North Mesa Community Meeting Minutes

Introduction of attending staff members:
Jana Severson, Housing*Dining*Hospitality (HDH)
Mark Cunningham, HDH
Dorothy Farris, Mithun
Brendan Connelly, Mithun
Robert Frazier, HDH
Cory Stevenson, ARCHAC
Scott Berg, Hensel Phelps
Juli Smith, UCSD
Malia Mahi, HDH
April Bjornsen, Graduate Division
Ryan Burbach, Hensel Phelps
Chris Paige, Intelisyn
Mark Derzindski, GSA
Ramona Fereirra, HDH
Rebecca Otten, HDH
Michael Salas, HDH

Malia Mahi taking meeting minutes and will post on ARCH website.

Mithun had board displays of future projects: One Mesa site plan (site plan for all 3 projects), Nuevo West and Nuevo East.

Jana Severson shared the agenda and goals for the meeting:
*Follow up to the meeting held on 8-23-17.
*Continue the conversation regarding the online petition and letters with signatures.
*Review some of the major concerns, including:
  • Communication
  • Green Space/family amenities
  • North Mesa Relocation

Brendan Connelly from Mithun shared Mithun and HP’s journey designing Mesa Nueva, Nuevo West and Nuevo East. He shared that these communities are a resource and open for all. Each node is connected with each having its own character. For example, the Gateway at Nuevo West is pedestrian bridge easier for cyclists and pedestrians. At the foot of the bridge is a new market space, a café, gathering spaces where you can grab food or go to the café to grab a coffee. Mesa Nueva offers a variety of spaces: a pub, fitness, and pool. Health and wellness are also noted as a guiding theme, with community centered spaces, and vibrant outdoor spaces.

Dorothy Farris from Mithun shared the goal of providing a variety of outdoor rooms that work for large and small gatherings. Nuevo West has a large open area called the Town Square with amenity spaces adjoined such as the Market and a music room for concerts and festivities. Nuevo West also provides a connection to One Miramar Street and ties back into the Mesa Neighborhood. Additional features
include opportunities for food trucks and gatherings, a canyon walk at Mesa Nueva which is a trail that winds through the buildings and will be extending to Nuevo West for a unique landscape opportunity, as well as providing more un-programmed spaces such as lawns.

Mesa Nueva will feature a Children’s Garden, sand play area which includes artificial turf. The North Mesa playground will be relocated next to the Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC). The grounds will feature a series of mounds out of artificial turf. The Mesa Nueva play area which is under construction is about sensory and exploration, climbing, with a sand digging area that includes mosaic turtles which are discovered when digging in the sand, climbing boulders and a safe lawn surface. Mesa Nueva also includes a splash play area. Dorothy shared that she has a 4 year old who likes to play and have the opportunity to climb. There will be a bouldering garden at Nuevo West which includes smaller boulders for children to climb and a large boulder for adults. There will be lawn space in Nuevo West and Nuevo East and space currently at Mesa Nueva.

Brendan spoke about parking and access for cars and shuttles. Nuevo West will include a parking structure with parking for 800 + cars, all projects feature accessible close parking for move in / move out, dropping off groceries. Parking is designed in accordance with University standards and a focus on placing parking close to where it is needed. Brendan shared that the only vehicles permitted in the interior are for emergency vehicles and food trucks. This keeps the interior safer and pedestrian focused. Brendan shared that he has an 8 and a 10 year old and understands the need to keep these spaces and create open play space. Spaces that interact with vehicular traffic (crossing to the pedestrian bridge and One Miramar Street) feature raised crossings to slow cars down. Nuevo East major thoroughfare, Parkview Lane has a clearer larger intersection that is more about the pedestrian crossing experience.

Brendan shared there is a series of community garden spaces throughout the projects. At Mesa Nueva they are using the natural terracing of the landscape facing the sun, and Nuevo West and East include gardens.

Mark Cunningham from HDH responded to a question regarding the Central Park, welcoming students’ input into the design of this area. He shared the Central Park is included in Master Plan which is posted on the HDH website and he offered to meet with the neighborhood to review it together.

Brendan shared that many of the pathways in the future projects connect to the Central Park.

A resident shared that the price point for a single parent is too high, making it unaffordable and asked what is being done to address this. Mark shared his personal commitment to keep the rates as low as possible for this community. And that the south side of Mesa would always be the family friendly, park your car, walk up, and put your groceries inside.

Mark explained that families receive priority over other students per housing policy. Mark shared challenges that he has addressed with mixed-use housing and challenges with the North Mesa community being the oldest and no longer efficient.
A resident shared concerns about the cost of housing for single students, stating the budget for a single student is around $1600-1700, with $1100 designated for housing and food. With the cost of a room at Mesa Nueva at $750/month, the resident asked how Housing is addressing this with new high density development. Mark responded that Mesa Nueva sold out in 3 weeks. Students compare rent to what they would pay off campus. Campus housing costs 20-50% less depending on the housing market. To build there is no state/federal funds provided. Housing takes out a loan, gets the best price possible, and goes as fast as possible before costs go up.

A resident asked what steps Housing will take to improve the relationship with outside leasing companies and learn from SDSU, where students pay $200-$300 more in the surrounding area and SDSU is working with the companies with vacancies. The resident asked why Housing did not work with apartment communities to house the transfer students. Mark responded that Housing did contact the local apartment communities and found only 11 units. Mark shared concerns from neighbors that the University does not pay taxes for children living on campus to attend school. Cory Stevenson confirmed the UC system does not pay school taxes. Robert Frazier from HDH let the group know that they can find marked rent studies posted on the HDH website.

Mark shared that Housing has tried to buy properties and they are charging 140% of the value. They don’t want to sell and to sell we would pay the premium price. We would have to charge more than they do now.

Mark shared that in regards to neighbors and resources, the University is currently negotiating with the fire department. We don’t pay those taxes, and the neighborhood sees that we are taking resources time. The University will build a fire department we will operate it to be a good neighbor and continue to build relationships with the neighborhood.

A resident expressed appreciation for the written agenda which includes Q&A and asked what options Housing is considering to assist residents with the higher rent that they have to pay when relocating out of North Mesa. Mark shared that he wants to help students get the right space. He has spent the last couple of days talking to many departments. Mark asked the group to work together and discuss a resolution. Mark is looking for a plan that works for a broad constituency.

Residents shared concerns that people have moved, are in transition or waiting to relocate and are being forced into more expensive housing and the email communication expressed urgency which is affecting student budgets. Mark apologized for not doing a good job in communicating the relocation announcement.

A resident asked for the timeline for rebuilding at South Mesa. Mark shared there is not a timeline. The resident stated her rent has gone up $400-600 but her stipend hasn’t changed. Mark introduced April Bjornsen, the Assistant Dean of Graduate Division and requested everyone works together to discuss this issue.

A resident shared concerns that no one is considering the price point. Cory shared that he is the chair of the ARCH Advisory Committee, ARCHAC, and was on the building advisory committees. Each time they
approached design feedback was provided. Cory provided an example where students request balconies, which are expensive, and sometimes concessions must be made. ARCHAC oversees the operations of housing, set rates, handle appeals. It is made up of 11 members, 1 is slated for an undergrad parent, 5 graduate student and 5 non-Housing staff. Cory stated he sends email blasts about openings on the committee.

A resident shared frustrations about the shifts in amenities over the years and expressed that families being integrated with single grads is part of the enriching experiences, being around other types of students. Cory shared the importance of providing a multitude of options. Offering low density for families offering studio style rooms for singles. Nuevo West will feature 4-6 bedroom units with 2:1 bath ratio. Now you have the opportunity to share communal spaces or single spaces. A family can be at Mesa Nueva with a washer and dryer.

A resident shared concerns that it will become more expensive outside. Cory shared that three years ago rates across grad housing were not increased. The 2 primary drivers of rate increases are debt and union mandated salary raises. Housing is an auxiliary service. There is no money coming in from the University, no subsidy.

A resident stated the University contracts staff. Mark shared that HDH staff are University employed staff. Housing is the largest employer of student staff on campus.

A resident asked if anyone takes into account a single income family when considering budget. Mark stated, historically, Housing has not taken into account personal financials when configuring rental rates.

A resident stated that housing is a recruiting tool for graduate students promising affordable housing. Students may choose to go somewhere else. Cory responded that one of the reasons why the housing needs to be built is campus leadership wants to recruit larger numbers. The number of master students is going up. Master’s students tend to be younger, don’t have kids and are here for a short period of time. This is one of the factors that drove the projects. A resident responded stating Housing needs to take care of the students who are already here.

A resident requested information about ARCHAC. Cory shared the info is on the website and in the ARCH Handbook. Mark Derzinski, GSA President, shared that the GSA website includes descriptions, contact name and time commitments for all of the committees.

A resident requested how information will be communicated moving forward? Jana Severson from HDH shared that construction updates are included on the ARCH website and a link is included on the agenda handout. Housing will send emails weekly to update the community. Housing will post flyers in laundry rooms, community rooms and elevators. And Housing will continue to have community meetings and calendar in advance.

Residents requested a timeline for hearing back about the rent for North Mesa residents who have to move. Mark requested to meet with the residents who submitted the demand letter. He requested time to ensure the decision is fair to everyone. 40-45 people signed the petition but it doesn’t account
for all who will be displaced or the people who moved before. Mark requested to meet in 3 weeks after undergraduate move in. Mark shared that ARCHAC will be meeting on Friday. They are the appointed group to advise on policy and procedures.

Mark Derdzinski shared these issues were brought to his attention a few weeks ago and he will continue to connect with distressed students. This is why the GSA reached out to the community to distill feedback and begin the conversation with HDH. But the decision affects not just this community and those here, but others at ARCH and the waitlist and all grad students need to be included in this conversation. Mark stated he met with Mark Cunningham, Cory and housing staff on the day the demand letter was received. Some of the things we are talking about affect more than the people who are here today. Mark stated he understands that people are being asked to move out in the short term, and will continue to collect feedback from this group personally. Mark requested the group allow us to come up with a reasonable proposal that everyone could be happy with.

Cory shared that he drafted a letter to be sent to all residents that included clarification on 2 questions received:

1. People are moving into North Mesa? No one is moving into North Mesa long term they are either temporary stays moving to Mesa Nueva or undergrads. Not permanent stays.
2. When do I really have to move out? Drop dead is 3/23/18. No one can be in those units. It is suggested to move before.

Mark Cunningham shared that North Mesa residents have top priority for any space that opens. We will sit down come up with a plan to look at this and get to a great place. Mark suggested if residents are being offered a location that best fits them, to start coordinating that move to get to the great unit. We are working on a solution that will make things right. Mark shared that he believes in this community and we can solve this together. We will make it right.

The handout distributed at this meeting will be posted on the Housing website and will be sent out to residents.

Residents shared their appreciation of the staff’s time.