



Shawn Ryan works on the grounds near the Hagar Court apartment complex that UC Santa Cruz is buying on the upper Westside near campus.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Bold steps are required to end area's housing crisis

UCSC - Growth

Yes, mistakes were made. Now both Santa Cruz and UCSC must focus on providing residents with an affordable place to live.

Everyone has heard the phrase, "mistakes were made." It's usually uttered by some beleaguered public official 10 years after the infamous mistake occurred.



HEATHER BOERNER
Gimme Shelter

In a cartoon by Jules Pfeiffer on that very topic, a man concludes that, "If we only knew, if we could only see far enough in advance to correct the outcome... so that mistakes might be unmade minutes after they are made, so that five or 10 years from now the people on top could go on TV and proclaim, 'Mistakes were *not* made,' That's as close to good government as we can hope to get."

Since we can't see into the future on housing, let's look back at the mistakes and ponder mistakes not yet made as we speak about student housing and the Santa Cruz housing crisis.

The crisis is well documented.

■ Santa Cruz County is the third least affordable place to live in the country, according to the National Association of Home Builders.

■ More than 14,000 students flood into the city every year. Many of those stay (Full disclosure: I attended UCSC in the mid-1990s), and some

become members of city commissions and the City Council.

■ The university can't keep its faculty here because lecturers can't find a place to live.

■ The university is planning to double its graduate student population in the next 10 years without concrete plans to build housing.

■ Property managers, as a matter of policy, increase rents for houses in which the residents are unrelated adults — in other words, students or young professionals — by a rate of \$200 to \$300 a month, driving up the overall cost of housing



UC Santa Cruz is buying the Laureate Court apartments as part of a plan to provide more faculty housing.

in Santa Cruz.

With that in mind, does this comment sound familiar:

"By reducing rents for students (on the UC Santa Cruz campus) we will decrease what amounts to a financial hardship on many students, as well as helping relieve the housing shortage in Santa Cruz."

How about this one:

"The need for housing has been ongoing and to some degree neglected by both the city and the university."

And finally:

"I don't feel any responsibility to create student housing."

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Gimme Shelter

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They don't live here. But I do feel a responsibility to create affordable housing."

Now, can you guess when these statements were made?

The answers might surprise you.

All three of those statements probably could have been made at any time since the university opened in the mid-1960s. But only the last one was made recently — in January by Diane Louie of the Santa Cruz Planning Commission. She was talking about proposals to build more than 800 apartments downtown, with some built just for UCSC students.

The first comment was made in 1977 by Alexis Kuhn, a student at UCSC's Oakes College. At the time, students could pay either \$220 a month each to live on campus or \$90 each to live off campus.

The second was made in 1985 by Stephen Reed, a spokesman for the

university, at a time when students paid \$400 a month each for on-campus housing, and about \$300 for a room off campus.

So why is it that, in 2002, a city commissioner is eschewing responsibility to build housing, when the average cost for a shared room on campus has grown to \$800 a month each and exploded to \$700 a month for a room in a house off campus?

Is it possible that the animosity between the university and the town has cemented to a place that we forget the reasonable discussions that have taken place in the past?

We're at a historic time in student housing. The university took the unpopular step last year of leasing the Holiday Inn on Ocean Street as a student dorm. Last week, the university announced it would buy an apartment building near campus to help house its faculty.

Assemblyman Fred Keeley, D-Boulder Creek, authored a new law that sets aside millions of dollars for student housing in towns that host public universities. And the city is looking seriously at building single-room-occupancy housing for students downtown, thus getting the kids out of the single-family homes and freeing up those houses for actual families.

The point is, they are doing something. Has the university made mistakes with its housing plans? Sure. Has the city fallen down in its responsibility to house everyone here, even students? Yes. But should the city, and its residents continue to make decisions that end up punishing us all with high rents and home prices?

Absolutely not.

Contact "Gimme Shelter"
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