

GREENSBURG

CITY OF GREENSBURG

Planning Department

Barbara A. Campini, Director

To: House Local Government Committee

Re: House Bill No. 809 Session of 2015

Dear Representatives/Members of the House Local Government Committee,

As a professional planner and a constituent, I urge you to block House Bill 809. The City of Greensburg adopted a student housing ordinance in 2007. We did it in order to protect the health, safety and welfare of the students that elect to live in our City and to protect the residential neighborhoods from clustering of student homes by requiring a 500' buffer from student home to student home. In fact we encourage the development of student housing in our downtown because it helps provide incentives to property owners to create residential units in upper floors of our buildings that have been vacant for decades. There isn't a buffer requirement in the downtown area.

The City works closely with student tenants and landlords to provide safe and secure homes. It's really quite amazing how successful we have been with this ordinance. The residents/property owners in our neighborhoods are happy because we pay close attention to noise and other common issues that may arise in a student home. Our student landlords have come to realize that they have to keep their properties up to code because they could lose their status if they don't. It's a win-win for everyone.

The other issue that often rears its ugly head with student housing is parking. We require off street parking or some lease arrangement for all of the vehicles associated with the student home. We approve unique arrangements for off street parking because many of neighborhoods were built in the pre-automobile era, so parking is in demand in today's automobile oriented world. Again the ordinance provides us with the ability to work through parking issues.

In our downtown we have embraced student housing. We now boast of a former vacant textile building that now houses 24 graduates and undergraduates in a facility called "The Lofts on Second". It was a 2 million dollar project that brings life to our downtown after 5:00PM. Other property owners have followed suit and have opted to use the once storage filled floors of their buildings as student apartments. It's quite a success story, but the student housing ordinance is the tool we need to guide the development downtown and the tool we use to keep students from clustering in our neighborhoods. Many of the current student homes in our neighborhoods were blighted properties. Conversations with property owners and property investors have helped to turn that around. Blight is removed and young people move into our neighborhoods. The City of Greensburg has a new construction student home facility that was once five (5) blighted properties. Soon it will house 57 students and bring a lot of disposable income into our economy, not to mention the increase to the assessed value of the new development.


So in conclusion I don't believe that it is up to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to tell local government not to regulate student housing. These are our neighborhoods, our residents, our students and it's what they want. Student Housing ordinances have the following positive outcomes:

1. Students live in safe and secure properties.
2. Student Housing ordinances help with the elimination of blight.
3. Student Housing ordinances help revitalize older urban core areas
4. Student Housing ordinances are an economic driver.
5. Student Housing ordinances help with the new millennials "walk to work, play and fun" phenomenon.
6. Student Housing ordinances help increase market value for neighborhoods rather than the other way around.
7. Student Housing ordinances offer a means of increasing assessed value when student housing involves new construction.
8. Student Housing ordinances offers unique opportunities to property owners and investors.
9. Student housing ordinances save lives.
10. Students want to live off campus in homes that are regulated by local government.

Once again I ask that House Bill No. 908 be blocked from moving any further. Let local governments continue to manage student housing as they see fit in their own communities.

Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,



Barbara J. Ciampini
Planning Director