

STRATEGIC AND LONG-TERM PLANNING FOR
GREEK LIFE HOUSING AT EMORY UNIVERSITY

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Prepared for the Tri Chairs for Emory University Strategic Planning for Greek Life

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Emory University approached Plaid, a management firm that works with colleges and universities, to assist with identifying strategies related to long-term Greek life housing. Plaid's review of past documents – along with surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews associated with the current process – resulted in the following report and recommendations. Both are informed by the Tri Chairs and Round Table participants, including Emory alumni, students, and staff.

Plaid recommends future housing planning discussions for sorority and fraternity life that include administrators, alumni, and students collaborating in the creation and development of a lease agreement that affords local chapters an opportunity to manage the day-to-day operations of their facilities, encourages alumni and national office involvement, and supports student self-governance.

¹ Tri Chairs indicates three individuals. This grouping includes four. With the pending graduation of one student representative, a second was named.

INTRODUCTION

Emory University is a highly selective research institution located in a residential section of Atlanta. It serves just under 7,000 undergraduate students, 31.4 percent of whom identify as belonging to a social sorority or fraternity. The institution's undergraduate alumni number almost 24,000, with 34 percent identifying as members of Greek-letter organizations.

The Greek-letter community offers a comprehensive range of options for Emory students and includes four councils representing various sorority and fraternity chapters. These organizations are the Interfraternity Council (IFC), Multicultural Greek Council (MGC)², National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), and Emory Panhellenic Council (EPC). Traditionally, housing on the Emory campus has been available for chapters of these organizations.

Most on-campus sorority and fraternity housing is located on Eagle Row, a street traversing the campus, with IFC and EPC chapters occupying most of the facilities. The houses were built with alumni resources and have been maintained with a combination of university funding and resources from local fraternal chapters. The lodges on Eagle Row are townhouse-style accommodations built by Emory and completed in 2006 primarily to provide housing for sororities. Three National Pan-Hellenic and two Multicultural Greek sororities and fraternities have also been represented among the houses and lodges along Eagle Row.

Some “residential theme houses” have occupied residential spaces on Eagle Row, and some Interfraternity Council and Multicultural Greek organizations have occupied spaces in traditional residence halls. The limited availability of housing has caused conflict within and among various Greek-letter organizations. With several suspended sororities and fraternities scheduled to return to campus within the next two years, students and alumni have expressed frustration that there is no clear path to return to their historic homes.

Emory hired Plaid to assist with understanding issues related to sorority and fraternity housing and to help facilitate a housing-related strategic planning process. Led by three chairs (Tri Chairs) – Kevin Kell, Kyle Nelson/Christian Virgil, and Elaine Turner – a Round Table representing alumni, students and staff was tasked to consider strategic and long-term planning for sorority and fraternity housing at Emory.

This report serves as an update on the overall process of reviewing Greek housing at Emory University.

It is important to note that Plaid's purview in this project is to consider issues related to housing. This report does not focus on student leadership, membership recruitment, education, conduct,

² Some MGC organizations are not permitted by their national organizations to have designated housing.

or other aspects of Greek life unless those issues may have direct relevance to housing-related issues. Non-housing-related issues will be reviewed at a later point in a process referenced below.

THE PROCESS

Emory Campus Life recommended an inclusive process to consider issues related to fraternity and sorority housing. Given that “trust” is a significant issue, as indicated below, it is important to note that Campus Life began, coordinated, and encouraged this critical reflection on sorority and fraternity housing concerns.

In October 2016, 2,336 students and 3,821 non-students (alumni, parents, faculty, and staff) responded to a survey related to sorority and fraternity life. This material was reviewed by the Tri Chairs and summarized for Round Table participants.

Plaid conducted 10 focus groups with more than 100 participants, as well as numerous individual interviews.³ These meetings included a broad range of students, faculty, staff, parents, and alumni. Although students were both Greek and non-Greek, the overwhelming majority of participants were students and alumni associated with sororities and fraternities. The focus groups occurred over three weekends in February and March 2017.

The university planned the first weekend of focus groups in early February. When turnout was not strong, the consultants recommended additional focus group offerings. The university coordinated additional alumni focus groups during the week of spring break. Additional focus groups for students occurred after they returned to campus.

Plaid has worked consistently with the Tri Chairs to review materials, receive feedback from the Round Table and revise this report based on feedback. This final report with recommendations is submitted to Campus Life administrators who have specific supervisory responsibility for Housing Operations and supporting sorority and fraternity life.

Because this study’s focus is limited to housing for Greek students, additional information received from this process will be provided to Campus Life to convene two additional groups to: 1) create the short-term and long-term housing recommendations for Greek students; and 2) craft strategic directions for sorority and fraternity life.

³ All alumni who requested an individual interview were granted that opportunity via phone and/or in person. Many of those resulted in multiple phone conversations.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The initial review of materials included identification of the following themes:

Building Trust

Significant trust issues exist between sorority and fraternity students/alumni and the university administration.

Addressing Disparity in Quality of Housing

The quality of sorority and fraternity housing is inconsistent with that of traditional residence halls.

Restructuring Staff Support and Self-Governance for Greek Housing

There is resounding agreement that the current staffing model supporting sorority and fraternity housing is not working well. A model that encourages alumni support and student self-governance is proposed.

Clarifying Policy and Consistent Policy Application

Policies and practices are not necessarily well-communicated to students and alumni, coordinated across departments, or consistently applied, resulting in confusion and contributing to the lack of trust.

Clarifying Ownership of Greek Houses and Lodges

Differing narratives exist about ownership of the houses. Because of this lack of clarity, discrepancies exist about who should be financially responsible and what funds should be used to support Greek houses and lodges.

Use of Reserve Funds

A lack of understanding by both staff and alumni of how reserve funds should be used is further complicated by discrepancies regarding property ownership.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consider Providing Additional Housing to Meet Student Demand

Student demand for sorority and fraternity housing exceeds the supply. Additional housing should be considered to accommodate demand. While, in fact, there may be an adequate number of bed spaces across all Greek housing, individual houses vary in size. Because organizations desire their own spaces, facilities that house one chapter may be only partially filled based on membership. This creates a clash of priorities with Housing Operations focusing on filling bed spaces while the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life (OSFL) and individual organizations are interested in the community-building aspects of having designated spaces for fraternities and sororities.

IFC and EPC chapters, in particular, have an expectation of housing, and it has become a coveted commodity. For IFC organizations, this expectation dates to the early 1900s with houses being built by alumni of the organizations. The university was not involved in any aspect of fraternity housing until the 1990s, when the Phoenix Plan was created. It was the first collaborative attempt between the university and fraternities to manage housing together.

Today, there is an expressed desire by most sororities and fraternities to acquire designated housing. For example, it is important to note that Alpha Phi Alpha, an NPHC organization, also had a long-time home on Fraternity Row, now Eagle Row. Therefore, when considering spaces, IFC, EPC, NPHC and, to a lesser degree, MGC, all have interest in designated campus housing. As part of the university's strategic planning, we recommend creating a framework to work through the layers of complexities that speaks to both realities as well as expectations.

Recognizing that a specific allocation of houses and lodges exist, university administrators, alumni, and student leaders should collaborate to create a plan that supports the success of organizations. Issues that should be considered include: smaller organizations wishing to be housed, "ownership" and responsibility for deferred and on-going maintenance and damages, phasing out houses that may be beyond repair, process for return of organizations that lose their on-campus or housing status, how a house may be used in the interim, etc.

New townhouse-style structures with fewer beds and adequate social space should receive consideration, as they are easier to fill, require less maintenance, and may better meet the needs of today's students. It should be noted this is not a solution that can occur immediately; therefore, it is important to identify both short- and long-range housing opportunities to adjust to students' interests and needs.

While focus groups were intentionally scheduled for students living in theme houses and for non-Greek students, there was no participation by theme house residents. There was some participation by non-Greek students but, when pressed, little was shared about sorority and fraternity housing. Therefore, further exploration is required to understand the need and value of theme housing among sorority and fraternity housing.

It is important to note that placement of theme housing on Eagle Row has created animosity between some Greek students/alumni and the university administration by raising suspicions that it reflects a move away from Greek housing. The challenges include specific situations that require significant attention.

2. Develop a Clear Process for Return Should an Organization Face Suspension

The university administration faces significant criticism for not providing a clear path for return to historical houses when a sorority or fraternity is suspended. The university has shared its concern for addressing issues of egregious student misconduct while also meeting

student demand for housing. It is recommended that Emory administrators work with alumni advisors and student leaders to formalize a policy that addresses return to campus for non-housed groups and return to campus and housing for historically housed groups. These two processes should be considered independently as they have separate implications that the university must consider.

For example, questions may include: Is there ever a time when an organization may not return to its historical housing? What occurs for organizations that do not have historical housing? Will those organizations ever have an opportunity to gain housing? Emory today represents a different student body than the era when historical houses were built.⁴ Is there a way to incorporate today's Emory students into the fraternity/sorority housing structure?

3. *Restructure Staff Support and Self-Governance for Greek Housing*

There is resounding agreement across students, staff, and alumni that the current staffing model supporting sorority and fraternity housing is not working well. The current house director model employs part-time graduate students (predominantly law students) supporting fraternity houses and undergraduate student house managers supporting sorority lodges. There is significant inconsistency in documenting infractions despite what is perceived by students and alumni as heavy oversight by house directors. What students and alumni describe as heavy oversight creates an “us/them” dichotomy, does not further student self-governance, and fails to foster the sense of community expected with life in sorority and fraternity housing.

While the current IFC appears to be placing significant emphasis on student self-governance, there is no common definition of what student self-governance means and how it can be both supported and reinforced. House directors currently report to Residence Life, which involves yet another departmental player in a structure that already has Housing Operations and the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life (OSFL) supporting Greek housing. As house directors do not appear to play a significant role in encouraging reduction of damage to housing through the chapter adviser/student governance structure, the current staffing structure may further contribute to an “us/them” paradigm of alumni/students versus university departments.

The use of Alumni House Corporations in day-to-day management and operations of chapter houses can provide significant improvement in this area. National fraternities and sororities have a practice of active alumni house corporations separate from, or in conjunction with, chapter advising. These local volunteers are supported and advised by their national organizations to support facilities, understand student housing, and work collaboratively with university personnel. Specifically, we recommend that:

⁴ This statement should not be interpreted to suggest that “today's Emory student” does not have interest in historical fraternities.

- House directors are selected and employed by Alumni House Corporations and OSFL.
- House directors are given responsibility for working with student leadership in day-to-day management of the house, encouraging student self-governance, and supporting the organization standards councils.
- Alumni House Corporations are given responsibility for maintaining the houses with limited damage, avoiding violations of university policy, etc. There should be a financial incentive to manage the house well.
- Alumni House Corporations should work with chapter advisers to encourage student self-governance and accountability.
- Alumni House Corporations should work with university Housing Operations on issues related to facility maintenance and upkeep.
- House Corporations should work with OSFL on issues related to student self-governance and accountability.
- Ongoing communication and training should be provided to support implementation of the recommendations above.

4. *Review Nomenclature*

Changes in nomenclature have occurred, which some attribute to the university attempting to downplay sorority and fraternity life. University personnel have communicated that this is not the case. Students and alumni report:

Historically

Fraternity Row

Houses referenced by name of chapter

Greek life mentioned on campus tours

Campus maps show Greek life

Mailings to prospective new members

Currently

Eagle Row

Houses referenced by number

Greek life not mentioned on campus tours

Campus maps do not show Greek life

No mailings to newly admitted first-year students

Valid administrative reasons exist for many of these changes.

- Eagle Row, the street formerly named “Fraternity Row,” now consists of sorority housing, non-Greek residential housing, and academic facilities. The university should consider placing a sign indicating “Greek Row” on the section of Eagle Row that contains fraternity and sorority houses.
- Houses and lodges became referenced by street address as organizations were placed on suspension and houses were repurposed to provide alternative housing. Nomenclature consistency became even more important for staff to do their jobs efficiently. However, it is important, particularly to alumni, to reference the houses they occupy by their fraternal name. Staff should make an intentional effort to know the names of the houses and use the names when interacting with students and alumni to avoid conveying an unintentional message of dismissiveness.

- It is not clear that admission tours consistently leave out Greek life. The Interfraternity Council has made purposeful attempts to reach out to admission tour guides to encourage a positive portrayal of sorority and fraternity life to prospective students.
- Alumni mentioned concern that names and addresses of newly admitted/enrolling students were no longer available to them to recruit potential new members. While it may be perceived that this is a slight against Greek students and alumni, it is actually the result of a need to streamline communications sent to newly enrolling students. Such streamlining is common at colleges and universities across the country. The university is encouraged to work with alumni and students who wish to reach students to recruit for their organizations.

5. Address Disparity in Quality of Housing

The quality of sorority and fraternity housing is inconsistent with that of the traditional residence halls. Upkeep of some houses has been more difficult due to vandalism and misuse. Student care for chapter facilities certainly plays a role in the wear and tear on these residential spaces. Greek student leaders argue that the wear and tear is not solely the work of sorority and fraternity students but also by those who attend their events. Vandalism and other damage occur on at least a monthly basis.

Student self-governance and increasing alumni involvement in chapter advising and accountability will be further explored later in this document to assist in addressing such damage. University staff report that it is difficult to manage deferred maintenance and other common facility issues when spending an inordinate amount of time on vandalism and other damage. Additional information about damage and vandalism in sorority and fraternity housing can be found in Appendix C.

Active Alumni/Alumnae House Corporations can be an asset in discussing and addressing these concerns. Plaid recommends working with alumni to create and empower Alumni House Corporations to sign lease agreements with the university. Within the lease function, the House Corporation is responsible for filling bed spaces and providing oversight of the facilities, including providing regular and timely information to the university to maintain the house. A lease agreement allows organizations to manage their facilities while enabling university staff to maintain its housing the way they maintain residence halls.

Furthermore, we recommend training Alumni House Corporations in university organization and structure so they can effectively: 1) maintain quality of housing; 2) fill bed spaces; 3) work with alumni advisers to help students understand that it is in their best interest to minimize house damage; and 4) do so in a manner that is cost-effective.

6. *Define Policy and Consistent Policy Application*

Concerns have been expressed that policies and practices are not well-defined nor well-communicated to students and alumni, coordinated across departments, or consistently applied, which causes confusion and contributes to lack of trust. Students and alumni shared multiple examples of policies and practices for which they felt there was no communication prior to a departure from former operating procedures. Staffing transitions in Housing Operations, Residence Life, and the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life have taken place in the past five years. We recommend a review of policies to determine current needs and ensure consistency.

Use of Alumni House Corporations and structured communication across departments could save much stress and strife. This will also increase trust in the relationship between students/alumni and the university. In addition, as outlined above, Alumni House Corporation volunteers can be trained to mitigate concerns and work collaboratively with university staff to achieve the objectives of all parties involved. Moreover, survey data indicate alumni volunteers are ready and willing to work with students and chapters.

7. *Clarify Ownership of Houses and Use of Reserve Funds*

Alumni, students and some staff lack clarity about house ownership, although such ownership appears to rest with the university. Nonetheless, financial responsibilities and procedures are unclear. There is difference of opinion about when a bid must be secured, for example, and at what amount and how vendors are selected. There is also difference of opinion about who maintains what.

Funding sources, allocations and expectations for use of reserve funds require comprehensive review and revision. Specifically:

- Clarify and ratify sorority and fraternity housing ownership.
- As part of the strategic plan, construct new housing agreements with key partners to better understand implications for Housing Operations, OSFL, Alumni House Corporations, and sororities and fraternities. Moving forward, establish an audit of fund usage or process for audit.
- Establish a bidding process and documentation process for housing improvements.
- For all related fees, records should be accessible to Alumni House Corporations and officers.

8. *Share Collected Data*

Emory collects a great deal of data. Alumni and students are concerned that the university is unwilling to readily share, including, but not limited to recruitment data, organization GPA, and behavioral trends. It is recommended the university share data with students and alumni

as it is collected, unless there is a clearly articulated reason not to do so. The perceived lack of transparency fuels trust issues.

The survey information that informed this study is available online. All qualitative data were reviewed and summarized for this report. The qualitative raw data are so voluminous that they are not included as an appendix to this report. However, all survey data, including qualitative data will be available online by summer 2017.

CONCLUSION

The willingness of a university to engage an outside facilitator like Plaid and open itself to scrutiny should be noted and the significance not understated. The university has designed a process that is inclusive and brought Plaid in to allow careful examination of policies and practices.

Thus, Emory is sending a clear signal that it wishes to work collaboratively with students, alumni, and Greek-letter national and international organizations. Likewise, it is important to note that students and alumni have come to the table to share their concerns. The most important step, at this point, is for both parties to commit to working on this report's first finding – *the need to build trust*.

“There is a significant population of Fraternity/Sorority students who are very disenfranchised, not finding what they were looking for in their Fraternity/Sorority experience, or within the existing chapters Hopefully these recommendations will provide an opportunity to give them voice, or at least address their concerns and help them and their organizations realize their potential. That will only happen when the Office of Sorority/Fraternity Life stabilizes in terms of structure and staff, when Governing Councils establish their identity and raison d’etre and fully embrace the concept of self-governance. Within that self-governance must be the development and maintenance of a strong culture of accountability. Students say they want to govern themselves, to challenge their peers to be better men/women and productive citizens, and to develop the management skills each will find necessary in the work environment. Actions speak louder than words. The time is now for these student leaders to take the tools in hand and create a future for Emory’s Fraternity/Sorority community that realizes those dreams.”

The passage above is from the conclusion of the Emory University – Sorority Fraternity Community Consultation 2013 report (Appendix F). While that consultation focused broadly on Emory sorority and fraternity life, many of the same concerns raised in that report exist today and challenges identified have contributed to Greek life housing-related concerns.

Although this report is hard-hitting in terms of addressing challenges, clearly Campus Life is committed to the Greek experience at Emory. It is also clear that Campus Life staff enjoy working with students and seem firmly committed to a strong student-focused experience.

Likewise, students express a strong desire to utilize a self-governance model and, when provided the necessary support through training, seem well equipped to succeed. Students in the sorority and fraternity community clearly are smart and talented and appear ready to embrace opportunities to demonstrate their untapped skillsets.

Finally, alumni, the group most critical of the university administration, are engaged in the process and want to see their organizations survive and thrive. With all parties committing to work together and move forward, great progress is on the horizon.

It is worth noting that this same commitment to problem-solving partnership will be necessary when sorting through the additional, non-housing data related to sorority and fraternity life that was collected throughout this process.