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UK must work with neighbors, provide affordable student housing

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The Farmhouse Fraternity on the left, and the new Central Hall I and Central Hall II dorms being built on the right, on the University of Kentucky campus at Hilltop and University drives. Those are several changes that are part of a master plan for the campus.

Herald-Leader [Buy Photo](#)

By Amy Clark

The University of Kentucky Master Plan is still in process. Sasaki and Ross Tarrant Architects have fostered real dialogue among the university, city and the neighborhoods on important issues, and have developed many welcome options.

But, as yet, few clear and certain points have been articulated: the definitive stage comes later.

Meanwhile, the university is proceeding apace with substantial demolition and new construction, major traffic and roadway redesign, even potential changes to the campus alcohol policy. Some of these matters show the good influence of the master planning process, others not.

It's not yet time to make a response to the master plan. But it is past time to make a clear statement of the measures most urgent and important to the university's closest neighbors. We can identify 10 points, many of which will come before the UK Board of Trustees for action as soon as May 15:

1. Permit the legal use of alcohol by students on campus, and return fraternity and sorority residences to the campus, especially at its center near the library where Greek houses are now being demolished.
2. Hold down the cost of campus housing as rooms are increased and upgraded. Currently standard doubles run \$501 monthly per student. In the newer dormitories next fall, doubles run \$739 monthly per student, and singles \$1,108 monthly. Only affordable housing on campus will relieve overcrowding in the nearest neighborhoods off campus.

3. Call an immediate halt to the demolition of further dorms; choose upgrading to preserve a range of room styles at lower cost, and keep dorm ownership in the commonwealth. Campus dormitory building already contracted with investment partner EdR will bring UK from the present 5,184 total beds to about 8,100.

Over 3,600 of these rooms will be at the premium rates, mostly singles. Plus thousands of new beds in nearby full-amenity student apartment houses off campus have been developed over the past decade.

Further UK dorm demolition is a luxury we can't afford.

4. Site the new science building nearer the Whitehall Classroom Building. Whitehall and the present Chemistry-Physics Building are the two highest-use classroom buildings on campus. Students need to pass easily between them in 10 minutes, without crossing a major city street. A proposed Donovan and Wenner-Gren site across Rose Street at Huguelet is too far.

5. Commit substantial funding to support and enhance the Live Where You Work home-financing program for faculty and staff settling in the neighborhoods near UK. Make it a major engine to restore nearby housing to owner occupancy.

6. Authorize the removal of Columbia Heights from the area designated for potential university acquisition by eminent domain. Along university borders adjoining the neighborhoods, establish buffering uses, landscape screening, and containment of light, noise and traffic nuisance from athletic fields.

7. Work closely with city and neighborhoods on any major traffic redesigns before authorizing further classroom and dormitory sites with a major impact on public roads. The proposed Cooperstown Bypass and any further closure of Rose Street threaten to send increased traffic onto Columbia, Oldham, Woodland, etc. in hazardous and confusing patterns. University leadership is critically needed for pedestrian safety along Limestone and the Norfolk-Southern railroad.

8. Develop parking structures and shuttles to relieve on-campus parking pressures. Work with the city to develop better transit alternatives and limit student parking on campus and in surrounding neighborhoods.

9. Research and designate the historic structures on campus; develop a plan to preserve them for contemporary use, and to assure that new UK building is consonant with nearby historic structures both on campus and off. Preserve these currently-threatened buildings from demolition and debilitating remodel: Ernst Johnson's Funkhauser, his unique Wenner-Gren Laboratory, his Holmes, Jewell and Donovan dormitories; the Kirwan-Blanding complex of Edward Durell Stone; the Mathews House and Garden; and the adjacent Ligon House. Preserving our history on campus complements the substantial investment of the surrounding neighborhoods in preserving our historic fabric throughout the city center.

10. Gather complete, accurate data on student housing to make sound planning possible. Maintain accurate local student addresses, and work with city administration to develop better data on student, tenant and owner occupancy in areas impacted by student housing.

At issue: April 28 Herald-Leader article, "University gathering complex pieces of a complicated puzzle"

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