

Students hurting upper east side, some say

By KENNETH R. LAMKE
of the Journal Sentinel staff

UWM plans meeting with neighbors about concerns

Is the upper east side — the charming and elegant upper east side, as the cliché has it — becoming overrun with loud, drunken and otherwise undesirable college students?

Is the 16-square-block neighborhood, or at least a big chunk of it, just south of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee turning into a resident student ghetto?

Some neighborhood activists think so. Their concern grows as some larger non-owner-occupied homes are remodeled into eight-bedroom units, and they are watching weekend parties

that, at times, begin on Thursday.

Added to their traditional complaints about inadequate parking, crime and rowdy student behavior is a new set of statistics that shows a continuing increase in absentee landlords. The number of owner-occupied dwellings has declined by 20% since 1991, according to neighborhood activists' figures.

If true, that means only 55% of the 435 dwellings in the neighborhood are owner-occupied. The other 45% are owned by absentee landlords.

"This is a big issue. It could be

a turning point for the neighborhood," says Annemarie Scobey-Polacheck, an activist with the church-based MICAH organization.

The concern has intensified to the point that the university will meet with residents of the south-of-campus neighborhood at 7 p.m. Thursday to discuss problems, said Sandy Hoell-Lyon, UWM's assistant chancellor for university relations. The meeting will be held in the Alumni Fireside Lounge of the student union.

The numbers on owner occupancy were compiled for MI-

CAH by UWM's Center for Urban Initiatives and Research and are based on City of Milwaukee statistics.

Ald. Mike D'Amato, who represents the area, does not dispute the figures that show there were 299 owner-occupied homes and 137 rental properties in the neighborhood in 1991. That dropped to 239 owner-occupied dwellings, with a corresponding increase to 196 rental properties, in 1999.

Many of the non-owner-occupied dwellings also have a large number of bedrooms, suggesting a large student population,

says Olmedo Varela, the researcher who did the UWM Center study.

Eighteen of the non-owner-occupied dwellings had eight bedrooms, seven had seven bedrooms, 75 had six bedrooms, 10 had five bedrooms, and 30 had four bedrooms.

At least some of those dwellings apparently operate — or operated — as rooming houses, which are illegal in the neighborhood under the zoning code, says Ron Roberts, a city zoning enforcement supervisor.

City inspectors have clamped down and put many of them out of business.

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Upper east side complaints
Officials of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee will meet this week with residents of the neighborhood immediately south of the campus to talk about problems related to rowdy student parties and an increasing number of absentee landlords.

Bob Verheijman/Journal Sentinel

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"That neighborhood was built in the early 1900s for families and now families are leaving, which is always bad for a neighborhood," says Lou Ann Bohn, another MICAH activist.

"Outside people say you should expect that" transition to student-occupied housing, says Barbara Finch, who, with her husband, lives within the 16-square-block area bounded by Kenwood Blvd., Locust St., and Oakland and Downer avenues.

But Finch says outsiders should try living with the loud parties and rude behavior of the increasing student population.

Parishioners at SS Peter and Paul Catholic Parish, a few blocks south of the area at 2490 N. Cramer St., last fall identified student drinking, parties and vandalism as the biggest problem in the neighborhood, said Scobey-Polacheck.

"We didn't want to move on this if it was just a few students having a good time," she said. "But the residents are talking about packs of binge-drinking students roaming through the neighborhood from Thursday night through Saturday night."

At 10:30 p.m. on a 64-degree April night, Finch toured the neighborhood.

"Things are just getting revved up," she said of the Friday night action.

A handful of loud parties were humming in the 2900 and 3000 blocks of N. Maryland Ave., which D'Amato says is the worst spot for student behavior problems. The two-block strip is directly south of campus.

The music and conversations were loud, though not booming. Students congregated outside. But elsewhere in the neighborhood, it was quiet.

Finch later said she called the police to check on one of the Maryland Ave. parties that night. The officer found that the student in charge was of the proper age and police made no arrests, either for illegal drinking or any other activity, Finch said.

But there is reason to look closely at the Maryland Ave. strip.

As just one example, a year ago city inspectors found eight padlocked doors on rooms in the house at 3008 N. Maryland

Ave., a strong indication the dwelling had eight students living in it. There was a refrigerator in the basement with a beer tap on the door. Inspectors subsequently forced a reduction in the number of residents in the house to three.

For D'Amato's part, his new city noise ordinance was passed April 11. It fines landlords if one of their renters receives a second ticket for a noise violation within a year.

D'Amato predicts that the trend on absentee-landlord buildings has peaked and is not reaching beyond the area.

According to D'Amato's figures, supplied by city statistician Mary Stott, the owner-occupancy rate in the broader upper east side area has increased from about 67% in 1984 to 71% now. It had been as high as 74% in 1996, the figures show.

The broader area is bordered by Edgewood, North and Downer avenues and the Milwaukee River.

The red-hot housing market is apparently resolving the problem, D'Amato said.

With housing prices for the large east side homes between Oakland and Downer often hitting \$200,000 to \$250,000, absentee landlords can't make their mortgage payments with only three students per residence, the maximum number of unrelated individuals permitted to reside in dwellings in the area, D'Amato said.

And most landlords are responsible, he said.

The crux of the problem in the UWM neighborhood is 10 to 12 absentee landlords who own multiple properties and who are less responsive to complaints about their tenants, the alderman says.

Adds Roberts, the city zoning enforcement supervisor: "We're doing more aggressive enforcement. The penalties are greater. Landlords are finding it less worthwhile to operate those kinds of facilities. I wouldn't say there's a decline (in violations), but I'd say the problem is peaking."

As a policy matter, UWM sees itself as somewhat in the middle of all this.

"The demand for non-campus student housing has radically changed in the past decade," acknowledges Bob Greenstreet, dean of UWM's School of Archi-

itecture and Urban Planning.

"For years, our (Sandburg) dorms were not filled. We put administrative offices in them," Greenstreet says.

Now, not only are the three Sandburg dorms filled, but construction is about to begin on a new, fourth tower, he said.

At the same time that the UWM dorms have been filling up, "There's been an overspill into the adjacent Victorian

neighborhood" south of campus, Greenstreet says.

Greenstreet was recently directed by UWM Chancellor Nancy Zimpher to explore new campus and housing alternatives for the university. Among the long-range ideas under discussion: convert the university's Kenilworth building about a mile south of campus to classroom and student housing uses, and build a satellite campus downtown, also with student

housing.

"We're all built-out on campus," he says.

As for the trend to absentee-ownership and more and more student housing in the UWM neighborhood, Greenstreet says:

"In my opinion, the campus should be concerned that an overgrowth of non-owner-occupied housing has the potential to deteriorate the neighborhood, and that is not in the interest of the university."

Police, UWM pledge crackdown on noise

5500

By JESSE GARZA
of the Journal Sentinel staff

About 200 people gathered in the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Union Thursday night to discuss what some see as noisy, disruptive student behavior in the upper east side neighborhood.

The police were there, promising "directed patrol missions" to stamp out rowdy parties and ticket noise ordinance violators.

The area's alderman vowed that absentee landlords would be cited if more than two noise complaints are issued to rental properties.

University officials said they've given the city a list of student addresses so inspectors can sift out renters exceeding occupancy limits. And they called for volunteers for a committee to address the problem.

Some residents said they might move, or even that they have moved. One claimed the neighborhood is "going to hell in a hand basket" and others claimed the issue has been discussed for a decade or more without any action by the university.

But Steve Schaffer, who is both a student and homeowner in the neighborhood, suggested that residents try something else before calling police or waking up the alderman in the middle of the night.

"Go to your neighbor and ask them to turn the music down," said Schaffer, a 38-year-old history major who lives in the 2800 block of N. Murray Ave.

The issue of party-minded students piling into rental properties and making life miserable for homeowners resurfaced recently when church-based Milwaukee Innercity Congregations Allied for Hope began pressing the university to take action to solve the problem.

To add weight to concerns the area was deteriorating, they gathered data showing a decrease in owner occupied dwellings in the neighborhood.

At Thursday night's meeting, Bill Merrill, UWM's assistant chancellor for student affairs, called on attendees to volunteer for a committee that would put plans for solutions in writing, present them at another meeting next month and implement them by the next school year.

"Any plan will have to be based on a partnership between the university, the city, students and neighbors," Merrill said.

Ald. Michael D'Amato said many illegal rooming houses have been identified and closed in the area. Landlords issued noise tickets could see a special assessment on their tax bills if they don't pay up, he added.

"The landlords have called me and said, 'Why should I be held accountable?' and I say, 'Of course you should be held accountable.'"

Fifth District police Capt. Dennis Draskowski said the special patrols, including officers on foot, will issue tickets on the first call if they find loud

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music disrupting neighborhoods.

"There will be no 'Turn the music down,' only to have them turn it back up" after police leave, he said.

Police "will issue the ticket the first time," he said.

Sandra Hoeh-Lyon, assistant chancellor for university relations at UWM, said the school has been providing student addresses to the city for the last two years and will request that university police be allowed to accompany Milwaukee police on patrol.

Deborah Darin, 45, of the 3000 block of N. Farwell Ave., said noise keeps her 7-year-old son up at night and makes him tired during the day.

"And the problem is not just in the summer but all year-round," she said. "This problem is the only reason my husband and I will move."

Some people at the meeting even suggested the university expel rowdy students and that their parents should even be ticketed.

But senior Paul Archambault, 22, was quick to remind the audience that people are considered adults at the age of 18.

"There are some of us trying to be respectful and responsible," said Archambault, an art education major.

But another neighborhood resident, journalist Joel McNally, said that people shouldn't be surprised to see "roving bands of students" in a lively urban neighborhood around a major metropolitan university.