

TWU Expansion Plan Update

Prepared by Kevin Roden, City Council District 1
July 26, 2011

Background

TWU's desire to expand into surrounding neighborhoods is nothing new. Some area residents recall a plan from the late 70s that involved interest in obtaining additional property surrounding the campus, but that plan never materialized. In recent years, a flurry of purchasing activity began in 2005 and continued through 2006. During that time, 27 properties were purchased in the surrounding neighborhoods. In 2008, the TWU Board of Regents approved a Master Plan that included two specific "Expansion Plan" boundaries. One area includes a portion of the East side of Austin Street and the West Side of Oakland Street to the North of Sawyer. The other area includes the entire neighborhood North of Texas Street, West of Bell, South of and including Grove Street, and West of Mingo (see attached map for more details). However, since the time of the approval of this plan, only 3 houses have been purchased. To date, according to a document provided by TWU (and attached), 32 properties have been acquired by TWU.

Although the vast majority of purchases have taken place 5 or 6 years ago (there have been no purchases in 2011 and only one in 2010), TWU has recently become aggressive with their plans to demolish the existing structures, many of which have remained rental properties since they have been acquired. The recent demolition activity has served to raise attention to this situation and increase the anxiety among the current property owners who have not sold to TWU.

This sign was put in front of a property scheduled for demolition in April. The wording, especially the tag line, drew attention:



Why this area is important for Denton...

For everything positive about the recent Downtown Implementation Plan, it neglected to address issues relating to the downtown neighborhoods, many of which are in walking distance to the square. Discussion of density often only looked to future housing projects in the downtown area. Yet it should be noted that there is already a significant source of density coming from the neighborhoods surrounding the area contained in the DTIP – it is in the city’s best interest to seek both the revitalization and the connectivity of these neighborhoods to one another and to the downtown area. These neighborhoods include: the greater TWU neighborhoods, the Stroud Street Neighborhood, SE Denton (both North and South of McKinney), the PECAN neighborhood, the Oak/Hickory Historic District, the West Oak Historic District, and the Bolivar/Anna Street area.

Housing market studies reveal that there is significant interest in the small amount of properties that come available in these surrounding neighborhoods. As a growing number of young professionals and young families reject suburban life, the demand for single family housing will continue to rise near town centers. Already, a slow renaissance is taking place in these neighborhoods as evidenced by the number of rental-to-single-owner turnovers and the increased foot, bike, and stroller activity.

The TWU Neighborhoods are particularly valuable to Denton for the following reasons:

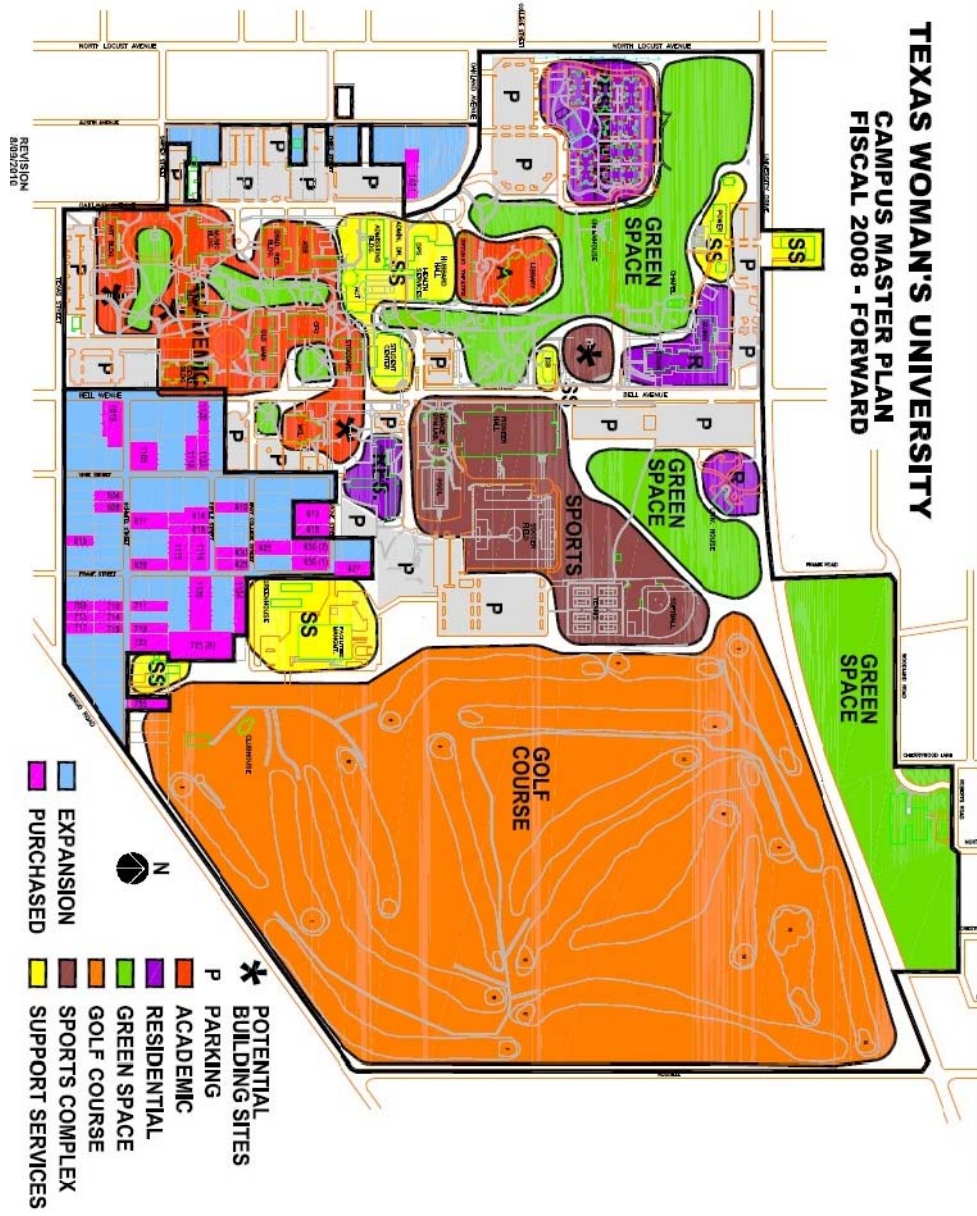
- **DIVERSITY** – because of the coexistence of higher-value historic homes with student housing, rental property, and lower income apartments, the demographics of this area is something that should stand as a model for other Denton neighborhoods. Just look at the make-up of the kids playing together at Quakertown Park or the Civic Center Pool and you will see something quite remarkable – they resemble the demographics of Denton. And what is more remarkable – it works and people are moving into the area for this reason.
- **MIXED-USE** – the core neighborhoods in Denton all share a common dilemma: how to work with the “edges” of the neighborhoods that are seen as ripe for commercial redevelopment (often with great opposition from the neighborhoods). The TWU neighborhoods have figured this out *organically*. You have \$200,000 homes beside apartments, the co-mingling of a university, churches, a park, and a library, and a thriving neighborhood friendly business district. Pay attention to what is going on from the Greenhouse to the Cupboard and you have a great model to study for how to replicate neighborhood-compatible mixed use in the other core neighborhoods.
- **WALKABILITY** – this neighborhood has everything a young family could want – and all without having to get in and out of a car: a park, local restaurants, a library, the place where the city hosts most of its festival, the square, the train station, a city pool, etc.

Recent News Coverage of this Issue

- THINKDENTON.com article in May 2011 - <http://thinkdenton.com/2011/05/twu-plans-to-improve-our-local-community-by-destroying-historic-neighborhoods/>
- Denton RC article on June 28, 2011 - http://www.dentonrc.com/sharedcontent/dws/drc/localnews/stories/DRC_TWU_expansion_0628.402706f09.html
- Denton RC coverage of initial neighborhood meeting on June 30, 2011 - http://www.dentonrc.com/sharedcontent/dws/drc/localnews/stories/DRC_meeting_0701.411e30535.html
- Denton RC editorial on the topic on July 1, 2011 - http://www.dentonrc.com/sharedcontent/dws/drc/opinion/editorials/stories/DR_C_Editorial_0702.417161186.html
- NBC/DFW Coverage on June 29, 2011 - <http://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/TWU-Expansion-Worries-Neighbors-124744384.html>
- DENTONEER.com coverage on July 5, 2011 - <http://dentoneer.com/2011/07/05/citizens-express-concern-over-twu-expansion-plan/>

The following text and image come from the TWU website - <http://www.twu.edu/fmc/land-acquisition.asp>

TWU's decision to purchase properties near the Denton campus for future expansion is part of its Campus Master Plan developed in 2008 and approved by the TWU Board of Regents. The areas shown in blue on the Campus Master Plan map (see below) indicate areas for possible land acquisition. The largest area for potential acquisition includes properties from the north side of Texas Street to the existing TWU campus, and Bell Avenue east to the existing TWU campus. The second area includes properties on the east side of Austin Street, north of Sawyer Street.



Since 2005 TWU has purchased 37 properties in these two areas. These purchases are indicated in pink on the map above. TWU purchased properties that were offered for sale to the University by the owners. TWU will continue to consider purchasing properties as they become available for sale. As the houses on the purchased properties become vacant, TWU will demolish the structures to ensure that the properties are safe and environmentally friendly. At this time, TWU intends to maintain the properties as greenspace.

TWU Expansion Plan Properties

Year Purchased	Address	Sales Price
2005		
	1120 Bell	\$64,200
	630 Grove (1&2)	\$102,500
	735 Schmitz	\$81,750
	1119 Vine	\$58,400
	1123 Vine	\$77,400
2006		
	1018 Bell	\$103,396
	610 College	\$62,475
	625 College	\$100,300
	628 & 630 College	\$82,500
	1115 Frame	\$102,458
	1120 Frame	\$116,000
	1134 Frame	\$115,000
	1401 Oakland	\$119,687
	616 Pirtle	\$64,775
	618 Pirtle	\$48,990
	604 Schmitz	\$65,310
	608 Schmitz	\$60,000
	617 Schmitz	\$75,000
	629 Schmitz	\$77,430
	710 Schmitz	\$68,040
	711 Schmitz	\$86,250
	714 Schmitz	\$71,190

	718 Schmitz	\$67,760
	719 Schmitz	\$80,000
	723 Schmitz (A&B)	\$251,066
	619 Texas	\$71,357
	713 Texas	\$63,560
2007		
	627 Grove	\$202,800
	1105 Vine	\$102,620
2009		
	1119 Frame	\$101,250
	709 Texas	\$47,600
2010		
	717 Texas	\$43,400

Prepared by TWU Office of Finance & Administration - July 2011

Communication with TWU

Subsequent to being elected to City Council in May, I contacted the TWU Administration in hopes of encouraging a dialogue between them and the affected neighborhoods. Although a representative was requested for two neighborhood meetings that have since taken place, the TWU administration has opted not to participate in the public forums. They have also not been available for an individual meeting with me.

They provided copies of a print-out from their website which briefly explains their master plan and shows a map of the expansion areas (see attached). In addition, they have responded in written form to questions I have posed, several of which came from neighbors attending one of the two meetings (see attached Q and As).

The scant amount of information and communication from TWU regarding their plans and timeline remain a source of concern from many in the neighborhoods.

The following 5 pages contain documents provided by Dr. Ann Stuart's office replying to questions I posed via email.

**Response to Questions posed by Mr. Kevin Roden on June 28, 2011 regarding TWU's
Land Acquisition Plan**

Texas Woman's University appreciates and understands the neighborhood's interest in TWU's Land Acquisition Plan. We hope these answers to your questions will address your concerns.

- 1. When the TWU administration was deliberating this plan in 2008, what sort of neighborhood outreach took place? Can you give me a timeline of the communications that took place during this time.**

The TWU Board of Regents initially approved the purchase of properties within the boundaries of the land acquisition plan in 2005. Since then, TWU periodically has sent letters informing property owners in the area of the opportunity to sell their property to the university. Since that time, 37 properties have been sold to the university.

- 2. When the TWU administration was deliberating this plan in 2008, what sort of conversations/discussions took place with city officials and who were those city officials?**

The city was not involved.

- 3. Can you get more specific as to the timeline you are following on the east side of Bell - it seems the plan has become increasingly more aggressive in this last year. How long will you wait for "hold outs" in this area. If someone is determined to keep their house for the next 30 years, will TWU wait on them or is there a date when you begin to consider taking the property?**

There is no timeline. The university buys properties as they are offered by their owners for sale.

4. Can you get more specific as to the timeline you are following to the west of campus (Oakland and Austin Street)?

There is no timeline. TWU has no plans to purchase additional property on the west side of Austin Street.

5. According to the map, TWU has acquired a vacant lot on the west side of Austin Street (outside of the expansion zone) – does TWU have plans to expand further in that direction. If not, what is the purpose of purchasing on that side of the street?

TWU acquired this lot in 1945, before the land acquisition plan was created. The university previously offered it for sale, unsuccessfully, and would consider selling it now.

6. What is the long-term goal with this property (east and west)? If you have no plans, what is the rush to acquire property?

There is no rush to acquire property. We acquire properties as they are offered for sale. The long-term goal is planning for the growth and success of the university.

7. Many neighbors ask why TWU doesn't use the large plot of land now used as a golf course for their expansion area – why can't that land be sufficient to use for whatever purposes you have for these surrounding neighborhoods?

TWU intends to retain and maintain the golf course for use by students and the community.

8. Some of the properties you have recently demolished were viable rental properties – it seems TWU is working with other units to rent to students, why couldn't TWU allow these properties to remain and use them as rental property?

All of the properties purchased have been single family houses, with the exception of one apartment unit that is being used as university housing. Single family properties are unsuitable and inefficient for university housing.

9. Thus far, TWU has not pursued eminent domain – but if you purchase all the property surrounding someone's house, tear it down, what options would you suggest are left for that property owner?

The property owner would have to make that decision.

10. The TWU website does not list contact information for the TWU Board of Regents – can you provide their emails and phone numbers for citizens interested in contacting them with concerns?

At the request of Regents, all communication with them is handled through the Office of the Chancellor and President, 940-898-3201 or astuart@twu.edu.

Prepared by the Office of the Chancellor and President

Texas Woman's University

June 29, 2011

***Response to Questions Posed by Mr. Kevin Roden on July 11, 2011 Regarding
TWU's Land Acquisition Plan***

1. There is continued concern about the timeline - homeowners are put in a difficult situation of not knowing what sort of investment they should put into their properties. In normal neighborhood situations, traditional zoning laws help protect what is for many people their largest investment. If a homeowner holds out for 5 years and is unwilling to sell, will TWU commit to not pursuing eminent domain of their property? What about 10 years? 20 years? 30 years and beyond? We are trying to understand what level of assurance they should expect.

We appreciate the homeowners' concerns. However, we have no timeline for development of the property.

2. Can you expand upon the reasons (from the last list of questions) for not considering the golf course as an area for this expansion instead of the neighborhoods? You made mention of it being a community asset - a neighborhood where people actually live and own homes is clearly a community asset. There is interest in hearing a fuller explanation of the reason for not wanting to use the golf course area.

At the present time, the university will continue to maintain and operate the golf course for use by students and the community.

3. Many residents expressed great surprise at TWU's position on neighborhood preservation. The campus has always been a shining light of beauty, architecture, and landscape for the benefit of the entire community - the lack of interest in historic preservation (especially of properties that have so much history tied to the university) is an anomaly. Are you able to explain this apparent disconnect?

The university does not make the determination if individual properties are historic or not.

4. Does TWU have a stated tree preservation property? Many of the properties that now stand vacant have beautiful, old growth trees remaining. Is TWU committed to preserving these trees?

The university makes every effort to preserve mature, healthy trees whenever possible.

5. Many neighbors complained that TWU-owned abandoned houses have been used for several years for police training practice for SWAT teams and hostage scenarios. After inquiring about this to the city, it was stated that TWU "invited" this use of their properties not just to Denton officials, but TWU, DEA, and other metroplex departments. Please speak more to this program... how long has it been going on? What is TWU being paid by these entities for the use of these houses?

The TWU Department of Public Safety and other law enforcement agencies, including the Denton Police Department, used some of the vacant properties for training exercises. Signs informing neighbors were posted in the area prior to the exercises, and no complaints were received. The university received no payment for the training exercises, which were conducted for approximately two years.

6. According to an earlier set of answers, you mentioned that the reason that TWU was pursuing the demolition of the purchased properties was to keep them from being menaces in the neighborhood. Yet apparently some of these properties were being regularly used by SWAT teams for practice with full gear, guns drawn, flash bombs, police cars, and other obviously un-community and neighborhood friendly practices. Are you able to speak to this apparent contradiction in motivation?

The purpose of the exercises was to train the TWU police and other law enforcement agencies to better protect students and the public.

Neighborhood Meetings

I hosted 2 neighborhood meetings at my home on the issue in the past month:

June 29 Neighborhood Meeting – 7:30pm – 48 people in attendance

Here are the major issues and questions raised at that meeting:

- What has the city done to invest in these neighborhoods? Specifically, what has been done in terms of road maintenance, property code enforcement, and infrastructure investment?
- Although the situation seems dire, particularly in the neighborhood to the East of Bell, most residents expressed great hope – “don’t give up on these historic homes!”
- Many neighbors were concerned at the lack of communication from either the university or the city on this issue.
- Concerns were raised over the lack of timeline given from TWU – this puts home owners in a very uncertain situation.
- Questions were raised about the apparent lack of plans for the area and whether all the destruction was justified.
- Why are there no plans to touch a large golf course, yet TWU finds it necessary to take out an existing, historic neighborhood?
- Many expressed the need for a city vision for this area.
- It is important to note the relation between these neighborhoods and a thriving downtown – many people are moving into this neighborhood precisely due to its proximity to downtown Denton.
- Several people noted the increase in young professionals and young families in the area – noting an increased interest in living in older neighborhoods near the town center.
- TWU has always had a great aesthetic sense – why not extend that to the preservation and renovation of these neighborhoods?
- How is TWU arriving at the appraised value for the offers they are making – aren’t these properties worth more money?
- What is TWU’s commitment to tree preservation in this area – many of the properties were houses have been torn down have several old-growth valuable trees?
- Several people brought up the issue of apparent SWAT team practice in the vacant houses (please see note below on this issue).
- For those wanting to “hold out” what are their options – when will TWU attempt eminent domain?
- There was much talk about pursuing the possibility of a locally-designated historic or conservation district. Although a state institution would not have to abide by the local protections, it would demonstrate a commitment to these neighborhoods from the city side, should people be interested in investing in properties in the area.

July 13 Neighborhood Meeting – 7:30pm – 23 people in attendance

The goal of this meeting was to address lingering questions and concerns and begin shaping goals and strategies for neighborhood revitalization and protection. Here are the major issues and questions raised at that meeting:

- A local realtor presented findings from an initial market analysis of houses in the area – the analysis showed a consistent trend of increased property values in the area over the last 10 years. There was also plenty of anecdotal information offered about rental properties turning over into owner-occupied properties where renovations are taking place.
- Deb Conte from the Bell Ave Conservation District (and recent appointee to the Historic Landmark Commission) presented on the process of obtaining historic district status.
- Questions about the City Council joint meeting with TWU coming up on August 1
 - What is on the agenda?
 - Is the public invited?
 - Can it be recorded on TV for others to watch who can't make it due to work, etc.
- Police Swat Team Practice Issue
 - Inadequate notifications
 - Still happening? Someone mentioned there was a training just two weeks ago
 - Do they have to follow city sound ordinances? Parking ordinances?
 - No one is in favor of this continuing
 - How do we get it to stop?
 - What does the Denton Plan say about neighborhood protection?
- Contact more realtors and realtor groups and work to get a clear market Deb Conte from the Bell Ave Conservation District (and recent appointee to the Historic Landmark Commission) presented on the process of obtaining historic district status.
- Do any city codes apply to the properties now owned by TWU?
- THINGS TO DO:
 - Need to put together a packet to give to existing homeowners/property owners
 - Catalog all properties
 - Pictures
 - Addresses
 - Owners
 - Info on house
 - Occupation status
 - Continue real estate analysis of area
 - List of examples of other college towns that have thriving older neighborhoods surrounding them

ISSUES TO ADDRESS:

- Improved and ongoing communications between TWU Administration and affected neighborhoods.
- More specific timeline – for many homeowners in the area, their house is their largest investment. The uncertainty created by this situation makes it difficult for homeowners to make prudent decisions (e.g. should I bother fixing my roof or will TWU condemn my house in 2 years?).
- Police SWAT Team activity – police departments from surrounding communities, including TWU, Denton, and DEA, have been using TWU-owned vacant houses for police training activities. This type of activity is universally objected to by everyone attending the neighborhood meetings.
- The reasons for the sudden rash of home demolitions are still unknown (given most of these properties were purchased over 5 years ago). In some cases, it leaves homeowners as the only remaining house on a block. Again, this is being done with no communication to the existing homeowners.
- Questions relating to the empty lots:
 - Some lots are being used for construction and contractor parking and equipment storage – and this right beside houses. What policies can be implemented to minimize the negative impact on residents in the area?
 - What is the short-term and long-term goal for these newly vacant lots?
 - What is the schedule of maintenance on these empty lots?
 - What sort of tree preservation is in place for these empty lots – most of which have old growth Oak, Pecan, and Maple trees.
 - Are neighbors able to utilize these lots for neighborhood improvements – community gardens, pocket parks, etc.?
- There is growing interest among the Austin Street area of developing some sort of Historic District. Given the small amount of purchasing activity in that Master Plan expansion area, would TWU be willing to help preserve this area?
- Can there be the option for someone to move an historic home rather than it be destroyed? I personally offered to move one such home at no cost to the university and my offer was denied.

PROPERTIES AT RISK

Below are just a sampling of properties at risk for demolition under the TWU Expansion Plan.

Examples of properties in the Austin Street Expansion Zone:



The last remaining house on Grove Street, East of Bell – where an elderly man and his disabled wife live...



Every property around them has been purchased and demolished by TWU – their neighborhood has literally crumbled around them. Now, TWU has directed their workers and contractors to park and store construction equipment on the vacant lot adjacent immediately to the West of their house with no fence or buffer to mitigate this incompatible use. Here's what it looks like...



College Street has some of the best examples of historic houses in the neighborhood East of Bell. These beautiful, one-of-a-kind houses will be demolished in TWU's plans...



Other examples of houses in the TWU Expansion Area...

