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Task force recommends changes in family housing policy boards

By Stephanie Mencimer
Emerald Contributor

After a five-month study, the University Family Housing Task Force has made recommendations for improving governance of family housing.

The task force was appointed in September in response to tenants' complaints that the housing department was not following legal procedures in governing Westmoreland and Amazon housing areas.

One of the task force recommendations is to develop a manual that would serve as a single reference on family housing policy for tenants and University administrators. The manual would include a clear statement of family housing purposes, eligibility criteria and priorities for housing assignment based on these priorities.

The task force also recommended:

- The two existing policy boards be replaced by one Family Housing Board to control policy development and governance of all family housing, including the East Campus area.
- Each family housing area have a tenant council.
- A new budgeting and financial management structure be designed that makes a clear distinction between basic items and discretionary items.
- University Housing establish a base budget to meet requirements for debt repayment, facility management and essential replacement and repair.
- The Family Housing Board approve discretionary expenditures supporting facility and community improvements such as computer rooms, day care

programs and playgrounds.

• The Family Housing Board be restructured to adequately reflect the interests of stakeholders and the range of issues arising in the provision for family housing.

• The definition of family be re-examined in light of contemporary relationships and living arrangements, in addition to procedures for decisions and appeals and Family housing board responsibilities.

Before making recommendations, the task force heard testimony from tenants and administrators to identify some causes of problems in housing governance. Tenants' concerns included the lack of governance rules for East Campus housing, the fear that tenant councils and policy boards would be abandoned and low levels of tenant participation in family housing governance.

Task force chairman Bob Mattson said the tenants' criticisms were "less of policy than of fidelity and implementation of policy."

Mattson said one of the biggest problems the task force encountered was the confusion over the role of the policy board in family housing governance. The task force suggested the use of the word "policy" in describing student functions is misleading because it implies a level of authority and responsibility that are, in reality, quite limited.

Mattson said students on the policy board advise the administration on issues, but ultimately, adopting policy is the job of the administration.

One of the goals of the task force was to clarify the role of students in policy-making and to redefine the goals of family housing, Mattson said.

Family housing at the University dates to World War II when it was built to accommodate returning veterans and their families. At the time, the community made family housing a priority to make sure returning soldiers completed their educations, Mattson said.

Now, Mattson said, the private sector sees family housing competing with the community.

Mattson said the task force got positive feedback from housing residents and said Vice President Dan Williams who appointed the task force should be commended for initiating the study.

"Dan Williams is smart for looking at governance before there is a conflict," Mattson said. "That's good administration."

The administration will review the panel's recommendations for a maximum of 60 days before making a decision on implementation.

Williams said he will consult policy groups, housing department staff and visit with other vice presidents to see how the task force recommendations would affect the University.

"It's mostly a matter of sitting down and digesting the recommendations and seeing how the (family housing) groups feel about them," Williams said.

In addition to Mattson, task force members were Barbara Chinn, conventional occupancy supervisor with the Lane County Housing Authority; Greg Johnson, a University law school instructor; David Whitlow, assistant city manager of Eugene; and Charles Wright, a University mathematics professor.



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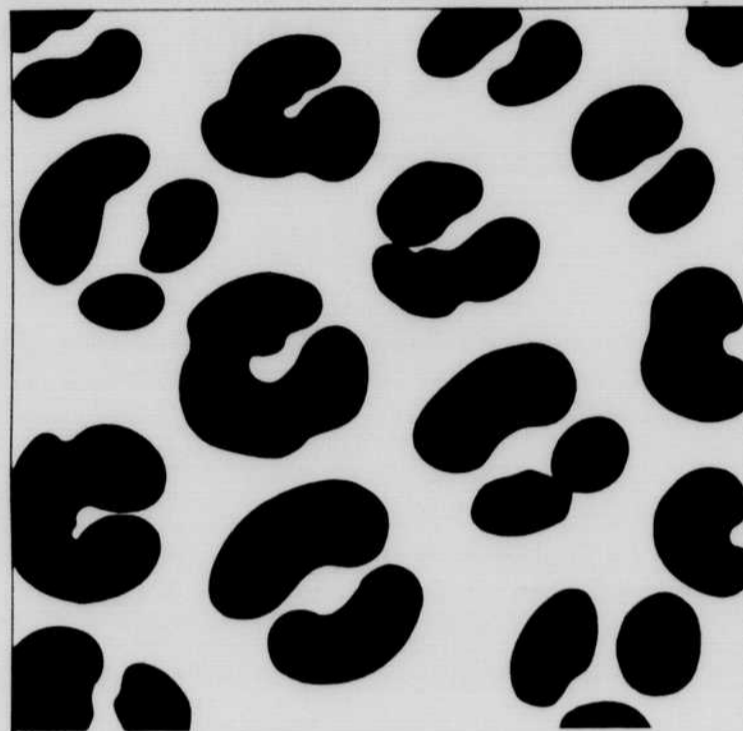
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