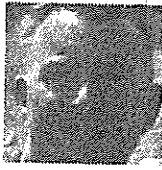


WNT

City has failed to prepare for growth of universities



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Doug Paziienza

Enrollment at the University of Minnesota Duluth and the College of St. Scholastica jumped 30 percent in 10 years. New construction at UMD since 2000 is valued at \$140 million. UMD injects \$300 million annually into the local economy. Is there any industry sector in the city that can match that?

What specifically has the city of Duluth done beyond the campus boundary to foster, encourage and accommodate this growth? The city has failed students and the neighbors on the fringes of the campuses by failing to prepare for this growth.

There is pent-up demand for market-rate student apartments and a commercial district serving Duluth's academic community. Both campuses are attractive, but student life off campus has limited curb appeal. Independence and community are integral parts of the college-life experience. Academic life need not be monastic. Here is a ripe-and-ready market waiting to flourish commercially, creatively and socially with bookshops, coffee bars, pubs, cafes and even a Kinko's.

Why has City Hall been so unwilling for so long to enable this to happen? We were crying for this in the 1980s when I was a student at UMD.

Students want a pedestrian university district with an identity and community spirit. Most UMD students are transplants. Half or more come from outside the Arrowhead region. They chose the University of Minnesota for its prestige and credentials. They chose Duluth for a unique, urban-wilderness experience. Many are let down by the feeling that the campus is an enclave in a sea of suburbia. The patchy commercial precincts of Kenwood, Mount Royal and Chester Park are oriented to motorists.

When is Duluth going to cease looking upon UMD like a community college?

The university draws students from all over. I came from New Jersey in 1982.

The enlightened people at Fuse Duluth recognize the value of local

graduates, but it is easy to get the impression the city is content to welcome students in September and then wave them off in May. Is Duluth merely a "college town" that contributes to the brain drain? Or is it a city poised to harness the brainpower and ambition that is incubating up over the hill?

The city has commissioned a market study, organized focus groups and solicited community commentary. That is a start. But what is really needed includes vision, progressive planning, design criteria and acceptance that the character of Kenwood and Woodland avenues and College Street must change.

If Rice Lake or Arrowhead roads are targeted for more apartments, those areas should be zoned urban/mixed-use, with a street plan that conforms and connects to the street-plan grid. There should be sidewalks, DTA access and neighborhood shops and services.

Students need serviceable, affordable, accessible, safe and modern living accommodations. Not all students wish to live on campus. Neither UMD nor St. Scholastica has the capacity to accommodate them.

Only one developer has invested anything toward satisfying the market demand. And his two complexes, Boulder Ridge and Campus Park, barely fit for purpose. They resemble sheds constructed of inferior materials; their sites resemble a bad example of a commuter park-and-ride; and their locations amount to isolated subdivisions that bear no relation to the community they serve. It is a travesty Duluth's planning commission, construction department and planning office allowed these blots on the landscape. Popping an apartment complex down on an undeveloped tract with no real linkages to organized neighborhoods is not responsible city planning.

UMD and St. Scholastica are marching forward with inspirational, architecturally renowned, LEED-certified edifices. Should we not aspire to provide equally stimulating abodes to the benefit of the students and all Duluthians?

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