NEIGHBORHOOD SOLUTIONS GUIDEBOOK

A resource for dealing with problem properties in the University District
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Introduction

The University District, anchored by The Ohio State University’s Columbus campus, is a collection of vibrant and diverse neighborhoods, which incorporate some of the best and least desirable characteristics of Midwest urban living.

The college students and other young people who live or seek entertainment in the University District bring a youthful energy, an interest in learning, and often a passion for community service. But as long-time residents know, the flip side of adolescent exuberance is noise, raucous parties, drunken behavior, and the aftermath of litter and vandalism. Some young people act as if the University District is a place where “anything goes.” That leads to the party atmosphere and contributes to the University District being a magnet for those outside the neighborhood who wish to do mischief or commit crimes of opportunity. In turn, the party atmosphere discourages long-time residents whose presence reinforces neighborhood stability, public safety, and a sense of community.

Some neighborhoods of the University District also suffer from urban problems of disinvestment and distressed and vacant properties. The situation degrades the built environment, lowers the property values of neighbors, and undermines public safety by inviting criminal activity and arson. It contributes to a downward spiral of urban decay. The challenge often for residents and for city officials is finding those property owners and holding them responsible for maintaining their properties.

The purpose of this guidebook is to highlight the tools for neighborhood civic associations and their leaders to work more effectively with local government and cooperative property owners to deal with “problem properties” in the University District. “Problem properties” are those with unruly residents or inattentive property owners, or both, whose activities or inaction are negatively affecting the quality of life of their neighbors.

A systematic approach requires that civic associations and their leaders know how to access the resources of city, county, state, and university.

A systematic approach requires that civic associations and their leaders know how to access the resources of city, county, state, and university – and those agencies should better coordinate their efforts with the residents. Such an approach can begin to change the mindset of those who believe “anything goes” in these neighborhoods. With its youthful population, the University District will always be a vibrant and lively place, but with respect for neighbors, it can be a better place for all.
When it’s practical and safe, begin with a conversation

Most of us have made errors and appreciate it when someone politely corrects us, without calling in higher authorities. This guidebook assumes that most students and other residents and property owners do not intentionally set out to alienate their neighbors. Sometimes a conversation with the residents or property owner – pointing out the problem and referencing city code and community standards – gets a positive response much quicker than going through the steps outlined in this guidebook. In situations involving rental property, the owner or manager is not likely to be there late at night or on the weekends. The Columbus Division of Police usually doesn’t notify the property owner that there was a police run to his or her property for a noisy, rowdy party. A call or letter from a civic leader can give the property owner information about the party that allows him or her to take action.

Caution 1
Only begin a conversation with residents or a property owner in a situation in which you feel comfortable and are not apprehensive or feel threatened. If your comments are met with a hostile reaction, simply back off. Use the public resources in this guidebook to deal with the situation.

Caution 2
Noisy parties late at night usually involve alcohol. Don’t attempt to reason with someone who may have had too much to drink. Let the police handle the situation. When possible, however, note the date and time, the inappropriate or illegal behavior (such as under-age drinking), property damage, improper parking, and litter. The next day you can explain in detail the situation to the property owner or, if the situation continues, involve the other public resources.

Some neighborhood civic associations and property managers provide “welcome packets” for new student residents. The packets contain information useful for the students, but also remind them that they are living in a neighborhood with families and working adults who regard noise, large parties, and litter as unacceptable.
Noise, large parties, and other neighborhood disturbances

Noise and large parties are among the most common complaints of long-time residents. The parties, which usually involve alcohol, often leave a residue of litter, public urination, and property damage. When you see signs that a party is imminent (such as temporary fencing going up), you might remind the building’s residents that the neighborhood includes working adults and families who don’t want to be disturbed by noise or rowdy behavior. Early communication usually works better than later anger; however, when large parties and loud noise disturb the neighborhood’s peace, here are the steps to follow and the resources available.

1. Call the Columbus Division of Police at (614) 645-4545 with a description of the issue and the address. (See page 9 for a copy of the city’s noise ordinance.)

2. Contact the property owner or property manager the next day to inform him or her of the inappropriate or possibly illegal behavior on the property and the fact that a police officer was dispatched to the scene. Ask the property owner or manager to enforce provisions of the lease to restrict such behavior. Remind the property owner or manager that he or she ultimately is responsible for the actions of his or her tenants. (See page 8 for instructions on how to find the owner of the property on the Franklin County Auditor’s website. Rental property is required to be registered and contact information should appear on the website.)

3. If you have reason to believe the residents are Ohio State students, then the next business day, contact the university’s Office of Off-Campus and Commuter Student Services at (614) 292-0100. Ask that a representative of the university meet with the students and explain how their behavior negatively affects the neighborhood. Some behavior may violate the university’s Code of Student Conduct. Willie J. Young at young.56@osu.edu is the senior director of Off-Campus and Commuter Student Services.

4. Keep track of the dates, times, and locations of the inappropriate or illegal behavior and the contacts you have made to deal with the issue.
If neither the tenants nor property owner or manager are responsive, the next steps are:

1. Contact Katherine H. Cull, manager of the North Side Pride Center in the city’s Department of Neighborhoods. Provide Ms. Cull with a description of the problem and relevant dates, times and locations. She can connect you to city resources to resolve the problem. Ms. Cull is at (614) 724-1900 and KHcull@columbus.gov.

2. Contact your police precinct’s community liaison officer (CLO) and provide him or her with a description of the problem and the relevant dates. The CLO can communicate the problem across the relevant units within the Columbus Division of Police. The CLOs serving the University District are Officer Steve Smith for precinct 4 (south of Lane Avenue) at (614) 645-1404 and scsmith@columbuspolice.org and Officer Ted Stacy for precinct 3 (north of Lane Avenue) at (614) 645-1403 and tstacy@columbuspolice.org.

3. If the property has litter or other code issues (i.e., parking on the grass, upholstered furniture on an open porch, peeling paint), contact the city’s Call Center at (614) 645-3111 or www.311.columbus.gov to report the situation. As a result, the city’s Code Enforcement Division will assign code enforcement inspector to investigate the report. If the situation is complicated or you are unsure of the follow-up, you also can contact John Hughes, supervisor of the inspectors in the University District, to explain the issue and your efforts to deal with it. He is at (614) 645-3296 and jphughes@columbus.gov.

4. Contact the Community Crime Patrol (CCP) and explain the issue. CCP’s trained citizen patrollers walk and sometime bicycle throughout the University District and a number of other neighborhoods of the city. They usually patrol nights and weekends. CCP patrollers, who carry walkie-talkies and are not armed, do not intervene in situations, but they are extra eyes and ears for the police. They also regularly report suspicious activity, code violations, burned out street lights, abandoned cars, etc. Explain the situation to the CCP staff and ask that patrollers pay attention to suspicious activity at the property in question. You can reach CCP at (614) 291-4262. Ellen Moore Griffin is executive director. She is at ellen@communitycrimepatrol.org.

5. If you have evidence of or suspect under-age drinking is involved, contact the Columbus field office of the Ohio Investigative Unit (OIU), at (614) 644-2413. OIU reports to the Ohio Highway Patrol within the Ohio Department of Public Safety. OIU investigates alcohol law violations, including under-age drinking. Inform OIU of the problem property and the potentially illegal behavior. Undercover OIU agents circulate throughout the University District on home football Saturdays, although agents will investigate complaints throughout the year.

6. Following repeated actions that fail to get a positive response from the tenants or the property owner, contact Katarina Karac, assistant city attorney in the Office of the Columbus City Attorney. Ms. Karac is a liaison from the City Attorney’s Office to advise on city-related legal matters that affect the University District. Provide Ms. Karac with detailed information on when and where the inappropriate or illegal behaviors have occurred and the steps already taken to try to deal with the situation. Ms. Karac is at (614) 645-8619 and kskarac@columbus.gov.
Vacant, abandoned, poorly maintained properties

The mortgage foreclosures and financial meltdown at the end of the last decade left many neighborhoods with vacant properties, often owned by out-of-town entities that are hard to track down and hold responsible, even by city authorities.

The Columbus Nuisance Abatement Code requires that a property owner properly secure his or her vacant property. Among the requirements are that all windows, doors, openings, or holes in the structure must be covered with a minimum one-half inch weather-protected CDX plywood tightly fitted to the exterior of the opening. The plywood must be painted to be compatible with the exterior of the structure. In general, the property values in the University District are high enough that totally abandoned and dilapidated structures are increasingly rare. The larger problem is with properties that are poorly maintained or neglected.

Here are suggested steps for dealing with vacant, abandoned or poorly maintained properties:

1. If a property appears to be vacant or poorly maintained, contact the property owner to determine the building’s situation. Remind the property owner of the city’s requirements for properly securing a vacant property. (See page 8 for instructions on how to find the owner of the property on the Franklin County Auditor’s website. Rental property is required to be registered and contact information should appear on the website.)

2. If you aren’t satisfied by the owner’s response or you cannot reach the owner, contact the city’s Call Center at (614) 645-3111 or www.311.columbus.gov to report the situation. You will receive information on how to track progress on your report. The city’s Code Enforcement Division will assign a code enforcement inspector to investigate your report. In some cases, the city has trouble finding the owner or the property may be in probate, making it difficult to deal with the responsible party. If the situation is not resolved in a reasonable amount of time, contact John Hughes, supervisor of the code enforcement inspectors in the University District, to discuss the particular situation and understand what steps his office has taken. Mr. Hughes is at (614) 645-3296 and jphughes@columbus.gov.

3. Code Enforcement can immediately post signs that the building is a public nuisance or a hazardous building, or both. Once the signs are posted (often referred to as “placarding” a building), no one is allowed in the building. At that point, if you see persons in the building or occupying the porch areas, you should call the police to have the persons removed. If the building is not secured (i.e., plywood removed from a door or window), contact the city’s Call Center to report the situation. Code Enforcement treats vacant structures that are open from the ground level as emergencies and will have the building secured if the owner fails to respond.

4. If a pattern develops of the property being unsecured, persons continue to gain entrance to the vacant property, or you suspect illegal activities in the property, then contact Katarina Karac, assistant city attorney in the Office of the Columbus City Attorney. Ms. Karac is a liaison from the City Attorney’s Office to advise on city-related legal matters that affect the University District. Provide Ms. Karac with detailed information about your concerns with the vacant property. Ms. Karac is at (614) 645-8619 and kskarac@columbus.gov.
Locating the property owner

The Franklin County Auditor’s website is the primary tool for determining who owns a particular property. Ohio law requires that rental property be registered and a rental contact be provided. The website is www.franklincounty auditor.com. In the black bar near the top of the home page, click on “Your Property,” then click on “Property search.” You then may search by “address” or “owner.” If the property has multiple units, it might have an address like 103-105 Acme Avenue. You will have to search “103” or “105” to see under which number the property is coded.

Once you have located the information for a particular property, you will see “Rental Contact” along the left side of the page. If the property is registered as a rental property, there should be contact information, including a phone number, for the property owner or manager.

Is the rental contact information on the website missing or inaccurate? In that situation, contact Dani Farrell, who is responsible for rental registration in the Franklin County Auditor’s Office, at (614) 525-7382 and dkfarrel@franklincountyohio.gov. She will send registration material to the owner. She also will add a fine of $150 per year to the property taxes for each year that the property is not registered.

Often the person or persons who control the property are difficult to determine because the ownership is listed as a corporation or limited liability company. You sometimes can find out more information on the corporation or limited liability company by visiting the website of the Office of the Ohio Secretary of State. If the corporation or limited liability company is incorporated in Ohio, then it will be registered with the Ohio Secretary of State.

The city’s Code Enforcement Division has had success in locating absentee property owners. If you’ve reached a “dead end” in determining who is responsible for a particular property, contact John Hughes, supervisor of the code enforcement inspectors in the University District, at (614) 645-3296 and jphughes@columbus.gov. He may be able to help.
Section 2329.11 – Community noise

(C) Prohibited sounds:
(1) No person shall make or allow to be made any unreasonably loud and/or raucous noise in such a manner or at such a volume as to disturb the quiet, comfort, or repose of a person of ordinary sensibilities. Strict liability is intended to be imposed for this section.

(2) In addition to the prohibition set out in (C)(1), the following specific acts are declared to be in violation of this ordinance:

(a) No person shall operate or permit the operation of any sound amplification system, auditory device, or stationary sound source from real property that is zoned residential in a manner as to be heard at a distance of fifty (50) feet beyond the property line of the property from which the sound emanates. Strict liability is intended to be imposed for this section.

(b) Where there are two (2) or more residential units contained within one (1) structure within a property zoned residential, no person shall operate or permit the operation of any sound amplification system, auditory device, or stationary sound source in a manner as to be heard within said structure at a distance of twenty-five (25) feet beyond the property line of the residential unit from which the sound emanates. Strict liability is intended to be imposed for this section.

(c) Where there are adjoining properties that are zoned residential, each of which has a residential unit, and where the residential units are located within fifty (50) feet of one another, no person shall operate or permit the operation of any sound amplification system, auditory device, or stationary sound source in a manner as to be heard at a distance of twenty-five (25) feet onto the adjoining residential property. Strict liability is intended to be imposed for this section.

(D) Special provisions (exemptions).
(1) The provisions of Section 2329.11 shall not apply to the following:

(a) The emission of sound for the purpose of alerting persons to the existence of an emergency, or the emission of sound in the performance of emergency work.
(b) Warning devices necessary for the protection of public safety.
(c) Outdoor gatherings, public dances, shows, and sporting and entertainment events, provided these events are conducted pursuant to a permit or license issued by the of License Section of the Department of Public Safety or The Special Events Section of The Department of Recreation and Parks.
(d) Public works projects as authorized by the state and/or other political subdivisions.
(e) The emission of sound from property zoned residential that is periodically generated by activities required to maintain the property in compliance with housing, building, zoning, fire, safety, health or sanitation codes and which occurs between the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.
Securing Vacant Buildings

Enforced by the Code Enforcement Division

4707.03 - Standards for securing and maintaining vacant buildings.
A vacant building or structure shall be secured in accordance with all of the following requirements:

A. All windows, doors, openings, or holes in the structure shall be covered with minimum one-half (½) inch weather protected CDX plywood tightly fitted to the exterior of the opening; and

B. The CDX plywood shall be attached with appropriate length galvanized bolts or two (2) inch galvanized screws; and shall be painted to be compatible with the exterior of the structure; and

C. The roof and flashing shall be sound, tight, and not have defects that admit water. Roof drainage shall be adequate to prevent dampness or deterioration in the walls or interior portion of the structure. The use of sheets of plastic or tarpaulins or similar materials does not satisfy the requirements of this paragraph;

D. All graffiti shall be removed; and

E. The vacant building or structure and premise shall be maintained in compliance with:
   1.Title 7, the Health Safety and Sanitation Code as it relates to interior and exterior sanitation, infestation, and high grass and weed requirements C.C.C. § 705.03, C.C.C. § 707.03, C.C.C. § 709.03, and C.C.C. § 713.03; and,
   2.Title 45, the Columbus Housing Code C.C.C. § 4521.04, C.C.C. § 4525.01, C.C.C. § 4525.03, C.C.C. § 4525.08, C.C.C. § 4525.11, C.C.C. § 4525.13, C.C.C. § 4525.14; and,
   3.Title 9, the Streets, Parks and Public Properties Code as it relates to the maintenance of the public sidewalks adjacent to the premise and house number requirements, C.C.C. § 905.06, and C.C.C. § 907.01

(Ord. 0946-04 § 2 (part); Ord. 897-05 § 4 (part); Ord. 374-06 § 5; Ord. 1132-2008 Attach. (part).)
Online databases for crime

A national website and the Columbus Division of Police (CPD) website offer access to crime reports filed with the Columbus police. Here is how to access those reports.

**Lexis Nexis Community Crime Map**
https://communitycrimemap.com
This website has a powerful mapping tool that tracks crime data submitted by thousands of jurisdictions across the United States, including Columbus and many of its suburbs. The map’s resolution is easy to control, so you can zoom in on a specific area, such as a University District neighborhood. CPD uploads crime reports to this website every four to six hours.

The site map has an icon for each crime and a variety of filters to aid your search. When you click on the icon, you receive information on the type of crime, when the report was made, the block in which it occurred (not the specific address), and the incident report number.

The site does not permit you to prepare a listing of crimes in a certain area in a certain period of time, although that may eventually be added to the site.

**CPD’s Web Report Portal.** The CPD’s website has more information on individual crimes and permits you to prepare a listing of crimes for a certain period of time across the whole city, by zone, by precinct, and by cruiser district.

You reach the Web Report Portal by going to https://www.columbus.gov/police, click on “Report an incident online,” and then click on “Search for an offense report.” Click on “Get started.” You then have the choice of searching for a specific crime by its incident number or by the victim’s last name. Or you can choose to see a number of crimes by location (meaning by city, zone, precinct, cruiser district).

The incident report for a crime provides more information, including a specific address, than is available from the Community Crime Map. Incident reports may take several days or more to be added to the web portal.
Resources

Code Enforcement Division
City of Columbus Department of Development

The division’s mission is “to improve the quality of life in Columbus neighborhoods through implementation and enforcement of the City’s Housing, Zoning, Graphics, Health, Sanitation, and Safety Codes.”

The first step in dealing with a code enforcement issue is to make a report through the city’s Call Center at (614) 645-3111 or www.311.columbus.gov. That puts your concerns into the city’s system so it can be tracked more effectively.

Columbus City Attorney, Office of

As prescribed by the Columbus City Charter, the City Attorney is “the legal adviser of and attorney and counsel for the city, and for all officers and departments thereof in matters relating to their official duties.” The City Attorney also serves as “the prosecuting attorney of municipal court...and shall prosecute or defend for and in behalf of the city, all complaints, suits and controversies in which the city is a party.”

Columbus Division of Police (CPD)

In an emergency, such as a crime in progress or a serious injury, call 911. In the case of suspicious activity or other matters, call (614) 645-4545.

In addition to regular patrols, the division commits to the University District a walking crew on busy weekends and a joint patrol with Ohio State University Police. The division also runs undercover operations to stop burglaries during holiday breaks when many students are gone and adds other resources when patterns of crime warrant it. The community liaison officers work with residents on crime prevention and are valuable sources of information about ongoing public safety matters.
### Community Crime Patrol (CCP)

Community Crime Patrol, Inc. (CCP) is a not-for-profit, community-based, crime prevention organization that deploys teams of specifically-trained citizen patrollers in several neighborhoods around Columbus, including the University District.

### Off-Campus and Commuter Student Services
**Office of Student Life, The Ohio State University**

This office is the university’s central resource center for off-campus housing and off-campus living information and education. The office engages students, parents, landlords, permanent residents, businesses, city officials and university personnel to better serve the unique concerns of the diverse off-campus community.

### Neighborhood Services Division
**City of Columbus Department of Neighborhoods**

This division employs 6 neighborhood liaisons who each are assigned to particular areas of the city. The neighborhood liaisons work as a team of advocates across departmental lines to get results for citizen requests, problems and questions. The liaisons coordinate the exchange of information among citizens, neighborhood organizations and city staff. They provide technical assistance, serve as an advocate on neighborhood issues, and coordinate the investment of city resources in the neighborhoods.

### Ohio Investigative Unit,
**Ohio Department of Public Safety**

The mission of the Ohio Investigative Unit (OIU) is “to provide quality enforcement of state, federal and local laws with emphasis on liquor, food stamp and tobacco offenses, further offering educational guidance and professional assistance to law enforcement agencies and to the general public.” OIU reports to the Ohio Highway Patrol within the Ohio Department of Public Safety.

OIU investigates liquor law violations, including under-age drinking. OIU works undercover with local law enforcement on football Saturdays in the University District and investigates other liquor-related complaints throughout the year.

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<th>CONTACT CCP</th>
<th>CONTACT OFF-CAMPUS AND COMMUTER STUDENT SERVICES</th>
<th>CONTACT NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES DIVISION</th>
<th>CONTACT OHIO INVESTIGATIVE UNIT</th>
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<td>(614) 291-4262 Ellen Moore Griffin Executive Director, <a href="mailto:ellen@communitycrimepatrol.org">ellen@communitycrimepatrol.org</a> Kevin Widmer Assistant Director, <a href="mailto:kevin@communitycrimepatrol.org">kevin@communitycrimepatrol.org</a></td>
<td>Willie J. Young, Senior Director Off-Campus and Commuter Student Services 614) 292-0100 <a href="mailto:young.56@osu.edu">young.56@osu.edu</a></td>
<td>Toya J. Johnson Assistant Director (614) 645-1991 <a href="mailto:tjohnson@columbus.gov">tjohnson@columbus.gov</a> Katherine H. Cull Neighborhood liaison and North Side Pride Center manager (614) 724-1900 <a href="mailto:KHCull@columbus.gov">KHCull@columbus.gov</a></td>
<td>Ohio Investigative Unit Columbus Field Office (614) 644-2413 Ohio Highway Patrol Speed dial #677 to reach dispatcher with Ohio Highway Patrol who can direct you to leave a message for OIU.</td>
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University Area Safety Committee

This committee, which has met monthly since 1995, brings together representatives of city police, fire, and code enforcement; university police, Student Life staff, and students; and permanent residents and property owners to share information and coordinate responses to public safety concerns in the University District. Meetings are open to the public. The committee primarily focuses on public safety on campus and in the predominantly student neighborhood.

University District Organization and University Community Business Association

The University District Organization (UDO) is a non-profit planning and community improvement organization incorporated in 1971 to work toward the stabilization and revitalization of the University District. An “organization of organizations,” UDO is governed by a board of trustees representing community groups, social service agencies, businesses, churches, local government, and institutions.

UDO is the home of the University Community Business Association (UCBA). Founded in 1984, UCBA was established to address the economic development concerns facing the University District and its business community. UCBA helps coordinate between the interests of developers, property owners, small retail and service businesses, and The Ohio State University.

Weinland Park Community Civic Association’s Safety Committee

This committee considers a wide range of public safety concerns in the Weinland Park neighborhood. The neighborhood’s boundaries are High Street on the west, the CSX railroad tracks on the east, East Fifth Avenue on the south, and Chittenden Avenue on the north.