

Jay Janner AMERICAN-STATESMAN

From the porch of his Pearl Street apartment, Sam Whiteside can see construction crews working on one of the new apartment complexes coming to the West Campus area near UT. The Quarters at Sterling House is scheduled to open next fall.

West Campus housing boom

A wave of new apartment projects is planned for the area west of the University of Texas, as developers take advantage of a revised zoning plan that allows more density.



| Apartments | Number of units | Floors |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--------|
| 1. Venue on Guadalupe | 75 | 7 |
| 2. The Quarters at Cameron House | 64 | 6 |
| 3. The Quarters at Montgomery House | 88 | 6 |
| 4. Sterling University WestCamp | 76 | 6 |
| 5. Texan Tower | 60+ | 6 |
| 6. The Quarters at Bandera House | 126 | 8 |
| 7. The Quarters at Nueces House | 232 | 8 |
| 8. The Quarters Garage | 12 | 3 |
| 9. The Quarters at Grayson House | 100 | 8 |
| 10. The Quarters at Sterling House | 100 | 6 |

| Condos | Number of units | Floors |
|------------------|-----------------|--------|
| A. Piazza Navona | 55 | 9 |
| B. Caswell Lofts | 42 | 3-4 |

Source: American-Statesman research
Linda Scott AMERICAN-STATESMAN

West Campus is on the rise

A year after plan raised height limits, apartment projects are springing up

By Kate Miller Morton
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

One year after Austin officials approved a plan to encourage high-rise and high-density development just west of the University of Texas campus, well-worn bungalows and low-slung apartment buildings still dominate the eclectic neighborhood.

But signs of change are everywhere in the area known as West Campus, from the dusty 18-wheelers lugging building materials through the narrow, car-lined streets to the gaping holes in the landscape where run-down student dwellings once stood and sleek, upscale apartments are being built.

Developers already have plans for 12 projects with a total of more than 1,000 apartments or condominiums, and several are under construction. Developers have more projects on the drawing board, and some land owners are considering starting projects of their own or marketing their land.

The activity is unlike anything the neighborhood has experienced in 20 years, and developers and city officials say it is only the beginning of a building boom that will significantly improve the quality of housing and the look of the area.

\$1,633

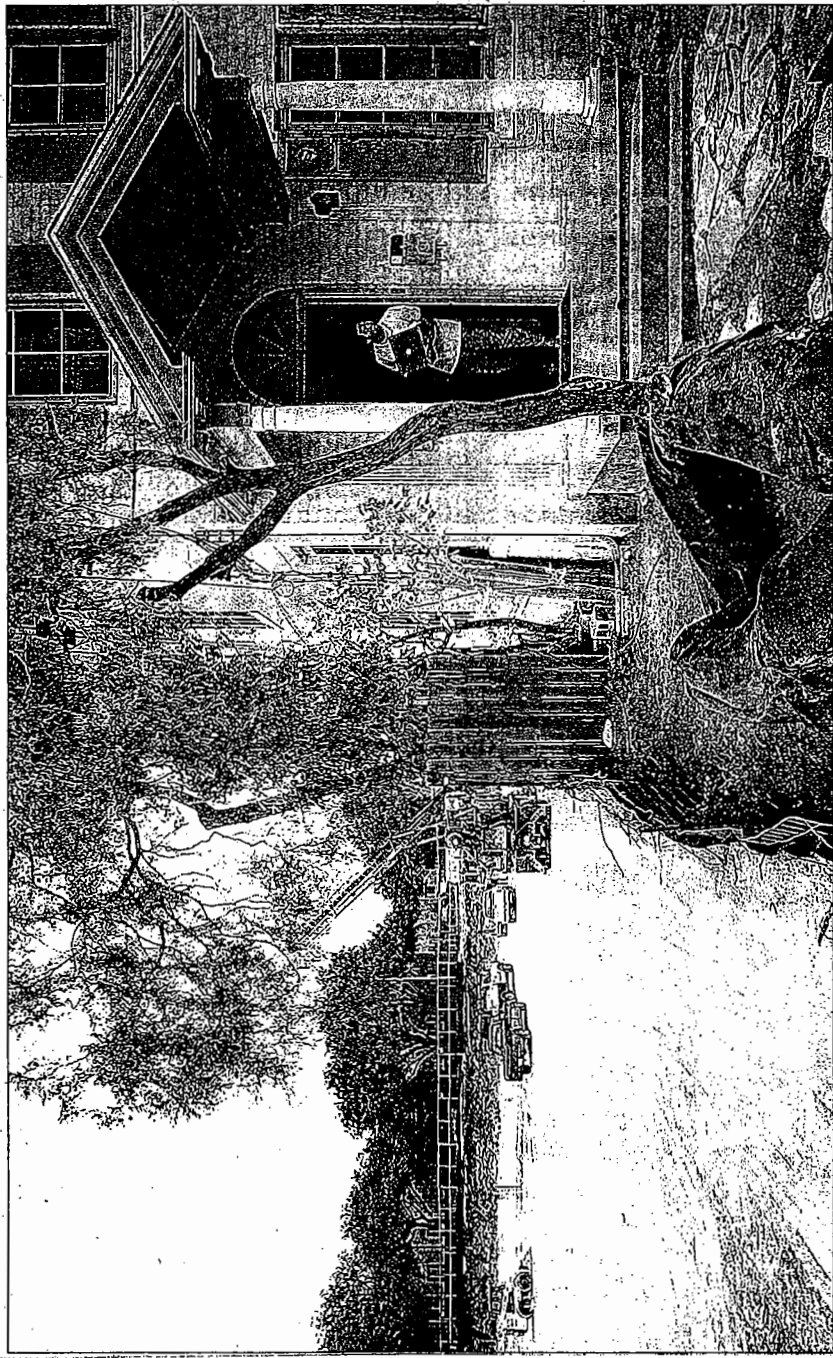
Average rent for two-bedroom apartment in West Campus

\$1,496

Average rent for two-bedroom apartment in Central Austin

\$811

Average rent for two-bedroom apartment citywide



Jay Janner photos AMERICAN-STATESMAN
Next door to Joseph Hellman's Acacia Fraternity house on Salado Street near the University of Texas, crews have begun working on the Sterling University WestCamp, a 76-unit, six-story apartment building. "We wanted to be within walking distance of a campus," said John Caltrigione, vice president of Houston-based Dinerstein Cos.

NEW: Funky character to stay, professor says

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long-neglected area. Change is inevitable, but UT architecture professor and former West Campus resident Larry Speck thinks that the development will not destroy the funky character of the neighborhood.

The outdated and often unattractive apartment complexes probably will be the first to go, as developers go after bigger pieces of land. Developers who want to build to maximum heights will have to observe design guidelines that require them to add wide sidewalks shaded by trees and set their buildings back from the street to avoid a concrete canyon effect.

"I don't see it as the destruction of the neighborhood moving quickly," Speck said. "I think in some ways it may be the enhancement of the neighborhood moving quickly."

West Campus' diverse blend of student housing is in dire need of enhancement.

Despite perennially high demand for student accommodations near campus and consequently one of the highest average rents in Austin, few new apartments or rental houses have been built in the area since 1984, when the city tightened the area's zoning to discourage high density.

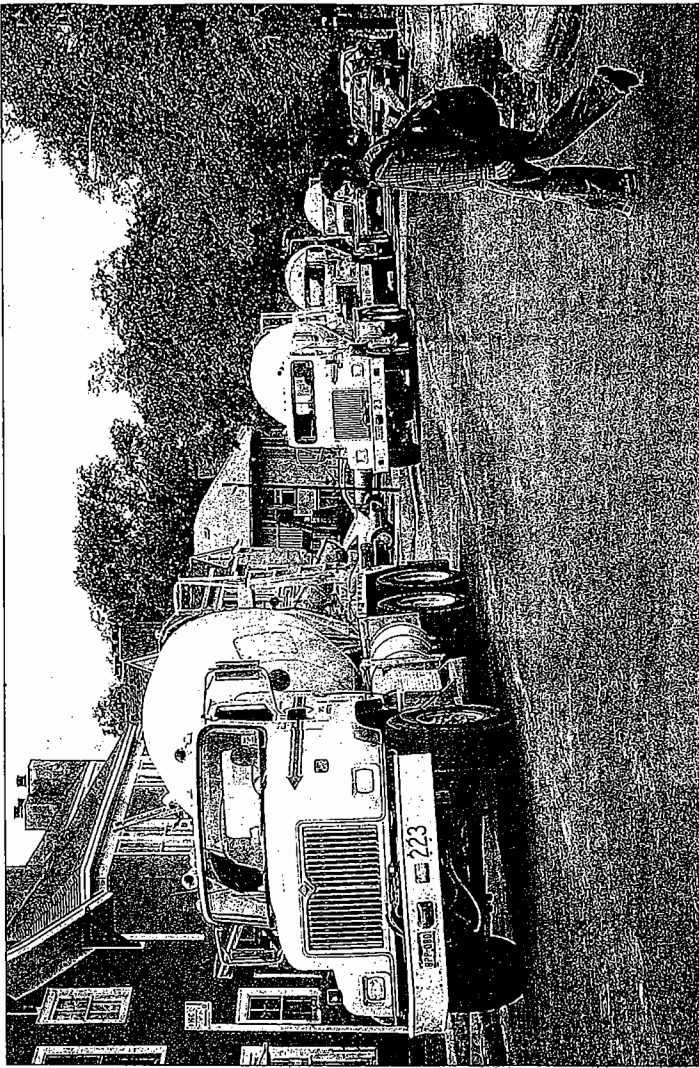
The zoning change helped discourage new development because property owners who tore down older buildings often were not allowed to rebuild as many units as they had demolished.

That was one factor that led to a diaspora of UT students in rental housing all over the city, particularly along East Riverside Drive, where apartment complexes house as many as 8,000 students. Improvised student housing also crept into nearby campus neighborhoods, where single-family houses were converted into apartments or replaced by so-called superduplexes.

A yearlong process involving neighborhood groups, property owners and UT students and officials led to the new plan that allows buildings as high as 15 stories in parts of West Campus, just west of the section of Guadalupe Street known as the Drag. The height maximums are graduated within the area. For example, heights on some blocks near Lamar Boulevard are capped at 40 feet, while the limit is 60 feet along most of Guadalupe. The tallest buildings would be limited to a few blocks along San Antonio, Nueces and Rio Grande streets, roughly from Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to 26th Street.

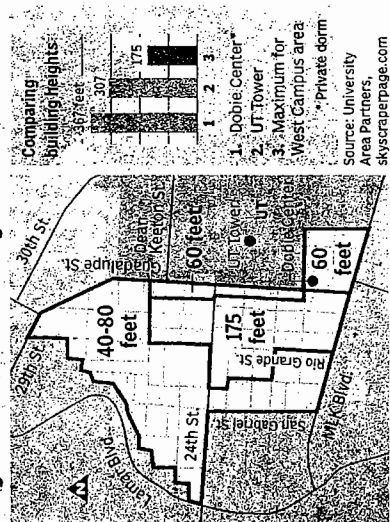
The impact of the zoning changes has surprised even the biggest supporters of the plan, who thought there might be four or five new projects a year. "The pent-up demand has been tremendous," said Mike McHone, who participated in the planning process as a member of the University Area Partners, whose members include area business and property owners, tenants and churches.

Leading the wave of redevelopment is Austin-based Simmons Vedder & Co., which is



Signs of change have become common in some parts of West Campus, where developers have plans for 12 projects with a total of more than

Height limits on new buildings



Source: City of Austin

tearing down several dormitories and the University Gardens apartments to build seven new apartment buildings with a total of 722 units and an eight-level parking garage.

The first three buildings — The Quarters at Montgomery House, The Quarters at Sterling House and The Quarters at Cameron House — will open next fall and rent for from \$800 to \$2,600 a month.

University Partners, the student housing division of Dallas-based First Worthing, broke ground in July on the Venue on Guadalupe, a 75-apartment project at 2815 Guadalupe that will open by next fall. Blain England Partners is the local development partner.

Houston-based Dimerstein Cos., which searched for development opportunities near UT for years, recently began work on Sterling University West Camp, a 76-unit, six-story apartment building on Rio Grande Street. "We wanted to be within walking distance of campus," Dimerstein Vice

1,000 residential units. Cement trucks formed a line Thursday on West 22nd Street, near the site of the coming Quarters at Sterling House.

High- and mid-rise apartment buildings with multilevel parking garages are always more expensive to build than the garden-style apartment complexes that are usually found in the suburbs. West Campus construction is particularly difficult and expensive because the land, in addition to being excellent, is typically divided into small parcels that make assembling large sites difficult.

"It is no cheaper to build in the West Campus area than it is downtown," Simmons Vedder Vice President John McKhinerney said. The cost will discourage some students, but market researcher Charles Heimsath, president of Capitol Market Research in Austin, expects demand to be strong. "You're always going to have a value-versus-cost equation, but I think on balance that there will be a large number of people who are students who will choose to live closer to campus and pay an extra \$75 a month to do that," Heimsath said.

Caltrigone said that land has gotten more expensive since the zoning change but that it is worth more because developers can build more apartments on top of it. The increased value also has prompted more owners to sell.

Escalating prices were not enough to convince the University Baptist Church that it should sell its three parking lots between Nueces and San Antonio streets, only one block from campus, but the church is actively seeking developers interested in leasing and developing the property. The property lies in the zone where builders are allowed to build as high as 175 feet, making it extremely valuable. "It's just a matter of economics," said Brian Gryta, the

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administrator. "As a church, we are responsible to all of our assets as best we can." College Houses Inc., a non-profit student housing co-op, owns two old apartment buildings and a historic house at 1905, 1907 and 1909 Nueces St.

The co-op wants to build a \$7.5 million apartment building that would house 180 students. The project would more than triple the number of students the co-op currently houses, but the approximately 60-foot building would not come close to reaching the property's full potential under the university overlay, so the organization is considering selling the land and buying less valuable property elsewhere for its project.

High prices and the difficulty of assembling adjacent properties in West Campus also could help preserve the neighborhood's eclectic character by leading developers to buy the largest parcels. Speck said the more charming old bungalows, the neighborhood's "smaller, sweeter things," will remain. "There are things we like about West Campus, but there are a lot of really bad projects in West Campus," Speck said. "Just imagine those going. It's not all a bad thing."

Also working to preserve the look and feel of the neighborhood are the extensive design guidelines required for developers building under the overlay, such as the installation of wide sidewalks and irrigated trees in front of buildings, which must be set back from the street. "The zoning ordinance itself is unlike most zoning we do in any Sun Belt city," Speck said. "It actually comes with design guidelines and they are there to protect the character of the street."

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