With significant growth in enrollment expected over the next ten years, UTEP must plan for its growth in cooperation with area hospitals, Kern and Sunset Heights neighborhoods. Members considered the potential impact of growth on UTEP’s physical facilities, student housing, central campus, traffic circulation, and parking.
Introduction

The UTEP’s Neighborhood Committee was charged with identifying and exploring prospects and challenges for positive and progressive University relations as the campus develops. The committee was asked to recognize opportunities and forecast the impact of significant growth in the campus population on a constrained area.

To surface recommendations, the committee examined the current nature of adjacent neighborhoods, business sub-populations, and public infrastructure and of UTEP’s campus physical infrastructure and population. Growth projections and facility plans for UTEP were presented and discussed.

Committee members’ expertise and diversity of interests provided a strong foundation for evaluation and projection. Areas such as architecture, urban planning, city government, land development, construction, law, engineering, grass-roots organization, and small business were represented on the committee, many of whose members were residential or business neighbors or both.

Each committee meeting focused on a theme significant to the University’s neighborhood impact and relations—Transportation and Movement, Quality of Life and Land Use, Housing and Community Development, and Economic Development. The results were cross-tabulated, organized, and reduced to a set of concise recommendations for consideration and action.

Results and Recommendations

The zones most directly affected by UTEP are found in the Sunset Heights, Rim, Rio Grande, Kern, and Mission Hills areas. The impact zone is generally bounded by Brown Street and Franklin Mountain State Park on the east, I-10 on the south and west, and Executive Drive on the north. The committee labeled this collection of distinct but related neighborhoods, businesses, and public spaces the “University District.”

After the focused theme meetings, the committee assessed the opportunities and challenges for University-Neighborhood relations and development in two distinct zones—the integrated campus-neighborhood and the extended University District.

• The Integrated Campus-Neighborhood—In general, the committee recommends that the University factor connectivity between the campus and the adjacent neighborhood into its development plans. Taking an integrated approach to developing the campus with neighborhood and public infrastructure could yield a range of benefits including reduced traffic congestion, increased attractiveness for potential students and faculty, reduced crime, increased support from neighborhood businesses and residents for University construction and expansion, expanded housing options for a growing student population, and the ability to attract and retain top faculty through desirable housing options and quality-of-life features. Proactive planning, development, and public relations will encourage advocacy on behalf of the University from its adjacent neighborhood stakeholders.
• The Extended University District—An overarching recommendation of the committee is for the University to work actively and consistently with its adjacent business and residential neighbors to coordinate development and increase the viability of the entire District. The committee recognized the University’s unique ability to convene and facilitate positive participation from the full range of affected stakeholders.

Benefits of coordinated development include increased support for the expansion of the University’s physical plan and programs, an increase in businesses that are attractive to and support students and faculty, reduction of urban blight, reduction of development costs for shared public infrastructure, increased traffic control, improved safety, and reduced crime, to name a few.

Within each of the two zones, the committee surfaced both broad and very specific opportunities and challenges. The final work of the committee was to sort and reduce all the opportunities and challenges to a more concise list corresponding to both zones (the Integrated Campus-Neighborhood and the Extended University District). The committee’s recommendations are organized into four major categories: Land Use, Transportation and Movement, Public Relations and Partnerships, and Implementation.

• Land Use
  • Revisit the University Master Plan with linkages integrated to the University district.
  • Implement Form Based zoning to promote mixed-use and transit-oriented development and connectivity to the areas, while integrating business and entertainment.
  • Evaluate centralization of peripheral facilities.
  • Identify and construct recognizable campus gateways.
  • Develop design strategies that reinforce the "University District" (e.g., public realm, streetscapes, buildings, signage, benches, vegetation).
  • Create and connect a network of open spaces, including pedestrian-friendly corridors.
  • Evaluate adjacent undeveloped properties for expansion.

• Transportation and Movement
  • Develop and implement a Transportation Plan addressing parking, transit, pedestrians, and campus links within the Integrated Campus and Expanded University/Neighborhood District.
  • Construct parking garages to concentrate peripheral parking and increase capacity.
  • Encourage the development of a pedestrian oriented inner campus.
  • Collaborate with the Texas Department of Transportation and the City of El Paso on arterial and interstate access to the areas.
  • Coordinate pedestrian crossings with vehicular traffic at the campus periphery.
  • Work with the City of El Paso on traffic calming measures in high pedestrian, off-campus corridors.
  • Work with Sun Metro to support the establishment of a bus terminal and promote community and University use through incentives.
  • Create and connect pedestrian and bike paths to link UTEP with its adjacent neighborhoods.
  • Emphasize pathways that reinforce and utilize the natural landscape—arroyos, outcrops, native vegetation, panoramic views.
  • Promote carpooling, bicycling, and Park and Ride for students, faculty, and staff.

• Public Relationships and Partnerships—Develop a specific Public Relations plan for the University District implemented by an Office of Neighborhood Relations to:
  • Actively strengthen interaction among University District groups (e.g., neighborhood development associations, business development associations, the University).
  • Partner with businesses to recruit out-of-town students to UTEP and El Paso.
  • Educate property owners on the benefits of Form Based planning and development to gain buy-in and participation.

• Implementation
  • Create a University District Council to include neighborhood, business, medical, and University representatives.
  • Create the Office of Neighborhood Relations to support, facilitate, and implement the goals of the University District Council.

Addendum—Office of Neighborhood Relations

Following submission of the above recommendations, the committee offered an addendum expanding on the idea of the Office of Neighborhood Relations suggested in the “Implementation” bullet. Successful implementation of the recommendations improves dramatically if someone is charged with direct responsibility for working on desired outcomes. A defined point of contact has numerous advantages, including visibility, advocacy for the University, liaison between related stakeholders and the University, and a consistent presence with government agencies.
(e.g., TXDoT, MPO, City Planning), to name a few. While the office appears to fit best within Institutional Advancement, the committee recognizes that other highly visible locations within the University may be equally or better suited to its success.

The charge of the Office of Neighborhood Relations will be to act as the catalyst and support for the University District Council, creating positive interaction between UTEP and its neighbors in three areas—business-related, recreation/quality of life-related, and neighborhood-related:

- **Business Related:**
  - Encourage service learning activities in the University District (e.g., trail development).
  - Create packets and conduct orientation for realtors.
  - Develop a public relations campaign and approaches for active engagement of adjacent neighborhoods and businesses.
  - Create information packets on UTEP for businesses to use.
  - Coordinate and offer a Lyceum Series on the role of urban planning in economic and community development.
  - Develop a “Design Studio” as a storefront for economic development.
  - Actively place students in local internships to stimulate entrepreneurial interest.
  - Survey students to identify “gaps” in adjacent businesses.
  - Post neighborhood rental opportunities on the UTEP website.
  - Recruit out-of-town students to increase UTEP’s resident population since a 24-hour student population increases business opportunities.
  - Identify gaps within the Entertainment Zone (e.g., movie theaters, art galleries) and work with Economic Development to encourage desirable businesses.

- **Recreation/Quality of Life Related:**
  - Enhance weekend and off-peak access to campus attractions (e.g., recreational facilities, museum, trails, Chihuahuan Desert Gardens, library).
  - Develop a sculpture garden in Charlie Davis Park to showcase UTEP artists. The garden would be another unique attraction that takes advantage of the campus setting.
  - Create Park Walk trails with signage along the trail and maps for guests (e.g., those staying at the new hotel).
  - Print maps of paths and walking tours or make PDF versions available on the UTEP website.
  - Actively promote use of recreational facilities, entertainment and education options within adjacent neighborhoods.
  - Assemble a neighborhood packet to be given to all new hires at their orientation.
  - Develop and promote weekend activities to highlight the campus (e.g., 5K races, bicycle races).
  - Sponsor movies on the lawn (Charlie Davis Park?) and invite adjacent neighborhoods. Student organizations could sell concessions as a fundraiser.
  - Promote sports camps with neighborhood associations to develop loyalty for women’s and Olympic sports.
  - Develop a University District neighborhood packet with UTEP information, Alumni Association membership benefits, education/recreation/entertainment offers, etc.
  - Increase signage for educational purposes (e.g., plant tours, geology and geography, campus history and architecture, directory kiosks).

- **Neighborhood Related:**
  - Encourage e-mail sign up for Calendar of Events to promote knowledge of the range of campus activities.
  - Encourage linkages from neighborhood websites to UTEP’s site.