

Housing: Officials dispute fairness and relevance of University policies

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housing money and have been managed by the housing department for decades.

Rich Linton, group chair and University vice president for research and graduate studies, said the group has many tasks, most of which center around issues pertaining to financial management and obeying planning guidelines set out in the east campus development plan, a collaborative plan on which the University and the area's

Administration Dan Williams said contributes to his view that some of the report's characterizations were "tremendously unfair and quite biased."

"The implication is that somehow we put the housing department in an (unfair) financial situation by doing things that were irresponsible, and I don't believe that," Williams said. "Painting the picture somehow that the housing department has been victimized over the years by University policy is simply not fair

of it is very valuable," Williams said. "On the other hand, the housing department is their client; they were trying to make the best case for their client, and there's nothing wrong with that. But ... I don't subscribe to everything that's in that report from my point of view."

Former University Housing Director Marge Ramey defended the report, as did Eyster, who said he has worked as a consultant before and knows it's difficult to report that something exists if it in fact does not. "If somebody wants me to write something that doesn't seem right to me, I don't do it," Eyster said. "And I don't think these people do it. Their reputation is too important to them."

Calls to Strickler and Anderson were not returned.

Working for fairness

The University's legal counsel has since ruled that the monetary compensation suggested in the report is not a legal obligation, and the East Campus Task Group is looking at the best way to determine if compensation is necessary for certain properties.

The group is comprised of nine University officials charged with the task of smoothing the transition of property management in the east campus neighborhood from University Housing to a to-be-determined-area of the University.

Linton said the committee comprises representatives from different areas on campus because the duties with which they are charged involve a plethora of things to consider.

"No particular vice president's role encompasses all of those things, so we're just trying to put together a group that reflects the diversity of operations and, if you will, University stakeholders," Linton said.

Leavitt, who serves on the task group, said issues regarding the need to update the residence halls are more a question of resources than of fairness. She said administrative policies toward the housing department are not something that should be scrutinized when looking at ways to fund renovations.

"(University Housing) need(s) help from the University in financial management of (renovations), just like the University needs help from housing when they need property,"

Eyster said resources are a major part of the questions surrounding policies but said fairness and priorities also play a big part. He said he considers himself a steward of student housing money and said he feels it's part of his job to point to incidents in which the money could be put to better use.

"(Students living in the residence halls) think they're paying for room and board, but really, they're paying for something that doesn't have anything to do with their housing," Eyster said.

Eyster said the collaborative effort evident in the task group's work is a signal that fair agreements will be reached, adding that updating the residence halls was recently placed on the projects list for Campaign Oregon, the University of Oregon's \$600 million fundraising campaign.

Eyster said the administration seems very attuned to the need for updated residence halls and is taking the preliminary steps to ensure

enterprise help housing with what needs to happen?" Leavitt said. "That's much more important than what dollar paid for what land purchased 20 years ago."

Linton said the group is faced with a big task in determining the future of property in the east campus neighborhood because it is impossible to determine the University's exact needs.

"It's very much a guessing game in some respects," Linton said. The group is "just trying to be as careful as we can about good stewardship for the neighborhood and building on housing's commitments to that over the years and in this transitional time trying to make sure we move ahead appropriately."

He expects the group to have a series of recommendations to give to University President Dave Frohn-mayer by the end of the term.

Leavitt said worrying about monetary compensation for properties purchased with student housing fees is not something the group is



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Carson Hall was hailed as an innovative approach to student housing when constructed in 1949. University officials have put renovating the residence halls on its fundraising list.

neighborhood association agreed.

Linton said after the east campus plan was drafted, it became apparent the properties in the neighborhood would be used for purposes other than just student housing.

"A logical next step, at least one component of it, is to work on the particular issues with regard to properties in that east campus neighborhood environment and to work toward some recommended policies with the governance and maintenance and so on of the properties in that neighborhood," Linton said.

University Housing Director and Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs Mike Eyster serves on the group and said the spirit of collaboration that's evident in the group's work is a sign they will reach policies that are fair to everyone involved.

Eyster said his biggest concern hinges on modernizing the residence halls. He said such projects may require financial compensation for properties purchased with student housing money because of a need for fairness when funding projects and because of land acquisitions meant to benefit the entire University.

Vice President for Student Affairs Anne Leavitt oversees the housing department and said the past and present financial problems are not totally relevant to the issue of modernizing the residence halls.

"Housing is trying to get the institution's attention about a real imperative — the need to improve our housing stock," Leavitt said.

Professional suggestions

The financial problems and administrative policies that past and present University Housing officials say have plagued housing and hindered the residence halls' improvement were discussed extensively in an assessment from a private firm in 2000.

Greg Strickler and Linda Anderson, financial consultants from Maryland, produced a "Vision Assessment for Student Housing," a detailed report on the current state of University Housing and its outlook for the future.

The report admonished the University for using housing as its "real-estate acquisition arm," something University Vice President for

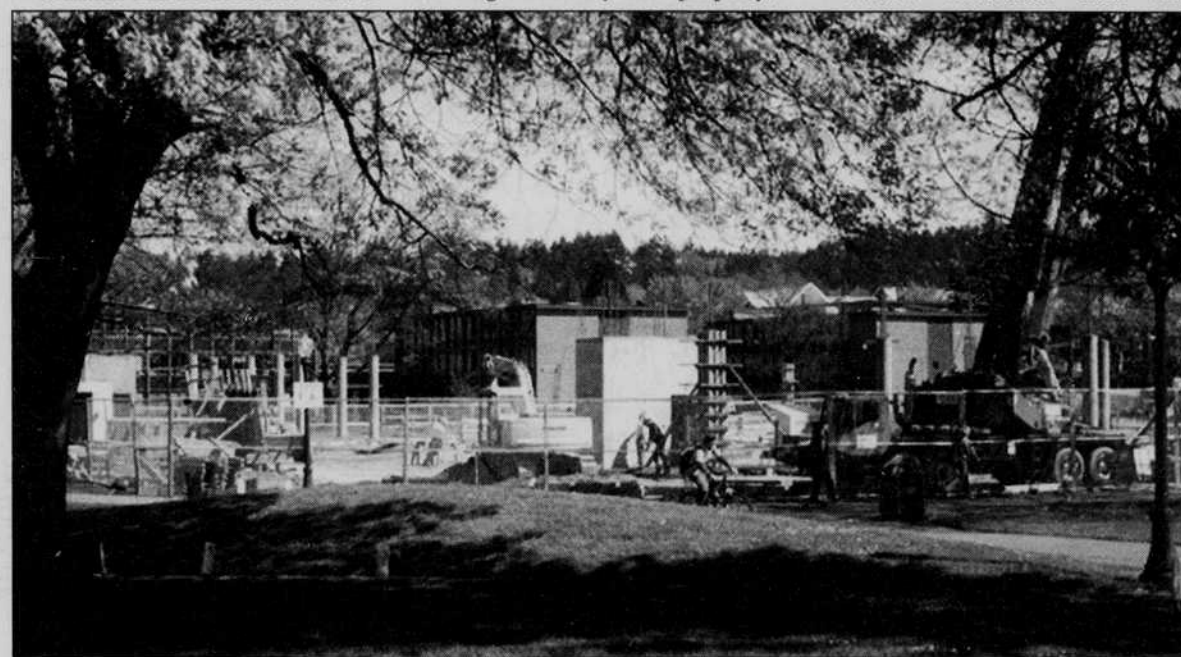
or accurate."

The report detailed the array of non-housing related projects student housing money has been used for over the years, such as the construction of tennis courts and the purchase of land that the Riverfront Research Park now occupies. It stressed the need for monetary compensation if the land purchased with housing funds is used for other purposes.

"There is little dispute that the OUS can, at the request of the University of Oregon, rededicate land to another use," the report reads. "The more important issue is that this rededication has been done without reimbursement to Housing for the purchase price plus a reasonable rate of return."

Leavitt and Williams said the assessment seemed to base its observations on erroneous assumptions involving land repayment requirements within the Oregon University System.

Williams said he does not want to



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Construction of the Living Learning Center, on property not purchased by University Housing, began in August 2004. The center is expected to open in fall 2006.

dismiss the report off-hand but stressed that one must keep in mind that University Housing hired Strickler and Anderson to write the assessment.

"I can understand why they would write a report like that; some

Leavitt said.

Leavitt and Linton both pointed out that the new Living Learning Center is being constructed on property that University Housing did not purchase.

financial problems with University Housing are a question of resources that involves the University helping housing improve the conditions of residence halls.

"The question is, 'How can the

overly concerned with because the University's legal counsel has already established criteria for when compensation is needed. She said talk of policies' fairness and the 2000 financial assessment spawned from misconceptions surrounding the legality of land rededication and repayment plans.

"Housing is not some private business located in the Eugene-Springfield area doing business with the University — housing is the University," Leavitt said.

Former University Housing Director H.P. Barnhart, who worked in housing from 1949-1979, said the internal workings of the University have changed drastically since he left. He said compensation for land purchased with student housing money then converted to other uses seems fair, but it all depends on what the University's hierarchy of power feels the need do.

"If the hierarchy in the University decided they're going to do something else, then (housing will) be stuck," Barnhart said.

University Planning Director and Architect Chris Ramey serves on the East Campus Task Group and said his job is to make sure the plans for management in the east campus neighborhood coincide with the University's east campus development plan. He said "whether or not housing is getting screwed financially" is really not any of the planning department's business, but he added that his mother, the former housing director, would probably be "the cheerleader for that group."

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