

# Order of The Golden Bear

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ESTABLISHED 1900

## **Virtual Meeting March 2, 2021**

The meeting was convened at 6:00 pm.

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

The Warden reviewed updated protocols for this semester's meetings due to these unique circumstances.

### **Items for the Good of the University: The Student Perspective on the Use of Campus Property, Housing, and Open Space**

Prior to the meeting, the Warden prepared a set of questions and resources for the Fellowship to inform our conversation of the topic:

*On the topic of The Student Perspective on the Use of Campus Property, Housing, and Open Space, here are some questions to consider:*

- What do students think of using University owned land like Edwards Track for housing? What are the benefits? What are the costs?
- In regard to both on-campus and off-campus housing, what do students think of the increase in housing? Is enough being done by the City as well as the University? What are the tradeoffs to this?
- How is the faculty affected by housing? How can the University remain competitive among other public and private schools in recruiting and retaining top faculty? Is the use of a housing allowance a good substitute?
- What is the University's responsibility with regard to housing? Should it solely be for students? Should it include housing and retail? What else should the University include?

After a brief introduction from the Warden, the floor was open for the Fellowship for discussion:

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- A Fellow, a student, states that it would be wise to ensure that there is enough space for every student admitted to student housing
  - Some students they know of have had to sleep on couches when there were not enough beds
- A Fellow brings up that a major issue with housing in Berkeley is affordability
  - The fellow references a report that found that there are more vacant apartments than occupied ones, which references high rent values as a cause
  - Campus housing (dorms) are also a big source of debt for a lot of students
- A Fellow brings up the new plans for development on People's Park, and the current plan is for 1000 beds
  - The fellow questions if that would be enough for the influx of students
  - Raises the question of number of beds vs. utility of tract of land
- A Fellow brings up that the net gain of beds when not building a new housing unit is 0
  - 1000 beds is about a  $\frac{1}{8}$  of an incoming class
  - If you look at each individual unit, the number of beds are not worth it, but as a whole, each tract of land combined creates a larger amount of space for student housing
- A Fellow mentions how expensive Bowles Hall is, and how limiting that is for many students
  - Housing is a necessity for students, but the price points are usually too high
  - How is it possible that we built housing that is meant for students but not affordable for a large portion of the population?
- A Fellow brings up that student housing rounds to about \$15,000 a year
  - More transparency about why the housing costs are so high
  - There were reports of many students who experienced homelessness while at Berkeley because Housing was too expensive
- A Fellow brings up a UCOP report which stated the University made \$77 Million in profits in housing and dining costs
  - As a public institution, is this the goal of how we are to serve the general public?

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- Living in campus housing increases one's expected cost of attendance by around \$4000
- A Fellow poses a question regarding if the housing developments on People's Park are geared towards housing for students who struggle to afford housing
  - If the priority is student housing, the housing unit needs to be maximizing the good it can do
  - Open up the housing options to those who need it most
- A Fellow clears up how housing and dining work in the UC system
  - Housing units and dining halls receive no state funding, must be funded by the institutions themselves
  - Students pay for the long-term debts which were generated from high construction costs in Berkeley
  - The University is not raking a profit off the housing, the University must fund these operations on their own
  - The Campus is looking to create partnerships with the private sector in order to cut down costs on construction and services
  - There is a misconception that housing and dining is a profit center, it very much is not
- A Fellow mentions that there is a fairly limited housing program at Berkeley
  - Multi-family housing is also a part of Berkeley Housing
  - A project of 200-400 units is considered a significant amount of housing
  - For Berkeley to attempt to build 1000-unit housing centers is very ambitious
  - The cost of housing in Berkeley is very high (City rates)
  - Getting a dorm room in the present day is sometimes unreasonable, due to high costs
- A Fellow mentions that we are missing specific goals in these housing projects
  - A major attraction for living in the dorms could be the overall experience of living on campus
  - The housing should be affordable and below-market, definitely not above market as it is now
  - The profits from housing should go back to student-oriented services
- A Fellow brings up a concern with the creation of new housing

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- Since this is a massive investment of capital and time, would this solution still be effective when it is finished?
- It could take us 10 years to create 1000 beds, but what if we need 10,000 beds in 10 years
- Create guaranteed housing for students, it quickly becomes realized that campus housing is too expensive
- The competition between Campus and Private housing puts the students at a loss
- A Fellow brings up that Transfer students have a much harder time finding housing, since they are not always guaranteed a spot in the dorm
- A Fellow addresses a previous Fellow's point regarding the influx of students coming to campus each year
  - A few years ago, we were set to be "zero-growth" campus
  - However, it seems as though we are continuing to grow
  - The Fellow also brings up the overall experience right now
    - It is more expensive to live in on campus housing and there are more restrictions and guidelines
  - What kind of experience are we trying to cultivate to incentivize students to live in on-campus housing?
  - We should work to make Campus housing competitive with off campus options in the Berkeley housing market
    - Currently still cheaper to live off campus than to live in campus housing
- A Fellow raises a question pertaining to current students
  - The fellow mentions that campus housing used to be essentially just a place to stay while attending Berkeley
  - Now it is turning into suites and glamorous options
  - The question to students is "how glamorous do students want this to be", and at what point will the options be too expensive
- A Fellow, a member of Campus Administration, clarifies that Berkeley is a "zero-growth" campus
  - Berkeley has the lowest capacity of student housing in all of the UC system
  - A new goal in the future is to provide two years of housing for incoming freshmen, a year of housing for both transfer students and grad students

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- The Res Hall experience is very important for creating a sense of belonging
- The Res Halls are designed to have a complete experience for all students
- The issue of affordability is a significant concern:
  - Goal is to build housing and list it at a below-market rate
- A Fellow suggests that a cost breakdown would be great for students to understand why the costs of housing are so high
  - The University could be more transparent about how the high costs of student housing are being used
- A Fellow mentions that for as long as they can remember, no students living or around the dorms felt comfortable walking around People's Park, and they would like some clarification on why students are advocating to preserve it if many students actively avoid the area
- A Fellow poses the question about what measures are being taken to ensure that housing is priced below market
- A Fellow raises some points about People's Park
  - The University should primarily serve its current students
    - The plans to build on all available tracts of lands looks to serve its current students
  - The Fellow raises the point of bias within the fellowship, as we do not represent all 40,000 people
  - The Fellow brings up a Berkeley Reddit survey where roughly 500/600 people in the poll did not support preserving People's Park
    - It is possible that many students support building on People's Park
  - The Fellow mentions that the Park does not serve the purpose which it was originally intended for
- A Fellow brings up the wide scope of this discussion: involving the university's finances and the relationship between students and the administration
  - The Fellow mentions that we are a combination of an institution and a community
  - Both are in play, and neither should greatly outweigh the other
  - There should be a larger communal discourse in which these issues are continued to be discussed

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- The Fellow mentions a student they know is writing a senior thesis regarding carbon footprint of Berkeley Housing
  - We should not forget the carbon footprint of these new plans
- A Fellow notes that there are a wide variety of perspectives about People's Park
  - One body of representation of the student body is the ASUC
    - 17/20 senators, the entire Exec council, the grad council, and many ASUC officials have signed a letter urging administration to consider other options
  - Many different student groups have all released support for preserving People's Park
  - The culture of the Park would be lost if it transitioned to a small park in the middle of a dorm
- A Fellow brings up financial figures of rent in off-campus housing compared to Campus Housing
  - In every avenue, still significantly cheaper to live in off campus apartments than to live in the dorms
  - It is important to empathize with every member of our community, however, it should still be the priority of the campus to care first and foremost for its students
- A Fellow asks to clarify which students the University is serving
  - Are we catering to current students or are we preparing for students in the future?
  - The current situation is that Berkeley students are being taken advantage of by a lot of different agencies
  - The question is are we actively working to serve the students who are currently attending Berkeley
- A Fellow addresses the underrepresentation of the ASUC
  - It only took 425 votes to become an ASUC senator (out of a student body of 40,000)
  - This Fellow urges people to view the current plans (through Capital Strategies) for what the campus hopes to build on People's Park
    - It is not a zero-sum game for the students and the unhoused members in People's Park
    - The university has hired a full-time social worker to help the unhoused members in People's Park

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- The Fellow believes that we as a campus can have it all - more housing for students and the unhoused, as well as a memorialization of the Park's past
- Continue to work with those unhoused members of People's Park
- A Fellow poses a question: What is the University's involvement in the daily operations of People's Park?
  - There is an intersection between the unhoused members of People's Park and current students
  - Housing in Berkeley is astronomically expensive ("market price" is still ridiculously high compared to the general rates across the country)
- A Fellow responds to some previous questions which were raised by other speakers
  - The campus approaches private housing asking to support students with those beds in each unit
  - The Fellow specifies that the "market rate" depends on a number of factors which are compounded and different for every unit
  - The Fellow mentions that a lot of profits generated are put back into student housing
- A Fellow answers a previous question:
  - People's Park is currently owned by the University
  - We spend \$25K a year to keep the Park clean as best we can
  - It is a zero-sum game with the money we have, but we can definitely have some funds for those who are unhoused
    - Use land that we own as an option for housing
- A Fellow mentions that as a Campus Ambassador, they were told to purposely avoid People's Park when giving housing tours (go around Underhill)
  - The Fellow felt that this was a false perspective for students who were leaving home for the first time
  - This was part of the Campus Ambassador Protocol
  - The Fellow mentions that they have felt unsafe around People's Park, but efforts should be made to increase a sense of Community to reduce avoidance

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- If you provide a safe environment to build community, then it is more likely that these relationships will be built up
- The vast majority of the new plan for People's Park is dedicated to the open green space
- A Fellow mentions prior to Covid, they enjoyed attending the long-range development plan public town halls
  - These meetings would have different topics every week, and a good number of high-ranking campus officials always be in attendance
  - This group would always discuss housing, usually involving People's Park
  - The Fellow states that this group can be very receptive to feedback from students and will be quick to act
  - The Fellow would also like to push back against the notion that pits the members of the People's Park community against students
    - Often times, the most frequent victims of crime in People's Park are the members residing in People's Park
      - They are the ones most in need of support against Crime as they are the victims in many cases
- A Fellow agrees with a previous speaker that the most violent incidences of crime at People's Park are usually not against students
  - The gentrification from Berkeley increases poverty which leads to increased crime
  - The Park is not a 60's fantasy of community, students and members of the park are interacting together, gardening and maintaining the park
  - The Units have common spaces in the middle of the buildings, but no one often frequents them
  - Which students are they serving? Who are we building housing for?
  - The Berkeley Student Housing Cooperative does a lot of good work to teach students how to live on their own and live in a community
- A Fellow makes a closing note regarding how we as a community have to influence how we want to be as a community



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- A drastic setback to student housing is also that it only lasts for a year, how can we increase the sense of community in the dorms (possibly increase the amount of time a student is guaranteed housing)

The meeting closed with song and was adjourned at 7:24 pm.

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