

PLANNING ISSUES & MISSIONS

Studies such as this rely on data, believable statistical data. If not available in the form needed at the site of study, it must be generated by the Planner. This time, here, most such information was available.

Early attention of the Planner was dedicated to a study of ACADEMIC issues trending over time; i.e. mission statements, institutional and program enrollments, degree offerings, credit-hour production, upper and lower division disparity, faculty and staff counts, demographics, recruitment, retention, program turf, etc...and the impact of all that on the ten year future addressed by this Plan.

Similar study and consideration was given existing STUDENT HOUSING...i.e. occupancy, adequacy, age and condition, location, maintenance costs, recruitment-retention, and how these issues might influence plans for a predictable future.

STUDENT LIFE issues were also a continuing focus for the Planner throughout the study. Did the student feel good about being at SHSU? What did the student like most about the campus? Will they encourage friends to come? What do they dislike most on a scale of ten?

TRAFFIC AND PARKING problems at SHSU are Twenty First Century issues in an early Twentieth Century World. CAMPUS EDGES, intersections and access corridors are hardly different from what they were fifty to seventy-five years ago. In this dilemma, a call to all constituencies of the University must go out...begging help. The Texas Department of Transportation, the City of Huntsville, Utility Providers and others perhaps must move against these issues **with** the University. It could reasonably be argued these are their responsibilities.

CAMPUS & COMMUNITY interface, relations and synergy are, or should be, topical concerns in any consideration of one or the other...as we look to the future. Dependence of one on the other is not an issue; coupling of assets, talents, and synergies are, however, and always will be.

HABITAT, that quality, texture, form and attitude of space-in-space, having obvious and defined boundaries, is an aesthetic issue caught up in all the others. Elsewhere, the report will speak of Habitat as an inherent quality found in functional, livable places where scholars might find inspiration as well as shelter and safety. Aesthetic values? Yes!

And, as one might wonder, how did these issues and understandings influence the Planner as he went from discovery to decision phases of his work? This paper goes to the heart of that question and others, in the following discussions.

ACADEMIC: It is undoubtedly true a number of Programs need more and/or better space. Examples: the Sciences, Dance, COBA, Education, Library, and CJC. Other needs as evident are more problematic than critical, and must wait for enabling authority and other project actions to get out of the way. Examples might include Agriculture, and Renovation of existing COBA space which must await completion of the new COBA addition. Also, Renovation of Farrington must await completion of its new Tower Addition...if the P.1-B Option is built. Various north campus project actions must await demolition of existing campus housing now in the way of such.

Justifications, good reasons to build new space are not always obvious. Other programs can justifiably demonstrate such needs. Some it can be argued are not critical and urgent needs.

The Planner has responded to all stated needs for space by recommending project

actions, with tongue in cheek in certain instances. Justifications are often obscure, or contradicted by trending data. Project justification and actions should be reconciled at the time Authority is granted for each...**again,then!**

Conversations re TECHNOLOGY did not always reconcile with Program Issues. Technology as a field of study is quite fragmented on campus. This was a surprise for the Planner, who still wonders why Technology is not a currently successful, cohesive and interactive field of study with several degree options. No facilities for technology are proposed by **Y2K+10**. All such matters were discussed, variously, but no definitive facility-related requests for technology were presented to the Planner.

The Planner believes various Colleges and program people feel threatened by any focus on technology as a multi-discipline field of study. Something of a Turf Tug will have to be resolved, administratively, before technology can become what it might on the SHSU Campus. Until then, this is not an architectural or planning concern.

Administrative and support services maintaining and operating academic facility assets are doing a very good job...with what they have to work with. All buildings where instruction occurs are suitable for such use. Some have problems, all likely have such, but the Physical Plant team is aware and actively engaging those issues. The Planner sees no need to get in their way or otherwise become involved in those matters.

STUDENT HOUSING: More explainable are project actions driven by critical and urgent needs for better Student Housing. These concerns have history. The CMP-2000 called out the need for new dorms in 1982 but nothing happened. The updated CMP ten years later restated such needs, but nothing has happened since. “Why” is not important. What is important, now, is

moving through excuses and helping the right thing happen **soon**. What must not be doubted again is that new dorms are 20 years late coming and critical to various interests of the University **now!**

This is a big deal! It will take time and a lot of money to resolve this gap in university assets and do what needs to be done, **now!** No one doubts cost was the primary obstacle standing in the way of these project actions years ago, but it does not matter. Hindsight is good, but it was not the right thing to do then and it will not be the right thing to do today, **again!**

In the Fall of 2000, fifty-two separate structures were student housing assets in the SHSU inventory. Each was and is a point of service to be operated and maintained, repaired and expensed. All are free of debt, but sink-holes for rental revenue. Almost as much is being spent annually to maintain and repair old and inappropriate housing as would be needed to service debt assumed to build new and appropriate facilities.

Conditions in and around existing dorms are not good. Reportedly, the inferior nature of student housing at SHSU is even now a major problem opined in recruitment and retention discussions.

Some feel the University should stand aside, get out of the dormitory business, and let private sector providers deal with the problem. The Planner thinks this can be a ‘qualified’ good idea...**but only to the extent the University competes and sets the standard by which students can judge competitive quality and space**. Students should not be exposed to a private-sector **franchise** on student housing. The Planner cannot endorse such thinking.

In 1980, roughly one third of the students lived in University Housing; 3,500 more or less. Now, in 2001, less than 20 percent live in such. Are they avoiding the quality of University Housing? Probably!

White Hall conversion and improvements completed in 2000 seem to endorse convenience and other quality-of-life issues students seek. Booked full with a waiting list before opening in the Fall of 2000, it is true White Hall is on the right track. It is better than other options. Rents are less per square foot, and it provides more and better space than any other dorm on campus. No wonder students like it?

Students want better housing! They want the convenience of near-campus locations where they do not have to struggle with traffic and compete for parking. Like other 21st Century people, they want convenience. This is not something the University pays for, it is not an expense to the State of Texas. Even maintenance and utility costs are borne by students. Land values and certain administrative expense are the only contribution the State or University might make here...and that is the way it should be. The students are customers. So, what to do?

The Planner concludes saying **build new and quality housing, with food service and structured parking for 600 students** and see what happens. If successful, build another complex like it. If not, what is lost?

STUDENT LIFE: Over the period of a full year, the Planner had hundreds of conversations with students. Typically, questions and answers came to focus on opinions that related the student to the campus, its assets, people, services...and their sense of student life in general. Talk of academic issues surfaced at times. The Planner was more interested in other matters, however, such as what is wrong and right, what can or should be done to make things better?

Students generally and unequivocally admire and respect the campus core as an attractive place, one they enjoy. Few expressed any disagreeable opinions re academic facilities they go to for instruction.

They seem comfortable with the people factors here; i.e. student groups, faculty, and service providers they are in contact with. Student morale, if we should call it that, is high, and pride in their university is real. No doubt!

Student interest in competitive sports is noticeable but spotty. None question the validity or presence of such, and all are obviously loyal and true **BEARKAT** fans. Many expressed interest in Recreational Sports facilities, especially indoor exercising assets available there after hours. Wishful thinking and talk of a new indoor pool (Natatorium) surfaced frequently as well.

Discussions relating to student housing and food service were entirely different. Those living on campus were typically negative in their opinions. Others who had lived on campus and moved away said the inconvenience is more than offset by quality of life advantages elsewhere. Some required to live on campus by University Policy were less than pleased about it. Others enjoying the convenience campus-life provides complained of the facilities and food...then moved out in subsequent years. Students, faculty, staff and others (even one Regent) cited examples where parents refused to have their children live in the dorms.

COMMUNITY-RELATIONS: Attention to facts help us understand the dimensions of this issue and discussions that follow:

The 12th Day Fall 2000 enrollment of the University was 12,355. Students living on campus in dormitories etc. at that time totaled 2,555. Other students living off campus, in or near the City of Huntsville and elsewhere, totaled 9,800. Available campus parking spaces total 5,789.

Interested in how students on campus or within the City of Huntsville feel about the assets of the Community, the Planner asked a lot of related questions. Afterward, the Planner concluded student/community attitude is at best, perhaps, one of **benign**

ambivalence. Another way to say it might be that students do not seem very aware of or dependent on assets and resources of Huntsville. Shopping? Yes, some that is; fast food places, grocers, cleaners, and other providers especially. Entertainment? What entertainment, they ask in response? Cultural events? Where, besides on campus, they ask? In the end, it seems gas enough in the tank to get to Conroe and the Woodlands, or to North Houston, might be the primary dependence on the community otherwise. Too bad, if true!

That said, students living on campus rely very much on assets and resources provided by the University for fellowship, recreation, entertainment etc. Few students feel deprived. Other providers including the City of Huntsville, would be welcome as University partners or sole providers of more and better social and cultural assets. It is unlikely the University can do more than it is doing, alone.

Students living off-campus in or near Huntsville, and other commuters living elsewhere, with one exception, feel much the same as on-campus dwellers do about most community-relations. They do not expect as much of their University or the Community, but their concepts of convenience and frustrations related to traffic and parking seem quite significant.

Commuter students, they in reality being all who do not live in university housing, come and go with little on their minds but what they need and find on campus. They enjoy the Student Center, the Recreational Sports facility, Computer Labs and other quiet places to pass time between classes. Living their day out of an automobile, so to speak, little things become big problems; like arriving late, finding a place to park, carrying a day's supply of books etc around, or going back and forth to the car for things they forget. The Planner is convinced these students will pay for the convenience of

assured and closer parking. Some even say they pay more in fines than parking fees would be.

Recommendations of the **Advisory Task Force for Campus Planning** include suggestions for a Center for Performing Arts and Faculty Center, on or adjacent to the campus. They also encourage on-campus commercial ventures including a bookstore, theatre, coffee shop, restaurant, small shops etc...with integrated parking.

The Planner agrees these are good ideas, of course, but is conceptually stymied as to where that kind of development money would come from, where such assets would fit in current land use patterns and, if or not private sector ventures could be permitted on campus? Like all good ideas, this one needs study...very careful study.

TRAFFIC AND PARKING: Much has been said or implied above, about this subject. More must be said:

Unhappy people talking about both these issues are not all students, but students do matter, most perhaps. They are paying customers of the University. Administrators look after themselves in privilege. Faculty are less privileged but more indulged; they do have allocated space. Students have little more than a hunting license, good beyond the range of convenience only.

Defensive response the Planner hears most often, from non-students, is that there is plenty of parking space but "**they**" do not want to walk far; "**they**" want it front-row. Well, so what is different about that? We all have such feelings.

Most people on any campus know these are endemic issues within university life, everywhere. Sam Houston State University has it pretty good, the Planner feels.

More importantly, the Planner feels other considerations should influence and shape action plans that might reconcile these and

other concerns, **and** make more people happy.

Access to the campus and circulation at the campus edges frustrate commuters, even as much as finding a parking spot perhaps. In this paradigm, reflection comes to focus on certain problems; access corridors are not adequate for heavy traffic-counts involved, intersections are unsuitably designed and controlled, sidewalks, if any, and pedestrian crossings are quite unsafe and our Campus Edges are ugly!

A principal virtue of the Sam Houston campus is its “contained” nature. So much is so convenient, once you get there. It has that potential for extraordinary excellence as habitat few universities ever realize. At all costs, this potential should be promoted and preserved.

The Planner feels automobiles are alien intruders in that potentiality; parking spaces above ground in the core area also. Streets, too, except as necessary for emergency and services.

Parking is a very contemporary dilemma pushing other things around in our culture today. Where people go, so do cars. If you want to do business with people you must expect to take care of their cars...or provide other acceptable transportation options.

Like commercial ventures, it is likely universities will experience rewards or consequences of such expectations, well or poorly addressed and managed, one way or another; recruitment and retention no doubt.

From the beginning of his studies here, the Planner has believed in and promoted a contained campus concept, one dedicating the campus core to academic activities. All else, he feels, should be outside well defined campus edge boundaries served by adequate and attractive access corridors. This study reaffirms that philosophy and policy.

In that strategy, the Planner wants a ring of convenience for student housing and parking to have priority on the sideline.

From that ring to any student destination, or faculty site, no more than a ten minute walk is involved. That walk would or should be obstacle free, for the most part, enabled by bridged crossings, and lifts or elevators. Another dilemma forming in development of the SHSU campus has to do with that ratio of pervious to impervious cover in a contained environment. Parking lots are not friends of virtue in such concerns. Balance is a key to successful development in zones of density and containment. Parking lots in the campus core area are not appropriate.

A medley of opportunities and proposed actions engage virtually all concerns relating to commuters and automobiles. First, the Planner proposes redevelopment of 20th and 17th streets & University Drive, new and adjacent housing and auxiliary facilities, structured parking below, at and above grade, celebrated gateways giving the campus needed identity, and various underground parking where future academic buildings will be constructed.

More importantly, the Planner proposes reserved, structured parking for students living on campus in new housing proposed. If we are now creatures of convenience to the extent we expect such indulgences, these proposed actions should satisfy any who are willing to pay for it. There are no free-lunch deals here however.

Here again, it will be very necessary for the University to have the cooperation and participation of the City of Huntsville, the Texas Department of Transportation and the several Utility Companies with buried or overhead services there.

CAMPUS EDGES: The Planner likes to think of Campus Edges as an enclosing and defining but welcoming and celebrated arrival zone; one where students, parents and friends, faculty, staff and the general public know very well where they are...and are excited about it.

Edges define, divide, zone and defend space, missions and activities in particular ways. They proclaim rights of ownership and responsibility. Edges explain mass in space, even zones of safety and danger, even conceptual images perhaps.

Growth, evolution and stress have come to our campus edges at SHSU. Parked and speeding autos, blaring horns, dangerous street crossings, brutalized terrain, scalped landscapes, encroaching walls and structures and a long list of other negative forces have wounded hopes for exciting discovery and approach, arrivals and penetration of today's campus. Excepting only a few locations, it is not convenient or fun to come onto the campus today...even if you know where you are going.

Over time, being adaptable creatures, we grow into cultural frames of opinion that respect beauty, stewardship, efficacy, responsibility etc., or we stagnate in this paradigm, eventually, and become part of the problem, part of what we experience. Quite probably, sooner or later, we get friendly with compromised values and fly lower and smaller flags in all we think and do. We must not allow that to happen; we must turn these problems around.

Believing 20th Street, 17th Street, Avenue H and Sam Houston Avenues should be the edges of our celebrated arrival zone at SHSU, the Planner proposes ambitious plans for redevelopment of all but Avenue H. He proposes a joint venture where SHSU, the City of Huntsville, the Texas Department of Transportation and Utility Companies share this task in a commitment to excellence. In line with real responsibility, the Planner proposes the University provide right-of-way, and expense hardscape and landscape development of the edges outside curb lines; the City of Huntsville expense streetscape and municipal utility issues; the DOT plan, expense and execute intersecting sites at 20th and 17th streets...and explore, execute,

expense the widening of Sam Houston Avenue from 15th to 22nd streets. Other Utility providers with buried or overhead service should participate in planning, expensing and executing redevelopment (**underground**) of all such service.

Engaging these issues will bring us into contact with considerations of directive campus graphics, pedestrian pathways and safety, handicap access, lighting, planting, watering and other energy concerns. The university should direct and oversee the planning and execution of each such obligation.

HABITAT: The Planner has no interest in esoteric arguments that claim special power resides in sophisticated concepts of space or elegant environments. He respects such and is personally attracted to excellence, and to quality "anythings", but this report is about a place of Higher Education, work, study, and **inspired scholarship**. Those qualitative forces have many origins and any influence environment might have on the learning process is questionable. All the Planner hopes for is environment that sustains, promotes and advances concepts of excellence, opportunity and scholarship.

More to the point, the Planner suggests the SHSU campus is at a turning point, one where much is right, little is wrong, and anything is possible if we clean up our own mess and move on with a clear sense of direction...and dedication.

COMMITTMENT: Pilot error, more than anything else, explains most disappointment in the outcome of master plans. Somewhere along the way many things can happen, and do. The best hope for a successful ending is commitment to the vision, confidence in the advocacy and authoritative management. Issues studied and reported are worthy of such. The ultimate outcome can be equally worthy of the effort