



Winter 2005

SEUNA Update

Southeast University Neighborhood Association, Inc. ~ P.O. Box 6658, Syracuse, NY 13217 ~ email@seuna.org



Burglary Opens Window into Rental Certification Process

Maybe you, too, saw the story before Christmas in the *The Daily Orange*. A seven student residence in the 800 block of Comstock had been broken into over the Thanksgiving vacation.

The Daily Orange reported that despite five of the seven bedroom doors being locked, the burglars pried their way into all of the rooms, taking jewelry, DVDs, clothes, expensive sunglasses and purses — about \$2,800 in valuables.

Our immediate thoughts were not about the burglary. We wondered how seven students could be living in a rental house when city ordinances limit the number of unrelated persons in a rental to no more than five.

Since 1991, the City of Syracuse has required that rental properties in the university “special neighborhood district” obtain a “certificate of suitability” before they can be offered for rent.

Before granting the certificate, city inspectors check for code violations, they verify that at least 35% of all habitable space in the building is available for common use (not converted to bedrooms), and they designate which rooms in the house are suitable for use as bedrooms.

These certificates of suitability

must be renewed every five years.

We were intrigued. From U.S. Census data we know that about 10-15% of all rentals in the



neighborhood are exceeding the limit of five unrelated persons — but which ones? Once the city grants a certificate of suitability they seldom look inside that property again, even when the certificate comes up for renewal five years later. It’s done on the honor system.

We asked the Syracuse Police Department for the address of the house that had been burglarized. They told us it was 813 Comstock.

In the Code Enforcement office downtown they brought out the folder for 813 Comstock. What

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Apartment-Style Housing Luring Students Back to Campus

In the 1960s and 1970s, as the baby boom generation came of age, enrollment in the nation’s universities swelled.

The growing number of students overwhelmed campus dormitories, forcing many students — mostly juniors and seniors — to find their own accommodations off-campus. Thus, the off campus student rental industry was born.

Investors snatched up one- and two-family houses near campuses and converted these to multi-person dwellings — often ignoring (as they

did here) single-family zoning restrictions in the process.

There were many benefits to the system. For one thing, universities could expand their enrollment without having to invest in additional student housing. Students suddenly had much more freedom than they did in the dorms. For many real estate investors this was a highly profitable business; every campus in the country seems to have its millionaire-landlord success story.

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Chancellor Setting New SU-Neighborhood Direction

Monday evening, Dec. 6th, Syracuse University Chancellor Nancy Cantor held her first "Town Hall" meeting with the neighborhood groups east of campus. This invitation-only event was held at the Goldstein Student Center on South Campus.

Local neighborhood groups in attendance included SEUNA, the Westcott East Neighborhood Association, the Outer Comstock Neighborhood Association, the University Neighborhood Preservation Association, East Side Neighbors in Partnership, the Barry Park Association and others.

The chancellor answered questions from the audience on a variety of topics, everything from local schools to student housing. She voiced her commitment to strengthening SU area neighborhoods and improving the quality of life for all who live here.

The major event of the evening was the report from the chancellor's East Neighborhood Task Force. This group was established at the chancellor's request during the first few weeks of the school year when parties, trash, etc. were getting out of hand. It was chaired by SU vice president Eleanor Ware and composed entirely of SU staff, plus one representative from SUNY ESF.

The task force addressed five areas of concern:

1. Off-campus student addresses.

After talking for years about collecting local addresses for students living off-campus, it now appears the University will accomplish this feat by Fall of 2005. With local addresses in hand, the university can match student names to houses in the neighborhood where problems are most often reported. With addresses for both SU and ESF students, the two uni-

versities can coordinate with the city to identify properties that exceed the limit of five unrelated adults.

2. Revitalization of the University-Community Partnership (UCP). The task force recommended that the UCP be refocused as a problem-solving entity with representatives from SU, the City of Syracuse, the east neighborhood associations, local landlords (SPOA) and students.

One of the more interesting recommendations is to establish a geographical information system (GIS) to map neighborhood trends like home ownership vs. rental properties east of the university. The task force also recommended the study of other urban university communities across the country to see how they handle such issues as traffic flow, parking, off-campus housing and student population density.

3. Neighborhood Safety Patrol. The task force recommended that patrol officers take a firm enforcement stand with students from the beginning of every semester – the opposite of previous practice. In the future, neighborhood residents will be included as co-complainants with SU's Department of Public Safety in University judicial system cases.

4. Education/Communication Efforts.

Among the task force's suggestions is creation of a centralized "hot line" voice mail system for all neighborhood complaints. They also recommend that the university support NYPIRG in its efforts to create a "Landlord Survey" for students.

5. Quality of Life/Code Enforcement.

The task force recognized that

when it comes to issues such as density of students, number of students per household, parking, noise, trash and snow removal, the past work of the University Community Partnership has yielded only "mixed results." Task force recommendations are less specific on this topic than on others. They recommend that the UCP "rethink the purpose and charge" of its subcommittee on quality of life/code enforcement.

SEUNA is impressed by the work of the chancellor's East Neighborhood Task Force. It is hard to imagine such aggressive recommendations resulting from a task force working under the previous chancellor.

On the other hand, the recommendations of the task force fall short of the sorts of measures SEUNA believes will be required to reverse the continuing loss of families from our neighborhood – particularly in the areas closest to campus.

Our goal should be to increase the number of owner-occupied homes in the neighborhood – not just slow their loss. It must be possible to build a campus community that accommodates all constituencies – students, faculty, staff, and everyone else.

There are two measures we feel are essential to this goal:

A. Licensing of residential rental properties.

In Albany, all residential properties must be inspected and reregistered every 30 months. At registration the landlord pays a fee of about \$30 per unit, which contributes to the cost of inspection and code enforcement. Albany raises about \$800,000 a year from these fees. With its larger

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population we estimate Syracuse could raise more than \$1,000,000.

Last year Common Councilor Stephanie Miner championed rental licensing on SEUNA's behalf. The mayor's office turned us away, saying the program would cost more than could be raised through fees.

Rental licensing is similar to a program the City has recently instituted for small neighborhood businesses. When that program is better established we hope the city will reconsider rental licensing. We intend to revisit this issue.

B. Change to three the number of unrelated adults allowed in a household.

The current standard, five unrelated adults in a rental unit, is too many.

Albany has had a limit of no more than three unrelated persons per unit for decades now. So has Poughkeepsie. In recent years Binghamton has enforced a limit of no more than three per unit. Areas near Cornell allow no more than two.

Allowing five renters per household provides landlords with the means and incentive to outbid owner-occupants when properties come on

the market. Once student rentals are established on a street, families become even less willing to pay top dollar – but landlords find the properties just as attractive.

SEUNA is encouraged by the bold proposals of the Chancellor's East Neighborhood Task Force and we look forward to working with the newly reconstituted University Community Partnership. We hope this year marks a positive turning point in university-community relations and the beginning of a renaissance for the neighborhoods east of Syracuse University.

Harry Lewis Stepping Down as SEUNA president

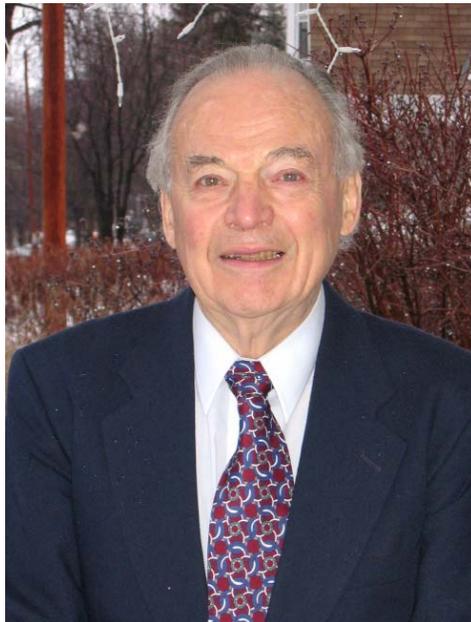
We sometimes brag that SEUNA is the longest continuously functioning volunteer organization in the City of Syracuse. Well, Harry Lewis is the longest functioning president our organization has ever been lucky enough to have: Harry has served as president from 1997 to 2005.

This year Harry is stepping down as president of SEUNA; a new president will be elected at our annual meeting in February.

A resident of Lancaster Avenue since 1959, Harry has worked for literally decades to preserve the quality of life in the University area.

Harry joined SEUNA as a board member in the early 1990s, he served as treasurer in 1995 and vice president in 1996.

During his tenure with SEUNA, Harry has become a legend – not just in our neighborhood but throughout



Harry Lewis
SEUNA President from 1997 to 2005

the city. Over the years he has attended more weekly housing court sessions than most housing court judges. Year after year Harry has

volunteered to reach out to students through SU's Office of Off-Campus Student Services.

If there were any kind of community event or public meeting going on, you could be sure Harry would be there, looking out for the interests of the neighborhood.

Luckily, Harry won't be going far – he has agreed to remain an active member of SEUNA's Board. Harry will continue to cover some of the community meetings he has developed so much expertise in – like community court.

Harry and his wife, Mary, have also generously offered to allow SEUNA the continued use of their home for monthly board meetings.

Thank you, Harry, from SEUNA's board and members. It's been a great ride!

Apartment-Style Student Housing

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But there were negative consequences as well.

Many families, including faculty and staff, were displaced by the rental conversions, and campus neighborhoods were deprived of their stabilizing influence. As faculty and staff now made a daily commute from the suburbs to campus, this exacerbated campus traffic and parking problems.

Even students found that there was a price to pay for their new-found freedom. Sometimes it was crowded, poorly maintained student rentals; other times it was landlords who always seemed to find a reason to keep students' entire deposit.

But the tide finally seems to be turning, with new student housing projects springing up across the country

Tony Moayed, president of TMCS, a Sacramento-based construction management firm, says 56% of the nation's universities are currently planning new construction or renovations for student housing facilities.

Gary Schwarzmuller, recently retired executive director of the Association of College and University Housing Officers International, says there has been a noticeable increase in universities building housing to keep more upper-class students on campus.

"Many schools are going from marginally residential to much more residential," said Schwarzmuller. "Much more of the stock on a given campus is put into apartment-style housing, particularly for upper-class students."

Are universities forcing students to move back onto campus? Not at all, they're luring them back.

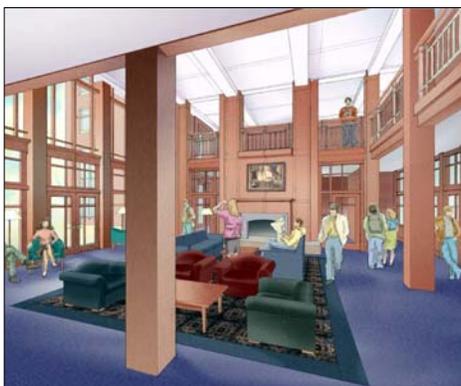
Students give up very little freedom in this new style of student housing — the days of curfews and bed checks are long gone.

At the same time, students are offered a variety of attractive amenities: high-speed internet access, cable TV,

covered parking, exercise facilities — the list goes on.

Parents and school administrators welcome the on-campus housing trend because studies have shown that students living in university housing tend to get better grades than their counterparts off campus. They are also more likely to get their diplomas.

These modern housing projects are seldom paid for with university funds, sometimes they aren't even built on university property. They are typically a cooperative venture between developer and university. The developer



The just-opened North Residential Village at Case Western provides "independent apartment living for upperclassmen within an academic community."

provides financing and expertise. The university contributes a steady stream of paying customers — students.

Here are just a few examples of the new-style student housing projects going up across the country:

- The University of Connecticut had to use a lottery to determine which upper-class students would get to live in their just completed apartment-style residence halls. These feature high-speed Internet access, cable TV, private bedrooms and semi-private bathrooms.

In the past, juniors and seniors couldn't wait to move off campus. "Now housing is so attractive, they don't want to move off campus," UConn spokeswoman Karen

Grava said.

- Boston University is completing Student Village on the Charles River. It will feature state-of-the-art fitness, athletic, recreational, and entertainment facilities, as well as elegant high-rise residences for students. Student Village will draw together people from the campus, the community, the city of Boston, and beyond.
 - The new, high-rise University Center in Chicago serves students from Columbia College, Roosevelt University and DePaul. With accommodations for up to 1,700 students, it features a quarter-acre garden terrace, a game room and stunning views of Lake Michigan and downtown. There is a laundry room with 75 washers and dryers, a game room with pool tables and video games and an exercise room. It also has 19 soundproof music practice rooms and an art studio. Students describe their new home as "amazing" and "absolutely incredible."
 - Georgia Tech officials are glad they got started on their new student housing in the 1990s. "We got a jump-start on what a lot of universities are doing," says Dan Morrison, associate director of residence life at Georgia Tech. "On just about every major campus, most everybody is rebuilding or renovating."
- Georgia Tech boasts 2,677 apartment units, primarily four-bedroom, two-bath apartments with ranges, refrigerators, microwaves and cable TV, as well as a fitness facility in each building.
- Case Western Reserve University is just completing *North Residential Village*. The first phase offers 749 single bedrooms, each with a double bed. These are grouped into 174 air-conditioned apartments featuring living rooms and full kitchens. A meal plan is offered, but not required.

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So what is happening with new student housing in Syracuse?

With the recent completion of its new dorms on Spring Field Road, Le Moyne College now houses over 90% of its 2,200 undergraduates.

SUNY ESF, on the other hand, has no residence halls for its 1,600 member student body. Onondaga Community College is building a 400 bed dorm near campus for its full-time students.

Syracuse University requires that all freshmen and sophomores live in campus housing, but SU does not have the capacity to house all its juniors and seniors so most live off campus. Including graduate students, there are about 8,000 SU students living off campus.

At Chancellor Cantor's first "Town Hall" meeting in December, we asked whether the university had any plans to build new student housing. The chancellor said no, the university could not afford to build new student housing at this time and — given other building plans — there was little space available on campus for this purpose.

A look at the new apartment-style housing being built at other campuses shows that these two factors — financing and space on campus — are not necessarily impediments. Many of these projects are financed primarily by the developer, and many are sited beyond the campus boundary.

There seems to be excellent potential to build new apartment-style student housing just to the north and/or west of campus. Such projects might be designed to serve students from SUNY ESF as well as SU.

In the long-run, SU, and ESF, may find that new, attractive student housing is not optional. It may soon be a requirement to attract and retain the best students in today's competitive educational marketplace.

2005 Neighborhood Survey

Last July, SEUNA volunteers used a one-page checklist of potential code violations to survey fifteen blocks of our neighborhood on Ackerman, Clarendon, Lancaster, Livingston, Redfield, Sumner and Wescott. This checklist was prepared by the SEUNA Code Enforcement Committee and focused on code violations that can be seen from the outside of properties. About 150 properties were identified with violations and pictures were taken of many of these.

We transmitted our survey findings to Jim Blakeman, Director of the Division of Code Enforcement (DCE) for the City of Syracuse. Mr. Blakeman promptly sent inspectors into the neighborhood to check our findings and 50 of the properties identified in our survey were issued citations.

In a recent meeting with Mr. Blakeman, we simplified and improved our checklist of violations and prepared new, handy forms that volunteers could use. We intend to survey the neighborhood again this spring and, with the help of some volunteers, we should be able to survey the entire neighborhood in just a few weeks.

Volunteers needed

Would you like to volunteer? In an hour, you could easily survey one or two blocks in the neighborhood. If you'd be interested, please email us at email@seuna.org or you can call Giancarlo Moneti at 475-0398.

A second, more difficult task we face is following up to see that violations are corrected at the properties we have identified. Unfortunately, the Division of Code Enforcement is limited in the resources and tools it can bring to bear on code violations.

Members of SEUNA's Code Enforcement Committee have also been active on the Subcommittee on Code Enforcement within the University-Community Partnership Committee. There we have insisted on the need to address the deterioration of properties in the neighborhood — particularly those used as student rentals.

Consistent code enforcement is important for the maintenance of any neighborhood. During the coming year SEUNA will be working again with the City and SU to see that we make the best use of code enforcement to preserve the quality of life in our neighborhood.

Rental Sign Update

You may recall that last year SEUNA and WENA (Westcott East Neighborhood Association) together petitioned City Hall, requesting that they take action against the many rental signs in our neighborhood that do not conform to code.

"Management" type signs ("Acme Apartment Management, 999-9999") are completely prohibited. "For rent" signs may only be posted while there is a vacancy at the property where it is posted.

The mayor's office invited us to a meet-

ing at City Hall where we were informed that the city could not afford a court battle with landlords on this issue — a battle the city might lose.

We have not given up.

In January, SEUNA and WENA again delivered a document to City Hall, this time detailing with photographs the many illegally posted signs in our neighborhood.

We are awaiting a reply from the city.



813 Comstock Avenue

Rental Certification

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we found surprised even us.

Although the “special neighborhood district” has been in effect since March of 1991, with its requirement that all rentals have a certificate of suitability, 813 Comstock had no certificate for six years — from 1991 to 1997.

City officials remembered that when the owner finally applied for a certificate in 1997, the process was a bit contentious. The owner wanted to rent two attic rooms as bedrooms, but the space between the top of the stairs and the “bedroom” doors was unfinished — just open attic rafters. The city allowed the third floor rooms to be used as bedrooms only when the owner agreed to build a finished, enclosed hallway between the top of the stairs and the doors to the rooms. The certificate documents included a sketch for the new third floor

hallway.

Bedrooms on the third floor or higher are not allowed in apartment buildings unless there is a second stairway or a fire escape. Otherwise, in an emergency there is only one way out. The city allows the use of third floor bedrooms only when they were part of the original construction of a residential dwelling — or a residential dwelling converted to a rental.

The certificate for 813 Comstock identified six rooms in the house that could be used as bedrooms. The two in the attic and four on the second floor.

If a family were to rent this house they could use all six bedrooms. Households made up of unrelated persons can be no larger than five — regardless of the number of bedrooms listed in the certificate.

The certificate for 813 Comstock made a point of specifically warning the owner that

none of the rooms on the first floor could be used as bedrooms. The language was unequivocal:

Three of the rooms on the first floor plan are labeled [by the owner] “Multi-purpose room...” Irrespective of any inferences which might be derived from the labeling, no rooms on the first floor shall be characterized as bedrooms. No representations shall be made by the owner(s) or others in the capacity of lessor to establish any of these rooms as suitable for sleeping purposes.

But when 813 Comstock was burglarized last Thanksgiving, the police report stated that one of the bedrooms broken into was on the first floor.

After five years, in 2002, the certificate of suitability for 813 Comstock expired. From 2002 until today this property has operated without a certificate.

I asked one city official what should happen to rental properties operating without a valid certificate of suitability. He said the city should shut them down until they comply.

How can rentals like 813 Comstock go for years before getting a certificate of suitability, then continue to operate for years after their certificate has expired? This official said decisions about code enforcement are often political.

During the Bernardi administration, the code enforcement office was told to go easy on landlords. These are just small business people, they were told, struggling against excessive

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regulation to make a profit.

Besides, the official said, no one wants to push students out onto the street in the middle of winter.

Fair enough, but why shouldn't the city close rentals like this down at the beginning of summer when the term has ended? There have been two summers since the certificate for 813 Comstock expired.

This isn't the only rental property operating in our neighborhood without a valid certificate. For example, in 2003 126 Stratford was purchased by a landlord in a foreclosure auction. It had been a single family residence before the sale and all the houses around it are still single family.

The landlord started getting signed contracts from renters early last summer. By August the house was full. Still, with neighbors complaining, the owner delayed filing an application for a certificate of suitability until late in 2004. No certificate has been issued yet because the City has so many applications to process at the moment.

But a funny thing happened when the application materials for 126 Stratford were finally submitted. This house, listed in the tax assessors records as a four bedroom house, had suddenly become a seven bedroom house. Apparently there was a bedroom in the attic, and two in the basement, that no one had noticed before.

In January, SEUNA formally re-

quested that the city provide us a list of all rental properties in the university area with expired certificates of suitability. We've also asked for a list of properties where the owner has been told by the city they must apply

for a certificate of suitability but they have not.

When we asked how many properties this list might contain, we were told it could be well over a hundred.

SEUNA Members! Don't miss the...

SEUNA 2005

Annual Meeting

Wednesday, February 16th

7:00 to 9:00 pm

Westcott Community Center
826 Euclid Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13210

Special Guests will include:

Syracuse Common Council members: Beth Brownson, Stephanie Miner, Van Robinson & Thomas Seals

Onondaga County legislators: Althea Chaplin, William Kinne, Sam Laguzza & Lovie Winslow

2005 SEUNA Board of Directors Ballot

Please vote for any or all nominees; write-ins can be added below (please include contact information). One ballot per household.

Please return this ballot to SEUNA, 935 Lancaster Avenue, Syracuse, NY, 13210, no later than February 16th (clip this ballot so you include your address, which is printed on the reverse side), or you can bring it to the meeting.

Orville Bakeman

Amber Hansel

James Hagarty

Pat Janecek

Harry Lewis

Laura Martin

Giancarlo Moneti

John Oldfield

Dan Smothergill

Michael Stanton

I wish to nominate:

name _____

address _____

phone# _____

Your SEUNA Board

Harry Lewis - President
935 Lancaster Avenue
472-3110

Michael Stanton - Vice President

Laura Martin - Secretary

James Hagarty - Membership

Orville Bakeman

Amber Hansel

Pat Janeck

Mary Lewis

Giancarlo Moneti

John Oldfield

Dan Smothergill

Please inform the board of directors of your concerns. Call President Harry Lewis at 472-3110, write to P.O. Box 6658, Syracuse, NY 13217, email us at email@seuna.org.

Visit our website:
WWW.SEUNA.ORG

Recent Neighborhood House Sales

in SEUNA area, as published in the Syracuse Post-Standard

Address	Sale Price	Date	Buyer
210 Berkeley Drive	\$148,000	July 6	Ramin Gharakhanzadeh
344 Buckingham Ave.	\$121,500	June 23	Christine Alemany
541 Buckingham Ave.	\$79,900	June 24	Lucius and Patricia Denis
929 Comstock Ave.	\$130,200	July 7	C. Martin and J. B. Keller
532 Cumberland Ave.	\$106,000	May 13	R. Wilson and A. Mountz
103 Dorset Road	\$222,500	June 28	W. F. Kelleher & J. D. Thomas
1221 Euclid Ave.	\$82,500	June 10	Michael Edwards
616 Fellows Ave.	\$60,500	March 26	Mary Ritnour
200 Kensington Pl.	\$115,500	June 30	Shreedhar Navkal
320 Kensington Pl.	\$109,500	July 2	Ryan A. Sanakerq
109 Kensington Pl.	\$44,900	June 15	Glen R. Haufelner
214-16 Kensington Pl.	\$142,000	May 7	John Pease
300 Kensington Rd.	\$154,000	June 28	J. A. and C. E. Ashby
518 Kensington Rd.	\$91,500	April 16	S. McCray and A. Nichols
956 Lancaster Ave.	\$63,500	May 21	G. G. and R. C. Fassett
1343 Lancaster Ave.	\$85,000	March 26	M. Kissane and J. Felix
819 Maryland Ave.	\$128,000	June 29	Lloyd Blanchard
853 Maryland Ave.	\$70,000	June 29	Stampede V. LLC
128 Redfield Pl.	\$64,500	March 18	Allen Krum
136-138 Redfield Pl.	\$115,000	July 2	William A. Osuchowski
985 Westmoreland	\$125,000	May 11	Jennifer Elway
1222 Westmoreland	\$115,000	May 18	Kimberley M. Sallie

Southeast University Neighborhood Association, Inc.

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Inside...

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- **Universities luring Juniors and seniors back onto campus**