

North Garneau residents oppose University's plans for expansion

U wants 15 feet on each side of lane for parking

U would tear down garages, trees

Petition being circulated

funds already allocated

Area needs cleaning up, U says

Withholding rents suggested



Lorne Leitch is the University of Alberta's Associate Vice-President for Finance and Administration.

Almost one quarter of the population of North Garneau community turned up last Thursday to vehemently denounce the University of Alberta for its plans for expansion into that area of the city.

The North Garneau district, owned by the university, was expropriated several years ago. It encompasses the area north of 87 Avenue and south of Saskatchewan Drive between 110 and 111 Streets. Located just east of the campus it is the logical area for the University's expansion.

The University is presently planning to take fifteen feet on either side of each back lane in the area for additional parking space. This would involve tearing down most of the garages and fences, graveling the fifteen feet, and building a low fence on either side of the lane.

The residents of the area who were in attendance at the meeting in Garneay United Church claimed this proposal would "adversely affect our physical and spiritual well being as well as despoiling the aesthetic value of the community." Many residents also accused the university of attempting to gradually destroy the area to forestall opposition when it finally completely tears it down.

North Garneau is one of the oldest districts in the city and boasts such things as trees, grass and stately homes. Many of the homes and grounds have been allowed to seriously deteriorate because of their apparently imminent demolition. There are approximately 425 residents of the area, most of whom are students.

Since expropriation, the university has torn down many houses west of 110 St. in the North Garneau area and constructed the Law Building on 89 Avenue. The university is presently constructing the Humanities Building on 88 Avenue and the Student Housing Project on 112 St. in their place.

Original planning called for the remaining houses in the area between 110 and 111 Streets to



This is one of the laneways (between 87 and 88 Avenues) which will be affected by the current University plan for North Garneau. The delapidated garages in the foreground have to go the university says. Of course any trees which have foolishly been planted within fifteen feet of this lane will be uprooted in the name of the Iron Law of University Unending and Directionless Development.

photo: Ken Bird

have been torn down by now. However, due to the drop in enrollment and the decrease in the University's operating budget, these are not expected to be torn down for another five years.

According to Lorne Leitch, the University's Associate Vice-President for Finance and Administration, the reasons for the proposal are the apparently critical parking shortage on the campus and the lanes and backyards which "are badly in need of upgrading."

Leitch says he plans to take the proposal to a general meeting of the area residents and "strong opposition will be seriously considered."

However, the proposal has been virtually approved by the University administration. There is no need, Leitch says, to go through the formal planning committee structure because the University's Physical Plant Department already has funds available for the project. It would cost \$20,000 to \$30,000 and probably begin in May.

Some members of the North Garneau community have already met with Leitch and made him aware of the potential opposition to the plan. However, Leitch claims the opposition of may disintegrate because "I don't think many of the residents know what's actually being proposed." He assumes the residents think the university plans to pave the entire backyards rather than just the fifteen feet.

However, at the Thursday meeting, it was obvious that the residents understood the mechanics of the plan and were nonetheless vehemently opposed.

The residents in attendance formed a committee of about ten volunteers. They mandated their committee to distribute a petition among the community's residents opposing any such move by the university and to seek legal advice. In the petition, the residents "demand the right, as human beings, to have a major voice in determining what shape our community shall take."

The residents think that "with strong opposition from the neighborhood, the University mightn't be willing to fight for a few parking stalls."

Associate Vice-President Leitch said the advantages of the laneways for parking was important because a planned parkade with a capacity of 1000 has been postponed by the Board of Governors Building Committee "because of uncertainty about the university's size." There are presently about 5000 parking stalls on the campus.

The North Garneau proposal would create from 300 to 400 parking stalls. Leitch said that "special arrangements may have to be made" for the residents of the area who own cars. "If they want to utilize what is left of their backyards for their own parking, we may be able to give access to them."

He admitted that, given the number of cars already parking in the lanes and garages the proposal may only create "between 150 and 200" extra places. He said that the revenue accruing from fees for the stalls may not even pay for the maintenance of them but the proposal was not designed "to make money but to provide parking."

A secondary reason for the

proposal, according to Leitch, is that the lanes are apparently in poor condition. He says he "wouldn't want to walk down some of them at 8 o'clock at night."

"Because we own the area," says Leitch, "we have a responsibility to make it presentable. Even without parking we would have to do something to the back lanes."

Leitch cites delapidated garages and fences necessitating a clean-up. However, the university does not feel obligated to fix these up rather than tear them down. "The reason we acquired them was to tear them down, not build them up." He also says that since the students living in the houses are paying relatively low rent, they are assumed not to be paying for garages.

The residents contend that the university has not taken their needs into account and they are determined to fight for their rights. Organizers expect an almost 100 per cent response to the petition.

Other forms of action were suggested at the meeting. Miles Murray advocated the formation of a tenants' union and the withholding of rent. "Money is the only language these people understand," he said.

Barclay Johnson of 89 Avenue suggested that money be sought from the university or from the government's local incentives program to pay the residents to repair the garages and fences.

"I don't care how badly the university needs parking," said one resident, "I just don't want them tearing down the garage and trees in my backyard to do it."

by Bob Beal