

The NJIT Greek Village: A Progress Report

Presented by The Greek Village Task Force

April, 2010
Version 1.1

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Background and Problem

Greek Life has historically played a significant role in student life at NJIT. Before there was a campus center, there were numerous Greek houses along Warren Street and MLK Jr. Boulevard (High Street). Through the years Greeks played a key leadership role in our student senate, clubs and organizations. For many years, Greeks at NJIT were the major force behind community outreach and service projects. Greeks were then and continue to be among our most enthusiastic alumni.

In the early 2000's, however, Greek Life and Greek involvement began to decline. Heavily influenced by the opening of the new Campus Center as well as the emergence of many new clubs and organizations, Greeks were no longer the epicenter of campus life. The numerous new organizations did not require dues to join. With few exceptions, the Greek houses were old and small in size. Many were in need of repair and/or considerable renovation. Most could not be expanded. There was also evidence of a decline in the "value" of the Greek chapters, as Greeks no longer captured the majority of campus awards for service or leadership. Indeed, the number of Greeks elected to the student senate, previously a majority, had dwindled to a handful.

Exploring Options

In 2003, the university administration began to explore ways to improve Greek Life. The university proceeded to inventory all of the Greek houses, identifying thirteen, three were rented by the Greek organizations, ten were owned by an alumnus, by a chapter or board. These houses were recognized as affiliated with NJIT. Other houses on the row included a Greek house affiliated and one formerly affiliated with Rutgers-Newark. A census was taken, comparing the current year and the ten-year trend, which showed a steady decline in membership and people living in Greek housing.

As mentioned earlier, the Greek houses and their location presented numerous obstacles to revitalizing Greek life. The near century-old houses along the "row" were located behind a senior citizen complex, in a "quiet hospital zone" and were surrounded by non-Greek residents.

In addition, the general quality of accommodations, no matter how inexpensive, became an issue as it was apparent that students and parents

were willing to pay more for space that was more modern, better maintained and more convenient. At the time of the survey, approximately 125 Greeks were living in NJIT residence halls.

What, indeed could be done to improve the quality and desirability of Greek housing? There were numerous barriers to revitalization presented by the current Greek houses: repair and renovation costs, location, zoning issues, town/gown concerns, limited capacity and little or no room for expansion. With all of these constraints present, an exploration of alternatives to the current situation was initiated.

The research of what other urban and urban-like colleges and universities did suggested three different models for Greek Housing:

1. "Traditional Model," in which the building are owned and operated by a house corporation and the land is generally owned by the Greek organization.
2. "Residence Hall Model," in which the university constructs, owns and operates the buildings.
3. The "Greek Village Model," in which there are various forms of partnership e.g., university land is used as the result of long term leases, Greeks build their houses, and there are shared operations of the village between the Greeks and the university. In several instances a third party was used for development, financial resources and operations.

The Exploratory Committee

Given the existing conditions, option one, presented many obstacles and option two was not desired by the Greeks or the university, some iteration of the third model seemed to hold the most promise for NJIT. As a result, in spring 2004, a Greek Life Housing Exploratory Committee was formed "...to examine the possibilities of future housing for students involved in Greek life organizations [at NJIT]." The membership of the committee was comprised of two members (an active and an alumnus) of each participating Greek organization recognized by NJIT. Representatives of the Dean of Students also served on the committee.

The committee also developed a Greek Housing Survey that was sent to all Greek organizations. The committee also began to collect additional information from other universities including building design, financing, and governance. The critical information gleaned from the sub-committees and the survey was as follows:

1. Design: Greeks wanted to have individual structures which were custom-designed and which they owned
2. Greeks wanted to maintain their autonomy and have the ability to self - govern.
3. Greeks had little to invest, but wanted any new housing to be affordable in order to attract new members

During the summer of 2004, some members of the committee visited George Washington University and the University of Maryland to gather information about their Greek Housing. Several months later, some members of the administration and Greek alum visited the University of Houston's newly constructed "Bayou Oaks" Greek Village. A report of the findings of the site visits was shared in fall 2004 with the Inter-Fraternity and Sorority Council (IFSC) and individual Greek organizations. The idea of a Greek Village at NJIT was discussed and incubated at NJIT over the next year and a half.

By the fall of 2005, broader discussions began about the overall neighborhood which bordered NJIT at Central Avenue and extended to Orange Street. NJIT, concerned that private developers were increasingly expressing interest in the area and would define what it would become, initiated discussions with all stakeholders in the area: The Greeks, The James Street Historical Association, Saint Michaels Hospital and the City of Newark. The purpose of this effort was (and is) to restore and re-vitalize the neighborhood in a way that preserves and builds upon its current character, provides for needed services and amenities and expands options for shopping, dining, and recreation. Such a neighborhood would greatly benefit NJIT; vastly expand housing options for University Heights students, faculty and staff as well as neighborhood residents, and those working in nearby hospitals and businesses.

The Gateway Plan

What emerged in April 2006 was a NJIT proposal for the Gateway Redevelopment Plan, a part of which incorporated the concept of a much-discussed NJIT Greek Village, to be located on the current NJIT lot 16, bordered by Colton Street, Warren Street and Raymond Boulevard. It was and is important to note that while Gateway and the Greek Village had a connection, neither effort was, or is, solely dependant on the other to come to fruition.

Over many months, meetings and discussions occurred with members of the Greek community about the Greek Village concept. From those discussions it became clear that too much was unknown. It was necessary, before anyone could make a decision about being part of the village, to have a

detailed plan. In order to develop such a plan, a working group of stakeholders was needed.

The Greek Village Task Force

The Greek Village Task Force, the working group was formally established in the spring of 2008. The Task Force was comprised of seven Greek Alumni, four undergraduate Greeks, the President of the Student Senate, the Dean of Students, the Greek Life Advisor, and chaired the Vice President of Academic and Student Services. The group began by crafting a statement of commitment to Greek Life at NJIT. It reads:

"We believe that there is value in a Greek experience which supports the academic mission of the university, promotes character in individuals, facilitates lifelong friendships, encourages commitment to true community and demonstrates meaningful, outwardly directed generosity through service to others. "

In addition to a commitment to the value of Greek Life at NJIT, the Task Force formally established their goals for the Greek Village. They stated:

"The Greek Village Project will enhance NJIT's fraternity and sorority chapters by :

- *Significantly improving housing for members.*
- *Strengthening current active members relationships with alumni/ae*
- *Enhancing the university's relationship with Greek Life*
- *Ensuring a long term future for our Greek organizations"*

Dealing with the Issues

The major issue areas identified by the Taskforce were:

1. Governance of the Village
2. Housing Design
3. Financing
4. Fundraising

In the meetings it became clear that each of these areas were to some measure interrelated. You could not have a financial plan, for example, without some concept of design and cost of construction. You could not have a clear understanding of governance unless there was an understood relationship of university to developer and developer to Greeks—and that, as well, would have

a relationship to financing. The Task Force will stipulate the “must haves” and the preferences, but in the end some preferences may be compromised by situational necessity.

Findings

Early on the issues of ownership and governance were discussed. It was clearly established that as much as possible the university had no interest in changing the governing relationship it currently has with the privately-owned Greek houses. The most desired state would be to have the developer as the property manager and the university as the lessee to the developer, making NJIT a “third party.”

It was also established that the university legally cannot sell state land but can lease it. Therefore, it was understood that in order for a Greek Village to exist, Greek houses would be constructed and owned by the organizations but sit on land leased, either directly or indirectly from the university. The desired lease term would be 99 years, with many safeguards in place that protect the owners of the structures. A sample Ground Lease, based on the lease in use by the University of New Mexico’s Greek Village, contained provisions that were a good starting point for lengthy discussion and resulted in the understanding that a ground lease protecting the interests of all parties involved was feasible.

Another milestone reached by the taskforce was the realization that a viable financial model is possible for the Greek Village, allowing for leeway in construction costs, income and realistic goals for fund-raising. After presentations from potential developers (Jones Lang LaSalle and the Emperor Group), the task force was satisfied that the project is financially “doable” for most of the potential participants—current property owners and renters-- provided that the developer is capable of building a financial plan that works for each Greek organization.

In its commitment to helping Greek organizations find support, NJIT’s Vice President for Advancement presented fund-raising strategies for Greek organizations as well as offering the resources of the NJIT Advancement operation to guide each Greek organization in its fund-raising efforts. The Task Force recognizes that fund-raising activities and perhaps National Greek organization support are essential to participation in the Greek Village, and that, in addition to currently recognized NJIT Greek organizations, national organizations not currently affiliated with NJIT may be recruited to participate, a couple of which have indicated interest.

Ideas springing from the site visits in Texas and Washington D.C., projects presented by potential developers, as well as concepts from the College of Architecture and Design guided the Task Force to identify many desired design

elements for Greek housing. There was also a desire for “green design” and perhaps an on-going showcase for sustainable and “smart” features within individual houses. Not necessarily in order of importance, design preferences include:

1. Distinctive exterior and interior design for each organization
2. Greek letters prominently displayed
3. Accommodations generally superior to the residence halls
4. Common chapter rooms
5. Adequate kitchens and dining space
6. Study areas
7. Separate entrances
8. Private outdoor space
9. Adequate parking for service and residents
10. “Green and smart design elements

Making Progress

As the Task Force made significant progress, there was parallel progress with the Gateway Plan. These included the city designating NJIT as Re-Developer for the Gateway and the naming of Jones-Lang LaSalle (JLL) as Master Developer for the Gateway project.

The first project announced within Gateway is to construct a parking deck on current Saint Michael’s surface parking along MLK Jr. Blvd., which would remove a major obstacle for economic development in the neighborhood and easily substitute for the Lot 16 spaces lost to the Greek Village. This development eliminates a significant obstacle to Greek Village development. While many issues remain, there is a sense of confidence that the Greeks Village Task Force, the individual “letter of intent” Greek organizations, the University, JLL and to be selected develop(s) have the tools to begin to develop both a detailed master plan for the village and the individual “strategic plan” with the Greek houses.

The results of the work of the Task Force have convinced six Greek organizations to submit a non-binding “letter of intent” to participate in the Village. It is expected that additional organizations will “sign on” as the work progresses.

Those organizations who have signed “Letters of Intent” agreed to form a “Greek Housing Corporation” or GHC, with the intent of establishing what will become the operational governing board of the village. As potential owners sign on, they will be invited to join the GHC.

The Greek Village Task Force has come a long way. The next phase of operation will be to identify and work with a developer to make real the vision of the Greek Village. Jones Lang LaSalle has formed MEIP (Merchant Equity Institutional Partners) to develop the Greek Village and the additional housing on lot 16. MEIP is

preparing an RFQ to solicit prospective developers for the Village and housing. The Task Force identified RFQ specifications for the RFQ which will be incorporated. Chief among these is experience with Greeks, Greek Village development and experience in the design, construction and financing of Greek housing projects.

Thanks to the work done and the work ahead, the vision of Greek Life as defined by the Task Force can be realized.

Additional Resources

For the most up to date information regarding the Greek Village it is encouraged for those interested to visit the website that is maintained by the Office of Greek Life. The website address is: <http://greekvillage.njit.edu/>

Task Force Membership

The following list is the members that comprise the NJIT Greek Village Taskforce and their respective affiliations:

John McCann (Alumnus and Sigma Pi)
Jim Krucher (Alumnus and Pi Kappa Phi)
Rocky Hazelman (Alumnus and Tau Epsilon Phi)
Grace Bodgan (Alumnus and Alpha Sigma Tau)
Saman Mazahreh (Alumnus and Kappa Xi Kappa)
Steve Drizing (Alumnus and Tau Kappa Epsilon)
Tom Reynolds (Alumnus and Alpha Sigma Phi)
Ray Vaccari (Alumnus of Tau Delta Phi)
Baker Assaf (Alumnus and Former President of Student Senate)
Jack Gentul (Dean of Students)
Joel Bloom (Vice President for Academic and Student Services)
Thea Schoenberg (Assistant Director for Greek Life and Wellness)
Nick Caravella (President of IFSC 2009-2010)

Task Force Resources

The following list reflects individuals that have been consulted with in regards to the NJIT Greek Village:

Henry Mauermeyer, Senior VP Administration and Treasurer
Charles Dees, VP of Advancement
Humberto Baquerizo, Former Greek Advisor
Joe Keber, Representative of Tau Delta Phi
Andy Litecky, Representative of Tau Kappa Epsilon
Jones Lang LaSalle
Emperor Group

Signature Page

The following signatures of the NJIT Greek Village Taskforce represent the support and endorsement of the information reflected within this report:

John J. McCann 04-19-10
John McCann (Alumnus and Sigma Pi) **Date**

Jim Krucher 4/19/2010
Jim Krucher (Alumnus and Pi Kappa Phi) **Date**

Rocky Hazelman 4/19/2010
Rocky Hazelman (Alumnus and Tau Epsilon Phi) **Date**

Grace Bodgan 4/20/2010
Grace Bodgan (Alumnus and Alpha Sigma Tau) **Date**

Saman Mazahreh 19 APR 2010
Saman Mazahreh (Alumnus and Kappa Xi Kappa) **Date**

Steve Drizing 4/19/10
Steve Drizing (Alumnus and Tau Kappa Epsilon) **Date**

Tom Reynolds APRIL 19, 2010
Tom Reynolds (Alumnus and Alpha Sigma Phi) **Date**

Baker Assaf 4/19/10
Baker Assaf (Alumnus and Former President of Student Senate) **Date**

Jack Gentul 4/19/10
Jack Gentul (Dean of Students) **Date**

Joel Bloom 4/19/10
Joel Bloom (Vice President for Academic and Student Services) **Date**

Thea Schoenberg 4/14/10
Thea Schoenberg (Assistant Director for Greek Life and Wellness) **Date**

Nick Caravella 4/7/10
Nick Caravella (President of IFSC) **Date**

Ray Vaccari 4/19/10
Ray Vaccari (Alumnus of Tau Delta Phi) **Date**