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Karen Burns

# The Holdout

## One Homeowner Reads the Student Housing Task Force Report By Linda Hurst

Ten years ago, I'd never even heard of the street I live on until the day I drove down to look at the house I eventually bought. It was a mixture of little old ladies you'd wave to as you drove by or passed while walking your dog. Families, singles, and a few students also added color to the street, renting some of the larger homes that had been divided into apartments.

My mother told me that when she was a child, this was considered a "fancy" street to live on and all the homes were large, stately and fine. "Only 'rich folks' lived there..."

I liked the idea of fixing up a rather run down house in an urban neighborhood and making it my home. I'd be close to downtown, I'd also be part of making the city more beautiful, gentrification, and all the nice mental pictures that go along with that.

...then, slowly, things started to change. But not for the better as I'd imagined.

The large Newtown Crossing apartment complex was soon built. It threw several hundred students one street away. Funny, the developers claimed it absolutely was not to be for college students, but for "young professionals." Well ... check out the young professionals playing beach volleyball in their bikinis any day and you'll know otherwise.

Slowly and stealthily, those people who owned homes on the street started to sell their houses and move. I don't remember "For Sale" signs even going up. All of a sudden instead of the little old lady I waved to sitting on her porch, there are three mailboxes, a grill on the front porch, and beer cans in the yard. If the residents were on the porch, they never raise their heads to wave.

What happened to waving? That standard and minimal form of neighborly courtesy?

The influx of students on the street, the lack of parking, the loud late night parties. Beer cans strewn in front yards, disregard by landlords to

### [comment from aceweekly.com] Student Housing Task Force

"What are you rebelling against?" — was that headline (Ace Sep 24, page 4) directed at the residents that you quoted or the students who had no clue but were led to the council chambers by their landlords who don't want to provide enough parking for their tenants, safety inspections, limit the number of tenants to say one per bedroom, or landlords who want to more than double the size of the original house by adding a big vinyl box to the back, side or top of their house? I was very aware of what I was rebelling against and what the neighborhoods have been rebelling against for the last 10+ years and that is UK's refusal to provide for their students and take responsibility for what is happening in the areas surrounding their school. They kicked alcohol off campus and into the neighborhoods, thus putting fraternity houses in residential areas. Students should party on their turf and UK should allow that and police that. On second thought, there are so many things to rebel against, I can see where people were confused!!

— Janet Cowen

maintain their properties or control their tenants, and all of the other standard activities associated with off-campus housing pretty much ran off the other homeowners.

Yet, here I stay. And adapt.

My stockade fence in the backyard is a must. The old view from my backyard was a garage converted to a clubhouse, three walls removed and a



All Photos by Linda Hurst

ping-pong table with a couch ... routine corn hole games in the driveway outside the window where I sleep that run sometimes until 4am. "Slam, Whooooo! Bam, Whooooo!" and this is like fingernails on a chalk-

board as I try to sleep and wake for work the next day at 6:30.

Do I call the police? "Emergency! People playing corn hole in their driveway!" Absolutely not, these are my next door neighbors! You don't call the police on your neighbors!

I made that mistake once and suffered repercussions for at least a year. Beer cans were tossed into my yard, people urinated on my house and shrubs, odd things left on my front porch, anything to get back at me for complaining to their landlord (who also happened to be their father).

There is only one other couple on the street who live in the house they own. They keep to themselves as I do. Their screenless window is always open to allow for the feral cats in the neighborhood to come and go. Another neighbor, their screenless window allows for their dog to come out and walk around on the porch roof. Yes, the neighborhood is colorful, but it is also testing.

I believe one man owns seven houses and another man owns five. Frequently you'll see one of them going up and down the street on his golf cart, with a large cigar in his mouth. Neither one lives anywhere near here. Every year or so, one of them writes me a letter telling me he

wants to buy my house "as is" and for me to state my price. I've held out.

Regarding the landlords ... I can say that the grass is usually kept cut, but not much more.

The aesthetics of the houses are long gone. Large vinyl-sided boxes exist where underneath I know was once a beautiful home. Large vinyl-sided boxes added on the back of small houses to create another couple of apartments. Shutters that don't match the oversized windows of these older homes (if shutters are there at all). Parking lots behind the houses made up of no more than gravel. Couches and dining room furniture on the front porches.

A lovely island runs down this dead end street with signs that clearly ask in a kind way to leash your dog and pick up after it. Seems some college students can't read. (Same goes for the "No Parking on the Island" sign that people park almost on top of.) Some people don't even bother to walk their dogs, they open the front door, let them out for a while then call them back in. There is no such thing as "picking up after your pet." No one is strolling down the island without worrying about stepping in *something*.



As a pet owner, after some run-ins with loose pit bulls, German shepherds, and other dogs, I've simply stopped walking my dog. She is small and has a large fenced-in backyard to play in. I've had too many near miss dog fights when walking her on my own street.

(Cesar Milan would not be happy with me.)

As a result, I tend to not even go



further out of my house than to my car, to do yard work in the front, or get the mail. The



back yard is my sanctuary. My Council Person, Code Enforcement and my local Police Community Coordinator have more than been helpful and have gone far out of their way to offer suggestions, and I do appreciate how attentive they have been to the problems. The problems just seem to never go away.

Seven cars for one house? The keg parties? The trash on the street? What other neighborhood would stand for this? It's even hard to call it a "neighborhood" since it's morphed into something else that has no name. Even the intangibles, like the "attitude" you get from the tenants — they simply don't care. This is simply a temporary stop for fun, partying, and maybe doing some studying on the road to their \$200K job that doesn't exist.

I certainly have no solution to this problem.

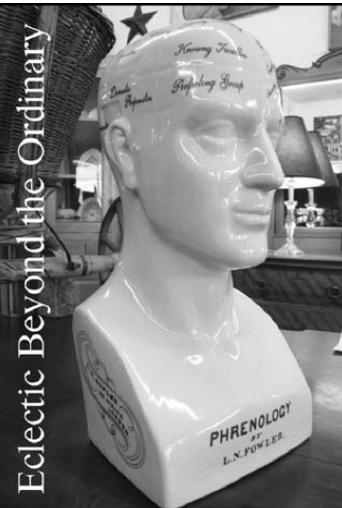
I don't want to move. (Paul)

I love my house.

No, I am not going to get a "condo." (Mom)

I really sort of "love" this street.

I just don't love what it's become. ■



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**October 5 Meeting**

Students marched on City Hall Tuesday September 22 to protest the Student Housing Task Force Report. Council Chambers filled and overflowed to the ballroom downstairs. Ace Readers — homeowners, neighbors, students — were invited to comment on page 4 in the September 24 issue (online now at aceweekly.com). Time expired before many of those signed in were able to address the Committee.

The next meeting is October 5, at 1pm, in Council Chambers. At the Tuesday September 29 Council Work Session, Council Member Diane Lawless asked Council Member Linda Gorton if "new people" would have time to speak at the October 5 meeting.

Council Member Gorton responded that if all of the people signed in on September 22 who did not get their 3-minute window showed up to speak on October 5, there would be no time left-over for new speakers.

Ace reports most LFUCG proceedings live at www.twitter.com/aceweekly, with summaries posted on the blog at www.aceweekly.com. ■