

Fort Sanders Quality of Life Committee

Notes from September 3, 2009 Meeting

The purpose of the meeting was to begin to identify recommendations for addressing quality of life issues. The list of recommendations will be finalized at the last committee meeting on Thursday, November 5.

Much of the meeting focused on one of the most difficult quality of life issues in Fort Sanders — student behavior.

Cathy Irwin and Emily Simerly of the UT Police Dept. reported in some detail the events of Sept. 11-24, when — to a greater degree than usual for the beginning of a semester — the neighborhood was besieged with loud, middle-of-the-night parties; public drunkenness; fights; post-party trash; and property damage.

As reported, one KPD officer was assaulted; one person was taken to the emergency room for alcohol poisoning; KPD had to use bull horns to urge students to "take it inside"; and an entire busload of students had to be given field sobriety tests by KPD and UTPD. Cathy indicated that she received nearly 30 e-mails from residents and association members complaining about the events and their aftermath.

The ensuing discussion uncovered a link between at least some rowdy student behavior and at least one absentee landlord. Cathy said that three absentee-owned apartment houses on Laurel Avenue had been marketed by the manager as off-campus fraternity houses, i.e. frat houses without the scrutiny of UT. She also noted that, in the past, when she called the owner, who lives in Florida, to complain about his tenants, he has claimed he does not know how to control their behavior.

Other discussion items:

** Students tend to listen to and respond to UT Police more than KPD because they know that UTPD will turn them in, and their student status might be affected. Discussion ensued about the degree to which KPD arrest records in Fort Sanders are made available to UT.

** Students steal street signs which can lead to public safety problems. Michael Gillespie recalled a traffic accident that occurred at one Fort Sanders intersection after a stop sign had been stolen.

** Based on state and local laws, the City of Knoxville's codes enforcement department cannot inspect an apartment unless the tenant invites them in. The Fire Dept., however, can require an inspection if there is suspicion of fire hazard. If, during the course of its inspection, KFD determines there are other building codes violations, it can call in a codes enforcement inspector.

Toward the end of the meeting, the group brainstormed some possible recommendations to consider making to the full committee. They were:

- 1) Request that KPD and UT (Student Affairs, UTPD) adopt a more formalized process of UT seeking and KPD providing records of arrests in Fort Sanders.
If such formalized process can be instituted, make it widely known among students in general and Fort Sanders residents in particular that UT will find out about and follow the cases of anyone arrested by KPD in Fort Sanders.
- 2) Define landlord responsibilities with regard to the behavior of their tenants and building standards.
- 3) Document cost to the city of KPD and Codes Enforcement calls in Fort Sanders.
- 4) Ask the City of Knoxville to mount a codes “sweep” in the neighborhood, using both fire and building codes inspectors, to identify substandard residential rental properties.
- 5) Identify possible revisions to or addition to codes enforcement and ordinances that would address problems more effectively, such as:
 - ** Requiring owners of rental properties in Fort Sanders to register their properties with the City.
 - ** Proactive annual inspections of rental properties in Fort Sanders.

These recommendations may be revised, and other recommendations may be added, at the final committee meeting at 3 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 5. Place to be announced.