



Town of Hamden

Planning and Zoning Department

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Memorandum

To: Hamden Planning and Zoning Commission

From: Daniel W. Kops, Jr., Assistant Town Planner

Re: Analysis of Quinnipiac University Housing and Traffic Issues

cc: Leslie Creane, Town Planner

Date: July 10, 2012

Last month Quinnipiac University gave the Commission copies of its 5 Year Campus Expansion Plan as well as other documents that had been requested, but discussion was postponed until both Commissioners and staff had had the opportunity to review the materials.

Summary of 5 Year Master Plan

The 5 Year Master Plan contains maps of the three campuses showing future expansion of facilities, available housing and enrollment projections, as well as a housing policy statement. It claims that the University offers a four year housing guarantee for all undergraduates who wish to live on campus.

Enrollment

Quinnipiac University continues to expand the number of students. The Plan shows undergraduate enrollment rising from 5,400 students to 6,456 by 2016 – a gain of 20% in eight years. The first significant increase occurred in the 2009-2010 academic year. By this past academic year the number had risen to 5,989 – a gain of 11%.

University Housing

Since 2008 the number of university provided beds has risen from 3,475 to 4,953 – a gain of 1,405, which has resulted in a decrease in the number of students living off campus (from 1,925 down to 1,215). The increase in university housing has been significant but the potential benefit to the Hamden community has been significantly weakened by the delay in completing the remaining 642 beds, the increase in enrollment of 589 students, and the existence of empty beds at the York Hill Campus. The growth in enrollment is troubling and has never been adequately explained to the Commission.

Potential Impact of the 5-Year Plan

The Plan notes the possibility of increasing the the number of available beds by the acquisition of more houses and/or the construction of the remaining beds on the York Hill Campus, but there is no actual commitment to do so in the documentation provided. In fact the figures suggest the shortfall of beds will be approximately 1,503 by the 2016-17 academic year – higher than it is now. In other words after adding 1,405 beds the number of undergraduates not living on campus will have declined by only 422. Despite it's claim in the Master Plan, at the completion of the dormitory expansion project the University will not be in compliance with Special Permit Condition of Approval 6.e, which states:

“The University shall guarantee its full-time undergraduate students four years of on-campus housing by providing sufficient dormitories to accommodate the full-time undergraduate population on-campus.”

The University is technically not yet in violation of this condition of the Special Permit. And it states that it stands by its commitment to do so, but the documentation does not support the pledge.

While Quinnipiac argues that its offering of housing to 80% of the undergraduates is consistent with rates at other colleges, it fails to consider the nature of off-campus, privately-owned housing in Hamden. There is no “college town” with a concentration of students. Many of the houses are located in residential neighborhoods.

The growth of the North Haven campus, which is beyond the control of the Hamden Planning and Zoning Commission, may well increase demand for housing in Hamden, raising rents and making investment in rental properties more attractive. The University anticipates increasing full-time graduate student enrollment 68% by the 2016-1017 academic year, obviously increasing the demand for housing.

Supporting Documentation Submitted

Quinnipiac University provided documentation concerning Hot Line calls, campus and Town Police interventions, disciplinary actions and properties with repeated problems. The information is interesting but not necessarily helpful.

Hot Line Activity

The most surprising aspect of the Hotline activity data is the small number of complaints per year. The data indicate that number of complaints regarding noise and large gatherings has held relatively steady around 19 per year until this past academic year when it dropped to 15. Parking complaints follow the same pattern.

Campus and TOH Police Interventions

The list of properties that have been visited by both campus security and the Hamden Police Department more than once per year indicates there are roughly five such properties each year. There are also repeat offenders. Some of the properties do not have student housing permits and are now under investigation by the Zoning Enforcement Officer.

Disciplinary Actions

The titles of the columns need to be better explained prior to a complete assessment of the table, but if Off-Campus Residential Students refers to those students living off campus, the number of students involved in disciplinary proceedings over the last two years doubles that of the previous three. And if Off-Campus Addresses refers to students living off campus involved in disciplinary hearings, the total for the last two years is also double that of the prior three, although the numbers are small. It is not clear from these numbers whether there has been an increase in incidents triggering university intervention or whether the higher numbers reflect a more vigorous enforcement policy.

Possible Responses for the Commission to Consider

Student Enrollment Growth and Provision of Housing

When all is said and done, the 5 Year Master Plan is inadequate and unacceptable. Staff recommend the Commission respond to the 5 Year Master Plan with a letter expressing its profound disappointment that the University continues to expand its student body, while failing to live up to its pledge to provide housing for all those wanting to live in University dormitories.

Expansion of York Hill and Main Campus Facilities

Every application submitted by the University has to be evaluated on its merits. However the Commission should adopt the policy that any expansion in facilities, such as the proposed Engineering School will require the completion of the approved dormitories.

The Unresolved Commuting and Parking Issue

The Commission has yet to decide how to respond to the University's change in policy to allow seniors living at York Hill to drive to the main campus. As noted in prior reports, the Commission originally approved the dormitory application based in part on a traffic study that assumed students residing at the York Hill Campus would not be driving to classes at the Mount Carmel campus during standard business hours. The Commission is aware that the University changed its policy this past year in order to attract seniors to the York Hill Campus. It now seeks to amend its approval to permit seniors to commute to the main campus and park in one of the existing lots (primarily the North (Main) lot).

The University conducted a traffic study which indicated the change in policy had not significantly affected traffic. However the Commission did not find the study to be particularly persuasive. The Commission must decide on its response to the change. Of the two outcomes, letting the seniors commute by car is probably preferable to leaving them renting off campus.

Staff therefore reluctantly recommend acceptance of the policy change, with the proviso that a shuttle between the Hamden and North Haven campuses be provided during daytime classes.

Planning and Zoning Department Efforts to Reduce Student Housing-Related Problems

As mentioned last January, staff have prepared new material to be provided to landlords and student renters, in an effort to reduce behavioral problems. Included are:

- Renewal application form with student license information
- Signed acknowledgment sheets from students to be completed after they read:
 - Hamden Zoning Regulations regarding Student Housing
 - 'Good-Neighbor' Policy Sheet
 - Student Code of Conduct Sheet
 - Hamden Noise Ordinance
- Stamped, addressed envelopes for all abutting property owners to be sent a copy of the

The material is to be sent out shortly with Student Housing renewal forms for the 2012-2013 academic year.

DWK:tbm