

Dr. C. Renee Romano
Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
120 Swanlund Administration Building
601 East John Street
Champaign, Illinois 61820

July 20, 2007


Dear Dr. Romano:

The Orchard Downs Input Team (ODIT) is a board of current Orchard Downs residents who have volunteered to represent the residents' interests and perspective in connection with the Orchard Downs redevelopment plans. Our objectives are to ensure that the needs of current residents are met, and to ensure a smooth transition to the future residential complex development.

Following is a document that outlines the concerns of the current residents of Orchard Downs and our suggestions/recommendations to the Selection Committee.

We are happy to attend the meeting to be held on July 24th at Coble Hall and look forward to answering questions from the Selection Committee.

Sincerely,



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Recommendations for the Orchard Downs Redevelopment by the Orchard Downs Input Team (ODIT)

Orchard Downs Family and Graduate Housing (FGH) is a vibrant, multicultural, green and welcoming community. An exciting and vital part of this community life includes the many facilities and services offered for residents. Our hope is that the redevelopment of Orchard Downs will only make it more attractive to students and affiliates of UIUC from all over the world.

1. Recommendations for future housing

1.1 Ownership of Family and Graduate Housing (FGH) component

The current Orchard Downs community values having the University as their landlord. Privileges of this ownership include: lease cancellation permitted upon termination of university affiliation at any point throughout the year, flexible lease renewal, varied services offered at no additional fee for residents (refer to section 2.1).

The University should retain ownership of the FGH component of any future development in Orchard Downs. This will provide a revenue source for the University. The high rate of lease renewal indicates that current residents of Orchard Downs value the services and facilities provided. In our opinion, university ownership has allowed a safe and secure community to develop which attracts prospective staff and students to the university.

1.2 Housing units and surrounding areas

We support better housing units for residents of Orchard Downs. As the beauty of Orchard Downs lies in the large open spaces, and the park-like feeling of our community, we recommend that this ambience is preserved in any redevelopment.

1.3 Number of housing units

Orchard Downs presently has a total of 776 housing units comprising 264 single and 512 double bedroom apartments. We recommend that the number and size of FGH housing units should be at least maintained at current levels.

1.4 Facilities needed for community activities

It is imperative to the community that current community facilities are included in the redevelopment. These facilities include: a community center with multimedia equipment, computer labs, sewing/crafts room, lending room, learning resource center, playground, basketball courts, picnic areas, and garden plots for residents. Future facilities that we recommend include fitness center, bike trails, underground/covered parking and a swimming pool.

1.5 Management and maintenance of the facilities

The current management of Orchard Downs is outstanding. Maintenance issues are resolved promptly with an excellent 24 hr service. We expect that any future management would not lower these standards in any way.

2. Recommendations for services

2.1 Current services

Following is an incomplete list of services from which the community currently benefits.

- Orchard Downs Pre-School
- Kids Club After School Program
- Parent and Grandparent Groups
- Cooking Club
- International Friendship Group
- Learning Resource Center for Educational Workshops
- Family Relations Programs
- “Safe Place” for the entire university
- Multicultural Health Center
- “The Neighborly News” - Community Newsletter

These services are highly attractive to current and prospective residents and certainly further the university’s academic mission. We recommend that the current services be continued on site in the redevelopment.

2.2 Community Aides

The Orchard Downs Community Aides are an integral part of community development. They serve as a liaison between residents and management of Orchard Downs. They assist in upkeep of facilities and in maintaining harmony amongst residents with diverse backgrounds. They also plan and host many popular community activities and are essential resources to the residents. We believe that the community aides program should be continued after redevelopment.

2.3 Graduate assistants

Many of the currently offered services at Orchard Downs are run by six graduate assistants employed by FGH. They play an essential role in the success of Orchard Downs as a community. We recommend that the graduate assistant program be continued in the redeveloped FGH component of Orchard Downs. Furthermore, we would like to see an increase in the number of graduate assistants for this program.

2.4 Family Housing Council (FHC)

The FHC is the residents' council for the Orchard Downs community. The council is a registered organization at the university and was formed to communicate the residents' needs and interests to Family and Graduate Housing (FGH). The FHC offers financial support for numerous community programs (e.g. garden program, sewing room etc.) and publishes a weekly newsletter called "Neighborly News" for Orchard Downs residents. We suggest that the FHC be continued after the redevelopment for the benefit of the graduate housing community.

3. Rent and budgeting

With a graduate student's monthly stipend being around \$1,300, and with international spouses who are typically unemployed because of visa restrictions, the graduate student family is on a tight budget. We have concerns that the improvements could price current residents out of the market. In particular, non-University management of the FGH component may not be sensitive to such concerns. We want to be able to provide feedback and recommendations in the future once a development contract is in place.

4. Transition phase

We recognize that any redevelopment of this magnitude will involve upheaval. As representatives of the current residents, ODIT would like to be involved with discussions of timelines and transition issues. We have concerns regarding the disruption of residents' educational program at the University and financial burdens that will arise as a result of the transition. We want to be able to provide feedback and recommendations in the future once a developer has been contracted.