



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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*The University of Virginia Student Council Executive Board  
Tuesday, October 12, 2021*

### **A Statement on Charlottesville's Draft Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map for the 10/12/21 Planning Commission and City Council Joint Public Hearing**

During our time at the University of Virginia, almost all students are guests in the City of Charlottesville, and we are lucky to call Charlottesville "home" for even a short while. Our presence in Charlottesville, however, is complicated and has lasting consequences.

Charlottesville is a community of 47,000 people,<sup>1</sup> and UVA has 27,000 students<sup>2</sup> but only 7,500<sup>3</sup> beds on Grounds, resulting in tens of thousands of student renters needing to find off Grounds housing. This places a significant burden on Charlottesville's housing stock and contributes to displacement of low-income and Black and Brown longtime city residents.

UVa students likely compose the single largest block of tenants in the City of Charlottesville, yet we have been notably silent and absent from city-wide efforts to redress historical housing injustices and prevent future harm. UVa Student Council's Executive Board offers no housing policy expertise, but as representatives of the student body, we wish to make our hopes for the City's Comprehensive Plan clear and thank the Planning Commission for their consideration.

The vast majority of UVa students *are* tenants and have common interests with other renters in Charlottesville. While most UVa student renters enter the Charlottesville housing market with substantial privilege, we also struggle with Charlottesville's high rents – the highest in the state outside of Northern Virginia – and very low rental vacancy rate, which hovers around 2%.<sup>4</sup> These conditions allow coercive landlords and major housing developers to take advantage of students and permanent residents alike. Students know the abusive practices of Charlottesville landlords well and often feel powerless in their own homes.

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<sup>1</sup> [Draft Comprehensive Plan – October 5, 2021](#), p. 14

<sup>2</sup> ["Statistics." UVA Office of Undergraduate Admission](#)

<sup>3</sup> ["Housing Areas as of May 2020." UVA Housing & Residence Life](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Draft Comprehensive Plan – October 5, 2021](#), p. 15



In solidarity with permanent residents of Charlottesville, and on behalf of all students at the University, the Executive Board stands committed to developing affordable housing and lowering rent in Charlottesville; preventing further student encroachment into the Charlottesville community and displacement of sensitive neighborhoods; codifying essential tenants' rights protections; and holding UVa accountable for its impact on the Charlottesville housing market.

***Increase Student Housing Density and Concentration, Lower Market Rent Prices***

The Executive Board endorses the Charlottesville Low-Income Housing Coalition's (CLIHC) three strategic goals: Upzone historically exclusionary neighborhoods near essential resources; incorporate anti-displacement policies in the housing policy specifically to protect historically Black neighborhoods from gentrification; and enact the strongest mandatory inclusionary zoning ordinance in the state.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, after meeting twice with Livable Cville, we endorse their 9/21 Letter to the Planning Commission<sup>6</sup> and suggestions. The Executive Board especially endorses suggestion #4: "Allow up to eight-story height for the JPA student corridor. This will encourage concentration of student housing in this area and will prevent undergraduate student housing from pushing into other neighborhoods surrounding the university, especially sensitive ones."

With these endorsements, the Executive Board at once affirms the need for affordable student housing and emphasizes our strong objection to any student housing developments that could trigger the further displacement of permanent Charlottesville residents.

Turning to the most recent Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map itself, we too want to increase "on Grounds housing and the percentage of students living in Charlottesville neighborhoods that are traditionally student areas."<sup>7</sup> Students do not want to live far from the University. Developments outside of Jefferson Park Avenue, 14th Street, Rugby Road, Wertland Street, etc. are inaccessible, but students often turn to faraway housing options out of financial necessity. The Executive Board sees increasing the density and concentration of housing near the University as a mutually beneficial solution for both permanent Charlottesville residents and student tenants.

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<sup>5</sup> ["Call to Action." Charlottesville Low-Income Housing Coalition](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Livable Cville 9/21 Letter to Planning Commission](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Draft Comprehensive Plan – October 5, 2021](#), p. 103



At the same time, we acknowledge that even the aforementioned “traditionally student areas” are sites of displacement (e.g., Wertland Street). We are also wary of any unintended consequences in increasing the density of student housing near communities most sensitive to displacement pressures (e.g., the 10th and Page neighborhoods)<sup>8</sup> as well as public housing near The Corner. Despite our suggestions, we defer to the preferences of Charlottesville’s most affected and sensitive communities and hope that our suggestions are developed alongside the proposed Equity Analysis tool.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Tenants’ Rights***

Most students at UVa can tell a horror story about their experience as a tenant in Charlottesville. According to a recent request for student input from Student Council, only 43% of UVa student renters are satisfied with their most recent off-Grounds housing experience and only 40% felt that their landlords were accountable and transparent. 55% of student renters reported untimely maintenance support, 44% reported hidden fees and terms in their leases, 35% reported unresponsive landlords, and 31% reported concerns for their safety as a result of poor property management. These figures are alarming, but student testimonials reveal just how disturbing rental conditions in Charlottesville truly are.<sup>10</sup> We encourage you to read through [Appendix A](#) to learn more about the reality behind student renting in Charlottesville.

The Executive Board believes that local landlords’ coercive practices are made possible, in part, by Charlottesville’s low vacancy rates and limited student housing supply and distribution under the status quo; these conditions exacerbate an already unreasonable power imbalance between landlords and student renters. We believe that some of these underlying causes can be partially addressed through land use policies and the Future Land Use Map. Even so, we call on the City to follow through on its adoption of tenants’ rights under the Affordable Housing Plan.<sup>11</sup>

The Affordable Housing Plan outlines a few essential tenants’ rights (e.g., right to counsel, advocating for rent control, enabling tenants’ rights to organize), which we endorse wholeheartedly. With student experiences and concerns in mind, we also suggest provisions that mirror Buffalo’s proposed “Tenant’s Bill of Rights,”<sup>12</sup> especially the Right to Timely Repairs, Right to Know Who Owns the Building, and support for a public rent fund. We understand that

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<sup>8</sup> [Draft Comprehensive Plan – October 5, 2021](#), p. 25

<sup>9</sup> [Draft Comprehensive Plan – October 5, 2021](#), p. 34

<sup>10</sup> [Appendix A](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Charlottesville Affordable Housing Plan – March 2021](#), p. 97

<sup>12</sup> ["Buffalo Tenant's Bill of Rights." People United for Sustainable Housing](#)



Virginia state law limits the City's ability to secure these rights but suggest that the City begin by staffing employees on the project.

### ***Holding UVa Accountable***

The Student Council Executive Board acknowledges that the University is a powerful and wealthy anchor institution in Charlottesville and has a substantial role to play in creating a more equitable housing market for both students and permanent residents. We offer our thoughts on the Comprehensive Plan while also committing to keep our side of the street clean. We will do everything in our power to ensure that UVa makes good on its promise to be a "good neighbor."<sup>13</sup>

The Charlottesville Low-Income Housing Coalition's 2020 report, "The Impact of Racism on Affordable Housing in Charlottesville," puts it best: "As the largest employer in central Virginia and with holdings of more than \$1 billion in property in the City of Charlottesville alone, the University of Virginia is a major force in local housing trends. As a non-profit institution, UVA does not pay taxes on any of its real estate holdings. Though contributing little to affordable housing funds and other City money, UVA enjoys many benefits provided by the surrounding community, often citing Charlottesville's amenities in its promotional materials and in recruiting documents for faculty and staff. On a more mundane level, the University depends upon infrastructure maintenance, fire and police services, and sewers, among other services, funded by the City's taxpayers."<sup>14</sup>

The Executive Board endorses CLIHC's suggestion that UVa join "its peers such as Brown, Harvard, Boston College, Carnegie Mellon, and the University of Pittsburgh in implementing a Payment in Lieu of Taxes program, providing financial support to the City for the services it provides." If such an agreement does exist, we ask that it be made publicly available and that the University increase its financial support for the City and contribute regularly to the Charlottesville Albemarle Housing Fund.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, while driving down rental market-rates cannot address many of the historical housing injustices in Charlottesville, more affordable on Grounds housing can relieve some of the pressure on the local low-rent housing market. Student Council will organize and work to

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<sup>13</sup> [A Great and Good University: The 2030 Plan – August 2019](#)

<sup>14</sup> ["The Impact of Racism on Affordable Housing in Charlottesville." Charlottesville Low-Income Housing Coalition – February 2020](#), p. 50

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51



price any future on Grounds developments, especially the proposed 2nd year housing, below current Charlottesville market prices.

The Executive Board is glad that UVA plans to help develop 1,000 to 1,500 affordable housing units in the City and Albemarle County in the next 10 years on land owned by the University or UVA Foundation.<sup>16</sup> We emphasize CLIHC's understanding of affordable housing as "housing for low-wage workers on UVA-owned land near the University or in the urban right where public transportation is accessible."<sup>17</sup> We will also still urge the University to develop additional affordable housing units as the need arises and beyond their present development commitments, especially given the ongoing debate around affordability mandates in General Residential areas of the City.

Finally, while Student Council is a small institution in the context of the City and University, we commit to expanding our UVA Mutual Aid program to support low-wage workers at the University and emergency housing funds in Charlottesville.<sup>18</sup> We write this statement in solidarity with the tenants of Charlottesville and commit to protecting the interests of low-wage workers through direct financial assistance.

### ***Student Organization Co-Signers***

- United Campus Workers Virginia – Uva
- Young Democratic Socialists of America at Uva
- University Democrats
- First-Generation Low-Income Partnership at Uva
- Hoos First Look
- Graduate Professional Council
- First Year Council (Class of 2025)
- Second Year Council (Class of 2024)
- Third Year Council (Class of 2023)
- Fourth Year Trustees (Class of 2022)
- undocUVA
- Minority Rights Coalition
- Black Student Alliance
- Political Latinxs United for Movement and Action in Society
- Cultural Organization for Latin Americans
- Asian Leaders Council
- Asian Student Union
- Central Americans for Empowerment at Uva
- Students for Equity and Reform in Virginia

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<sup>16</sup> ["UVA looking to supply land for affordable housing." \*The Daily Progress\* – April 2021](#)

<sup>17</sup> ["The Impact of Racism on Affordable Housing in Charlottesville." \*Charlottesville Low-Income Housing Coalition\* – February 2020, p. 51](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Resources for Housing Needs in the Charlottesville/Region Ten Area. Legal Aid Justice Center](#)



### ***Acknowledgements***

Many thanks to Matthew Gillikin and Livable Cville, Charlottesville Democratic Socialists of America, and The Equity Center for their input on this statement.

Thank you to Planning Commission Chair Lyle Solla-Yates and Charlottesville Neighborhood Development Services Director James Freas for their time and meeting with us to discuss the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map.

We furthermore wish to thank the Charlottesville Low-Income Housing Coalition, Livable Cville, and Charlottesville Democratic Socialists of America for their tireless efforts and leadership in creating a more equitable housing market and experience in Charlottesville.

### ***Additional Reading and Resources for Interested Students***

#### ***Charlottesville Planning Commission***

- [Charlottesville Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map Drafts – 10/5/21](#)
- [Joint Planning Commission/Council Hearing: Charlottesville Comprehensive Plan Update, Agenda and Slide Deck – 10/12/21](#)

#### ***Livable Cville***

- [9/21 Letter to the Planning Commission](#)
- [Future Land Use Map \(FLUM\) FAQ](#)

#### ***Charlottesville Low-Income Housing Coalition***

- [The Impact of Racism on Affordable Housing in Charlottesville – February 2020](#)
- [Why Building More Market-Rate Housing Will Not Solve Charlottesville's Housing Crisis – April 2021](#)

#### ***Charlottesville Democratic Socialists of America***

- [Housing Justice Online Resources](#)
- [Charlottesville City Council Elections 2021: Voter Guide](#)



## ***Appendix A: Sample UVA Off-Grounds Housing Experiences Testimonials***

### **Comment 1 – Cabell Jones**

I found a “deal” at Woodrow apartments. They told me that tours were unavailable thanks to COVID. As someone who comes from a family of hands-on landlords and real estate agents, I understand the maintenance that goes into a house, the difficulties one can face, and the value of a unit. However, they are letting this place rot beneath their fingertips and, because the walls are sturdy, don’t seem to give two damns if I’m breathing in mold.

The bathroom baseboard is visibly rotting, barely covered up by tons of poorly-applied caulk in parts. The shower has holes and cracks in it — and they have seen these before; I can see that maintenance has caulked over the reopening cracks before and ignored them — and the water in the shower head barely comes out half of the time. Black mildew (or mold? I need to do a test) forms in the sink every so often, and the shower floor is unstable. I know what moisture can do to a house, and with holes, mildew, and rot like that, the wood behind it must also be rotting. Mold could also be an issue, yet they don’t seem to care because the floor is “lifted over a slab” so “structural issues won’t be a problem”.

More than that, an entire room that was listed as a “closet” on my floor plan is actually a boiler room accessible by the entire house. I am paying over a thousand a month for this place, and a 13 x 6ft area of my house is unusable. I asked for a rent deduction and my property manager promised to talk to his manager about it, and then promptly switched jobs without telling me. Response has been slow to any issues. Cockroaches, millipedes, centipedes, crickets, flies, and spiders infest the place. I find them dead daily. I’m a very clean person, but I just can’t sweep them all up, there’s so many. I asked for pest control, but despite me mentioning visible gaps and significant entry points, they only sent someone to spray the baseboards. He spent 2 minutes on the whole place and only sprayed any exposed baseboards, neglecting the rest.

The location is good, but it’s no excuse for this clear negligence, but this seems to be considered normal here. No one in MSC bats an eye at this.

Is this student housing? How did they walk through this and approve this place? Why are the standards so low for students? Why are students treated as subhuman sometimes? I am not a partier, I am not irresponsible, and I meet none of the stereotypes that landlords seem to have. Yet they don’t give two damns about it, and because of it, I have to grin and bear it for my education.



I considered breaking my lease, but there are no other affordable options (if this can even count as affordable) and thanks to certain mental health issues, I need to live alone. Solo dorm housing is my only other option, but it's difficult to obtain. Last year, I had secured a spot in a solo room on a hall-style setup, but was suddenly switched into a suite setup in Bond 2 weeks before the start of school when they converted my room into quarantine housing. I soldiered on best I could, but eventually had a complete breakdown. I had to return home and drop the semester. So, this is my only option, and I worry that it will impede my education.

Thank you for your time; I hope this was on-topic. I just want people like us to be heard. I don't know what the fix is in the Charlottesville community, but I trust you will find one.





## **Comment 2 – Heather Raimer**

My name is Heather Raimer, I am a 5th year PhD Candidate in the School of Medicine. I am now starting my fourth year living in an apartment managed by MSC UVA.

Some things to note are that these apartments managed by MSC are probably some of the most convenient apartments on major bus lines and very near grounds by walking, and MSC knows this.

Therefore, even though my lease for 2021/2022 just started in June I received an email this week from MSC asking about renewing my lease for 2022/2023 (and everyone living in MSC properties, most leases start some time in the summer, all just got these emails). This is a problem first because people who may be new to leasing with them wouldn't know if they wanted to renew so early. But more importantly they set this early lease renewal time and if you don't renew by their early deadline then they are at liberty to have your apartment listed and can start showing your apartment, all while you are likely only a couple months into a 12 month lease.

Additionally, because they know their leases are highly sought after, they tend to raise their base rent every year, like this renewal offer lists a new base rent for the next lease at \$50/mo more than our lease this year. And when I went back to look, my first lease that started 4 years ago was \$150/mo less than this new starting base rent.

Now I do understand some changes but for perspective my program in my whole time here has increase our stipend only one major time and was \$30,000/year (before taxes) and now is at \$32,500/year (before taxes) which amounts to just over \$200/mo increase (again before taxes).

So in the time I have been here the raise we got in stipend has almost now exactly matched what the increase in rent has done. Now luckily I live with my partner and split this cost, but it's more the principle that MSC pressures you into signing new leases very early in your current lease timeline and always bumps your base rent. It's either sign to renew or deal with fairly constant tours of your apartment for the duration of your lease.



### **Comment 3 – Anna Baglione**

We lived in a duplex that was owned by a private landlord but rented out through Management Services Corporation (MSC). We always felt safe in our housing, and things were mostly good. However, in the span of our time living with them the landlord pulled a bait and switch on the rent, and MSC didn't do anything about it. In line with Charlottesville rent hikes, our rent increased an obscene amount - 16% (\$200 / month) after the first year, and a proposed 7% (\$100 / month) after the second year (we chose not to renew our lease). These rent hikes were largely due to the landlord conducting unnecessary renovations (e.g. putting in quartz countertops in the kitchen, which grad students don't need). Ironically, at one point we had mice, which made the brand new kitchen unusable and disgusting (there was mouse poop and urine everywhere, behind appliances, in the sink, and under the washer and dryer).

To their credit, MSC always handled things in a timely manner, including the mice. But we felt misled and jilted as renters, and unable to find more affordable options when we looked. MSC in particular has monopolized the market. When we decided to move due to the price hikes, we went to view other properties only to find them owned by MSC, and similarly overpriced for shoddy renovations. I also know of some friends whose complex all the way in Lynchburg was taken over by MSC - sure enough, prices went up and utilities were suddenly no longer included in rent.

If you'd like further details, I left a review on Google, and I'm sure my husband would be willing to speak about our experience. If there is anything we can do to help push housing reform for students (e.g., sending stories to state representatives), we'd be happy to help as much as we're able.



#### **Comment 4 – Akhil Shekar**

My name is Akhil Shekar and I am a graduate student in E-School. I wanted to share with you some of the horrible aspects of Off Grounds Housing with you in hopes of obtaining better terms for UVA students who stay in these facilities.

For a brief bit of background, I am an international student and I joined UVA in 2020 spring semester. I happen to pursue my PhD in Computer Architecture at E-School.

When I arrived in Spring 2020, some of my lab mates were staying at a property called “Cavalier Crossing, 100 Wahoo Way, Charlottesville - 22903” and they referred me to it. Promptly I had signed the leasing agreement for the same. I wanted to however list out some of the situations which I felt were very unjust upon the residents living there. As this property was occupied by many UVA students, I was of the opinion we need to address some of the serious issues affecting the student population and lobby for better terms.

1. My friend (let's call him Mr. X) who happened to stay in another apartment at Cavalier Crossing had a very dangerous and mentally disturbed roommate (Let's call him Mr. Y) . This Mr. Y in question was a local resident of Charlottesville and was also suffering from schizophrenia I believe, and he happened to think that my friend wanted to kill him. He brandished guns in the living room space and made threatening remarks. He even called police one day upon my friend Mr. X, thinking he wanted to kill him at night. The police had to arrive and inspect Mr. X's room and seized knives which he was using for cooking. But sadly, Mr. Y passed away by shooting himself and his body was discovered a month later when bad odour started emanating from his room in the same house. Now my friend was an international student who was pursuing his PhD at UVA. He was absolutely terrified of the experience and he was unable to change his room, because Cavalier Crossing demanded \$250 to even consider changing. He was forced to stay with this type of mentally disturbed people and was very afraid of even going into the living room when Mr. Y was around. The Cavalier Crossing authorities should have taken prompt action after these disturbing incidents but they never took.
2. Another friend at the same property had another disturbing roommate (who was again a local resident of Charlottesville). During the height of the COVID pandemic last year, my friend who suffers from asthma and breathing problems was very afraid of contracting COVID and he used to wash clothes as frequently as possible in the shared washing machine in the house. His roommate got into a huge fight with him over the fact that he



was using the shared washing machine frequently and that he was skewing the shared electricity charges. Now, obviously they could have sat down and come to agreement over this minor issue but it erupted into a huge fight with a lot of shouting. And even he was unable to change his room because of the payment demanded by Cavalier Crossing.

3. Cavalier Crossing charged me \$250 for vacating the house just half an hour late. As I was shifting to a new property, they had intimated that the keys should be turned over by 12pm at a certain date. But during the height of rainy season in July, I happened to just turn over the keys half an hour late as my cab was delayed due to the incessant rains. It was an appalling amount for such a minor issue. I contacted the Student Legal Services (SLS) over this. One Mr. Lestor Wilson from SLS too was appalled at this amount and was of the opinion that this made no sense. He tried speaking to Cavalier Crossing on behalf of me and tried to protest and wanted to remove this fine. But the Cavalier Crossing management said they were going to escalate the matter and turn this amount over to the Collection agencies. Finally, I was advised by Student Legal Services in order to not complicate the matter further, and to pay the fine and get over with it. I believe the Student Legal Services did their best, but Cavalier Crossing management was so bent on extracting this huge amount of money from a student even after protesting.

Properties like Cavalier Crossing should be put on a blacklist and the incoming cohort should be made aware of such incidents and the bad history associated with renting their properties.

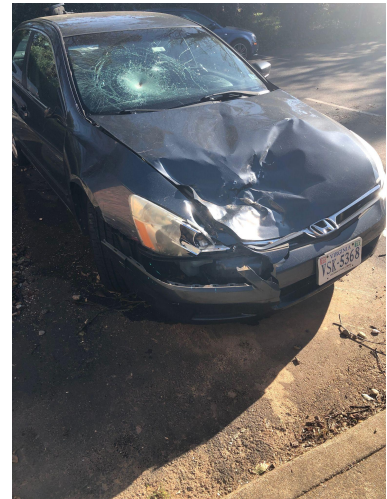


### **Comment 5 – Cecilia Cain**

I am a low income student at UVA and previously signed a lease with Management Services Corporation (MSC) at their Oxford Hills property. Last year, I had a used car that I purchased a parking pass for and parked in the Oxford Hills lot. In early November 2020, a rotting tree in the parking lot fell directly on my car, totaling the vehicle. The tree also fell close to my neighbors kitchen and could have caused serious damage to their apartment. The tree fell at 11:30pm, and I was asleep at the time of the accident.

MSC cleared the tree by 10:30am the next morning – before they tried to contact me at all. To be clear, MSC called a clean up crew, took photos of the accident (which they did not share with me until I asked repeatedly), and cleared the tree all before I was notified about the accident. In fact, MSC never called me or tried to contact me at all.

When I did see my totaled car in the morning, I went directly to the leasing office and talked to the property manager. The property manager tried to defend not contacting me (i.e. "We had not yet found your contact information" despite greeting me by name upon my arrival). He informed me that MSC was not liable for the damage to my car from the tree. I asked for the incident report from the accident, and the property manager told me that he would "talk to legal" and get back to me. I later had to follow up with him for the incident report, which he refused to give me. Since the accident occurred during COVID, my insurance company could not dispatch any inspectors, so they required more specific evidence than usual. Even with this context, the property manager refused to give me the incident report or any formal record of the accident.





I also followed up with the property manager the next day and asked for the arborist report because the property manager had previously admitted that the tree was rotted on the inside. The property manager told me that there was no arborist report. MSC maintained no written records of the arborists inspection. They apparently only had verbal conversations with the arborist.

I then had my roommates' parents review our lease because they are insurance lawyers. Under the force majeure clause in the contract, MSC did not have any liability for the accident despite having a completely rotted tree directly next to residential units and their parking lot.

I was never able to collect any payment for the totaled car. MSC did not even refund my parking pass. Despite their negligence, nobody was able to hold MSC responsible. I still do not have a car and know that this process was deeply wrong and only made possible by the standard of predatory management practices under leasing companies around UVA. Students have no rights.

*Questions and further media inquiries should be directed to [studco-dur@virginia.edu](mailto:studco-dur@virginia.edu).*

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