

Dear Commissioners,

March 2021

The University of Florida is trying to demolish our homes, and we need your help.

On behalf of the UF Mayors' Council, the Graduate Student Council, and Graduate Assistants United, we are reaching out to you to ask for your support in our efforts to protect two critically important and affordable graduate/family housing villages at the University of Florida: **Maguire Village and University Village South (UVS)**. We ask that you do everything in your power, including **not signing on to the newly drafted Campus Development Agreement**, to pressure UF to remove that provision from their proposed Campus Master Plan (CMP).

In case you are not familiar with the area, UVS and Maguire Villages on UF's campus along SW 34<sup>th</sup> St. are the best places for graduate students to live in Gainesville, being filled with historic trees, walkable courtyards, and ample amenities. They have been home to many exemplary individuals, all of whom succeeded in no small part thanks to the peace of mind these complexes provided. These Villages comprise 348 solid brick apartments on 27 acres built less than 50 years ago, and were renovated just recently. An estimated 70% or more of the residents are international/minority students from a wide-variety of countries, many of whom have families or small children. They form a welcoming, safe, and peaceful community that is unique in its harmony and worthy of saving.

And yet, UF is proposing (in their CMP) for the leveling of the entire area, buildings, playgrounds, trees, and all, to make room for an unneeded and redundant "recreation" field. It truly is a tragedy.

Destroying hundreds of affordable apartments without any investment in replacement is an offense to the low-income graduate students who need these places to live, not to mention the history that will be lost.

As you know, Gainesville has some of the highest renter cost burdens in Florida. According to the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies in 2018, cost-burdened renters (those paying at least 30% of their income to rent) represent 58% of Gainesville renters. Severely cost-burdened renters, who pay 50% of their income or more, make up 37% of renters. By demolishing Maguire Village and UVS, hundreds of graduate students and their families will seek new housing on the already stressed housing market in Gainesville, and we don't think that is something you or anyone would want.

Despite graduate students' contributions to the University which helped bring in a record \$901 million in research funding, the median UF graduate assistant stipend as of Fall 2020 was \$22,414. We simply can't afford to move into luxury apartments off-campus. But more than that, these Villages have a history and worth of their own, and it would be unjust to destroy them.

UF is planning to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on new undergraduate housing as part of their CMP proposal, but all they plan to give their graduate students is an eviction notice and remove nearly 40% of the places they can live on campus.

Please reach out if you can discuss further. We would be honored if you would lend your support to help us protect affordable housing for graduate students at UF. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

- Graduate Student Council, the representative body of UF graduate students
- Graduate Assistants United, the union of graduate students
- Mayors' Council at the University of Florida, an elected body of Student Government