

# NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT

IT'S YOUR TOWN. READ ALL ABOUT IT.

## Westville Skeptical On UNH Plan

BY MELINDA TUHUS | MARCH 25, 2008 8:31 AM | [PERMALINK](#) | [COMMENTS \(10\)](#)



Melinda Tuhus Photo

Joanne Sculli (left in photo) heard a promise three years ago about the new apartment complex across the street from her home — then returned Monday night to hear a pitch to break that promise.

Sculli and 70 Westville neighbors listened intently at a contentious public meeting at Beecher School as the president of the University of New Haven pitched a plan to fill up the large apartment complex with students — exactly the outcome residents had sought to avoid when the complex was built.

That complex is the 293-unit [Wintergreen apartments](#). A company called Metropolitan Developers got permission to build it on the [site of an abandoned factory](#) with the specific condition that it not be used as a student dorm.

Now the developer wants to devote a portion of the complex — a 60-unit building — to house 200 UNH students this coming school year.

After hours of angry debate, neighbors agreed to work on a committee to explore making that possible. But it's by no means a done deal.

Mary Faulkner, chair of the Westville Management Team, will sit on that seven-member community committee. "People were really upset because the meeting wasn't run well," she said Tuesday morning. "It was basically a free-for-all and things got really rowdy by the end."

The seven-member community panel will meet with Metropolitan and UNH at an unspecified future date in order to have some community representation in the process of amending the Planned Development District (PDD), the special zoning designation that allowed the developers to put in such a dense project in the first place.

"Trying to get the PDD amended is a lengthy process and might not fit into their time frame," she added.

She said an alderman told her the earliest it could be voted on would be June — and that's with completely smooth sailing, which seems unlikely.

There are obviously trust issues with the developers," she said.

#### **UNH Students Are Different?**



The university sent a phalanx of officials and student leaders to the Beecher School to promote their cause of renting 200 of the 350 units as student housing. University President Steven Kaplan (pictured) said he returned early from schmoozing big donors in Florida so he could plead his case in person.

The 70 residents heard how these students are not like students at "other universities" — i.e., Southern Connecticut State University and Quinnipiac University, both notorious party schools. Kaplan claimed UNH students have caused virtually no problems either on campus or off. Three hundred students already live off-campus in West Haven under similar arrangements.

The neighbors heard about how the majority of students at the school are majoring in public safety or criminal justice, and so have more to lose than other students if any bad behavior follows them into their job search.

Kaplan said he was begging the community for its help, to agree to a nine-month leasing arrangement with the developers starting in August until adequate housing is built on the West Haven campus.

Metropolitan Developers partner Carlos Vasquez began the meeting by announcing that 105 units have already been lease. He expects the rest to be rented by October if they are not rented to UNH students. But given the current state of the economy — and the rents of the complex that range from \$1,060 for a one-bedroom to \$2,600 for a three-bedroom unit — some in the audience were skeptical about that forecast.

"You're bailing out the developer and the city," one woman shouted at Kaplan. Residents were concerned about possible vacant units if the developer were not able to rent up the whole complex.

He said the administration would screen all the students who might live in the complex, and it would be open only to juniors and seniors. A shuttle bus would take them to and from campus, as well as to other destinations around New Haven. They wouldn't be prohibited from owning cars — increased traffic was one concern expressed — but neither would any other residents of the complex should it not be rented to UNH.

"The students that want to live in this housing are subjecting themselves to pretty heavy rules," he said.

"They want those constraints; they want the quiet; they want the study environment; they want to live with

other students.”

Joanne Sculli lives across the street from the complex. She recalled how three years ago neighbors were concerned that the housing wouldn't be leased up and would be turned into dorms. So a clause was included in the zoning variance Metropolitan Developers were granted that explicitly prohibited dormitory housing.

“At the time they absolutely assured us they had done all the market research and that there would be no problem filling this development,” Sculli said. “And now here we are three years later, and exactly what we suspected would happen is happening.”

Three student leaders and Dean of Students Becky Johnson (on right) explained that if the units were considered student housing, resident advisers would live there to provide oversight, guidance and a firmer link to student life. Johnson explained the disciplinary process if any of them were to break the rules of quiet hours beginning at 8 p.m. and “courtesy hours” of respecting the privacy of other residents at all hours: they would be written up and “removed” if the behavior continued. Kaplan said

One woman said, “UNH is a third party in this. Our disagreement is with the party that made the agreements” that would be violated if a dorm were created in the building.

Another said, “I personally don't care if students move in. But I'm damn mad at the developer and I always have been.”

Tom Talbot from the City Plan Department said allowing a dorm would require an amendment to the Planned Development District to be approved by the Board of Aldermen. He added that if it was for just nine months, it was possible no such vote would be required. Kaplan and Wintergreen attorney Michael Lasso are researching that possibility.

Many people were worried that allowing UNH to move students in would set a precedent, allowing in other students less hardworking and courteous than UNH students are purported to be. There was also concern about policing with so many additional young people, especially due to the number of bars within walking distance of the complex.

Kaplan said right now UNH police officers don't have jurisdiction in New Haven, but he is in discussion with city officials about some accommodation.

---