

# Order of The Golden Bear

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ESTABLISHED 1900

**October 26, 2021**

The meeting was convened at 6:03 pm.

## **Items for the Good of the Order:**

- The Warden notes that there is a prepared handout on the topic of Housing at UC Berkeley, provided by Vice Chancellor Marc Fisher
- A Fellow presents a wooden bear sculpture, Pleiades, for Senior Hall, and tasks student fellows with placement and decoration

## **Items for the Good of the University: Housing in the Post-Covid Era**

*On the topic of Discussion on Housing in the Post-Covid Era:*

- A Fellow begins with pointing out some of the key problems through working with students
  - This Fellow has seen so many students sleeping in cars, sleeping in laundry rooms, sleeping on couches - this Fellow states that this is unacceptable
  - This Fellow provides some pamphlets regarding legal rights as a renter
  - This Fellow notes that there are 1500 empty units that landlords have been sitting on for quite a while - local gov't has the power to mobilize these units
  - This Fellow notes that 65% of students are on financial aid, and the average housing budget is \$900, while the average rent is \$1200-1500
  - This Fellow suggests fundraising for programs that work to provide more affordable housing for everyone in the Berkeley Community
- A Fellow shares their experience attempting to get housing as a transfer student and as a parent with visitation rights
  - This Fellow was turned away from housing applications in family units because they did not have majority custody of their kids

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- This Fellow states that they were unable to live on campus if they still wanted to have weekend visitations
- A Fellow brings up two concepts
  - This Fellow recalls that their daughter was a member of AOPI years ago
  - This Fellow asserts that Fraternities/Sororities should work to not sell their property, cause this will force many members of these groups out in the housing market
  - This Fellow notes that there are ways to work with banks to acquire property and utilize it for student and faculty housing
- A Fellow builds upon a previous speaker's comments
  - The speaker provides additional context regarding the AOPI house
  - The Fellow attempts to provide another solution to the unused housing units
    - The City of Berkeley can look at the business incentive that helps the landlord keep it vacant
    - Is it possible to restructure these incentives to make it so that landlords should fill those empty units?
- A Fellow, a previous member of the campus' Housing Plan in the 1980's, adds some historical context
  - This Fellow recounts that there has always been a housing crisis at Berkeley, but some years are worse than others
  - The University did not take any responsibility in providing student housing until after WWII
  - Enrollment has always increased, and the University always asserts that their hands are tied in this regard
    - Steady increases in enrollment will only make the housing crisis worse
  - The campus never has input on how many beds/how many units should be available
  - The Campus also has not set a number on how large the campus is going to grow
  - The Fellow also asserts that the University does not have a strong rapport with the surrounding community
  - The City of Berkeley seems to impose its own solutions on the University without any input from University Administrators

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- The Chancellor and the Mayor of Berkeley do not have frequent communication
- A Fellow calls to attention the high amount of unused housing units
  - This Fellow questions the concept of supply and demand, what is causing there to be both so much supply and so much demand (rent values too high?)
  - The Fellow is also curious about how other student Fellows go about finding housing
- A Fellow recounts that there is a general lack of resources for finding housing provided by the University
  - This Fellow thinks that the best way to find housing is to know someone who is moving out
  - This Fellow suggests more university-sponsored platforms for helping students find housing
  - Most students are left to fend for themselves when trying to find housing
- A Fellow agrees that if you don't know someone moving out, then Facebook groups are the best way for students to find housing
  - The best way to find housing is not through a University-sponsored platforms
  - This Fellow also calls to attention the expanding enrollment, with nowhere to place them
  - This Fellow also points out that we are housing students in study lounges in the dorm, is this really housing?
  - Suggest that the architecture and design of the inside of new housing units matches what the University needs
- A Fellow would like to praise the Chancellor's efforts for on-going attempts at providing housing
  - There are no buildings on Campus-owned property that are off limits for providing housing for students
- A Fellow responds to some previous speakers' comments:
  - Disabled housing - available at market rate housing price (generally unaffordable for most)
  - This Fellow responds to a previous speaker's comments about People's Park - the narratives surrounding the Park do not represent all of the residents

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- This Fellow advocates for not simply paving out key areas of our University's and City's history
- A Fellow would like more clarification on how the future housing projects involving both housed and unhoused members of the community
  - Is there going to be overlap between the two populations of the community - would they mesh well?
  - This Fellow asks why there can't be more available housing closer to campus
    - Points out that other universities have housing right next to classrooms, why doesn't Berkeley have something like this?
- A Fellow provides some context about the new housing project on People's Park
  - This Fellow reviews the numbers surrounding the housing projects in People's Park, including for both students and the unhoused members of the community
  - This Fellow notes that people are not allowed to reside at the park, but this restriction was loosened during COVID
  - The Fellow points out that all buildings will be fully accessible to people with disabilities
- A Fellow calls to attention that the housing crisis is not just limited to students - Faculty are also impacted
  - This Fellow mentions that this is one of the hardest restrictions when trying to recruit younger faculty - housing prices are much higher in the Bay Area compared to anywhere else
  - This Fellow also supports the housing project on People's Park
  - This Fellow notes that it is extremely expensive to live near any UC campus
  - It is difficult to build in an area where the costs of housing are already so high
  - Many renters have taken down units for listing due to rent control
    - There will come a point where rent control will make housing inaccessible
- A Fellow provides some student perspectives:
  - Around the time when they were first talking with landlords, COVID hit and a period of uncertainty struck

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- This Fellow points out the transparency from the University during this housing crisis
- This Fellow points out that during their freshman year, the tenants in the “lounge housing” units had to consistently move from place to place
- A Fellow addresses a few points from previous discussions:
  - The Fellow points that we as the University have a lot of power in the city of Berkeley, we should not just leave up the job of filling apartments to the city
  - The Fellow also notes out that there is no legal obligation to house the unhoused in the new Peoples’ Park housing project
    - This project will definitely be a low-income housing situation
  - This Fellow points out that they lived at Mills College their freshman year, and there was a surplus of unused housing
  - This Fellow points out that it takes about twelve weeks to gain residency status here at Berkeley
  - Transitional housing? - support for students who are looking for housing but have not found it yet
- A Fellow calls to attention two points:
  - There are a good number of students who have a long commute to get to Berkeley
  - This Fellow recalls experiences of sharing cramped apartments (5 people in a single), as well as staying in campus facilities which were open 24/7
  - Is it possible to make space on campus in the spaces used by those who are working primarily from home now?
- A Fellow brings to attention a more global perspective:
  - The problems that we face are not unique to Berkeley, it is very much present throughout the rest of the world
  - We should focus on the language that is being used: Crisis in specific
    - This Fellow questions the overall scale of the housing crisis
    - This Fellow brings to attention the expansion of Silicon Valley outside of the Bay Area
  - Some people can frame the university as a business model

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- Are enough things going well with enough people at the university at the moment such that there is not a need for the university to focus on those who are not having the best experience
- A Fellow calls to attention how much of the student housing experience is run by students
  - The University can definitely provide some more input, the burden shouldn't just be on the Students
  - Many public services have been defunded after the great recession
  - Blackwell currently has a 50 year lease - what happens after then?
    - Could the same situation happen for People's Park?
  - Many students are in high-enrollment classes (500+), with no hope of getting a letter of recommendation
    - Are we already over-enrolled? Has the line already been drawn in the sand and have we just been ignoring it the whole time?

The meeting closed with song and was adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Meeting Minutes taken and compiled by the Chronicler for the Order.