**Opinion: Spense Havlick: CU and Boulder: Finding common ground**

Spense Havlick For the Camera

I Loved ‘’ Dear Old CU “

For nearly four decades after many commencements and basketball games, I would sing the CU Alma Mater (often out of tune) with devotion. In those early days the relationship between the City of Boulder and the University seemed compatible. Town and Gown events were lively yet friendly. But something has changed.

Could it be that both CU-Boulder and the City have increased in size and bureaucracy? Are city council members and CU regents not talking to each other?

The fundamental problem is that Boulder attempts to have a slow growth policy and the Boulder campus seems to have no population cap. CU officials seek to expand beyond the city limits in south Boulder and elsewhere. In 1977 there was a cap of 20,000 students. But now with 36,000 students, disturbances on the Hill and problems with crowded, unsafe housing, Dear Old CU is not so dear anymore.

I have observed that CU growth and land development challenges have strained relationships in recent years. The campus administration appears to be more focused on land development than being the academic “city on the hill”.

As a sovereign state entity it is assumed (somewhat incorrectly) that CU does not need to abide by city height ordinances or flood plain regulations. Nevertheless, as CU’s Research Park plan evolved on the East Campus, the city council negotiated flood guidelines to prevent losses and CU complied.

Numerous town gown relationships show signs of stress with unwanted campus growth. Schools large and small have promulgated unilateral policy decisions that negatively impact a town, and lead to reactions. Temple University’s “Stadium Stompers”  (community members, students and workers) halted the school’s dream to build its own football stadium. At University of California Santa Cruz city and county officials banded together to oppose campus expansion because of a crisis in available housing.  Excessive traffic, parking shortages, loss of property tax revenues, campus expansion, and unruly student behavior are grievances not only in Boulder but also in many university towns across America.

The researchers Forman, Greenberg, Le and McKay (2021) state, “ Universities have the capacity to add value to surrounding real estate and businesses, as well as to develop high-end housing and amenities. …where often the university-driven entrepreneurial activities have contributed to gentrification and housing unaffordability, increased policing and surveillance and the displacement of low –income communities.”

I join with those who opine that there is a better approach to finding common ground for improved city –campus relationships. It would require that elected officials, not administrators or professional staff, begin an ongoing face-to-face dialogue. The foci would be on mutually acceptable growth limits, land use free of natural hazards, climate change planning, addressing the lack of tax revenues, and the mitigation of social and/or economic injustice for both parties. The protocol should be transparent, public, well publicized and with annual checkpoints to evaluate and reward progress. A process similar to this has had good results on campuses such as Virginia Tech, the Air Force Academy, Brigham Young University, Clemson, Penn State, and University of Maryland.

Of course we should remember that we have a history of joint endeavors. The City granted $ 300,000 toward a Macky Auditorium renovation. CU created a student pass to encourage transit use and less student driving. The ECOPASS and HOP have been effective demand management tools. And there is cost -sharing of pedestrian/ cyclist underpasses at campus borders, student internships in city government and student employment in local businesses.

CU depends on city fire protection, but there is cooperative joint law enforcement when necessary.

Other good town-gown connections include the Office of Campus Housing and Neighborhood Relations and the City Manager’s Advisory Committee of students that work with student behavior and community issues.

The many free public lectures, libraries, art galleries, the Natural History Museum, and gatherings like the Conference on World Affairs enrich the university and community alike. Another intangible benefit of the university is the unique Tuscan Vernacular Revival architecture and elegant landscaping of the main campus of 786 acres. And CU’s world –class faculty and bright student body are the envy of many universities.

We should be able to bring back the fondness of  “Dear Old CU” with strong leadership from elected city and elected CU officials. The acrimony, disagreement or stalemate at the national level need not trickle down into our town.

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