

**ULI MULTIFAMILY TRENDS – APRIL 2006****REVITALIZING COMMUNITIES FROM THE OUTSIDE IN**

by Richard T. Burns and Dennis R. Jankiewicz

College campuses can reawaken adjacent communities through campus housing and connections.

Of the colleges with the top five largest enrollments in 2002, the National Center for Educational Statistics/U.S. Department of Education shows that only two were universities that stood immediately adjacent to urban centers. That number may increase, however, as urban universities become more competitive in how they attract and retain new students. Today, some urban universities are turning to their surrounding communities to increase campus appeal.

These universities are looking for developers to join in creating solutions that connect the campus to the community. Often, such solutions involve neighborhood revitalization in which students provide the economic engine for developer-university partnerships. By positioning new student housing on campus edges, for example, students can more easily visit and patronize the retail businesses and restaurants of neighboring communities. As the increased activity rejuvenates these establishments, various new development opportunities tend to arise and become feasible throughout the community.

Planning a connected university “town and gown” community requires an understanding of cooperation, linkages, and ways to partner.

**COOPERATION**

Town-and-gown cooperation is increasing as developers, colleges, and host neighborhoods realize that adjacent neighborhood revitalization offers tremendous opportunities for all partners. Urban universities are becoming more sensitized to the quality of environment of their host neighborhoods. For students, life outside the classroom is just as important as it is inside.

Campus-community redevelopment can benefit three entities: the university, the developers, and the neighborhood. Cooperative projects include housing with retail and parking, which tap into the captured market base of students, faculty, and alumni. This action works to revitalize the community by spurring more retail activity, which in turn helps the existing merchants. Likewise, these merchants recognize the large potential market in their own backyards—something they could not see when campuses were introverted.

At the University of Maryland—College Park, 648 units of new student housing, called South Campus Commons, were developed by Capstone Development Corp. as a public/private enterprise. Positioned adjacent to the historic south campus area facing the city, the housing incorporates four new buildings into the existing campus by extending pedestrian and vehicular circulation corridors and enhancing site vistas. Immediately after the housing opened, nearby retail centers began experiencing more sales activity, and eventually were busy full-time.



Charles Commons at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, is a mixed-use project that provides student housing and community amenities such as a large retail bookstore and conference spaces.



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Moreover, developers were inspired to build new retail in the urban community, and the city announced initiatives for high-density housing and parking. This once-sleepy section of the town has been rejuvenated, all in response to placing student housing on the edge of campus.

#### LINKAGES

With university housing as the catalyst for neighborhood redevelopment, it is critical for developers to find effective, physical ways to link these buildings to both campus and community.

One approach is to create view corridors, which provide commanding views of university and town icons. In the 1980s, many universities placed walls around campuses. Those walls are coming down; new designs enable a campus to face the neighborhood. Traditional campuses turned inward to quadrangles and greens, but new planning places entrances on streets that link neighborhoods with campuses. Such connecting views inspire a strong sense of cooperation and unity between campus and community.

The way in which buildings are positioned also strengthens connections. At the Homewood Campus of Johns Hopkins University, a major new student housing project located just off campus, one block from the university, includes a main pedestrian connection from campus to neighboring Charles Village. The mixed-use project provides secure upper-level housing for 618 students, but also includes community amenities such as a large retail bookstore and conference spaces. The pedestrian path, a physical bridge between the two areas, encourages students to patronize the village's eating establishments and other businesses.

Using open space on a campus to create pedestrian sidewalks leading to an urban area can form strong connections. By activating movement at the street level, such connections enable pedestrian circulation to flow from the housing entrance to campus gateways to the business village's main street.

#### WAYS TO PARTNER

In working with available off-campus land, developers should approach universities to find out about current market conditions, growth potential, upcoming research grants, and other opportunities not only for housing and retail, but also for office space. By doing their homework, in other words, developers can assess possible untapped campus-edge opportunities.

At the University of Pennsylvania—Philadelphia, development is beginning on the edge of campus near the main green. The project, a cooperative venture between the university and a private developer, the Hanover Company of Houston, will include a required amount of retail facilities and market-rate housing for students, faculty, and alumni. It will also provide an Internet café, conference rooms, and study lounges.

The existing community already has felt the effects of the project: previously vacant stores are occupied, and open areas are being developed as other entities get involved. In this setting, both retail opportunities and housing can flourish. One example is seniors' housing. Alumni members wishing to return to their college roots can enjoy the university programs that are opening up for seniors. That population, in turn, can spur continued neighborhood growth.

Community revitalization truly proceeds parcel by parcel, as demonstrated in the Mount Vernon Cultural District, where 16 cultural institutions, including the University of Baltimore and the Maryland Institute of Art, are collaborating to create one coherent cultural campus. This cluster neighborhood will connect to several areas: Baltimore's Visitor Center, the city's historic financial district, and other historic neighborhoods. With student housing under construction, at least three other developers have begun participating in nearby market-rate housing projects.

Because a university's academic focus and a developer's business focus may not always agree, partnerships between universities and developers often require a knowledgeable third-party viewpoint to balance the collaboration. Architects and planners who have significant experience in both neighborhood revitalization and in university projects can bridge the two mindsets to get projects rolling.

Communities alongside college campuses can be reawakened to new development through new campus housing and connections. The key is to form sound collaborations to tap into students' needs, because it is the students who ultimately drive partnerships between developers and universities. This increased activity can spark a healthy, growing town-and-gown community, leading to ongoing new development opportunities of many kinds—from the outside in.

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