

Friday, April 16, 2010

Temple growth faces balancing act

Philadelphia Business Journal - by [Bernard Dagenais](#)

Temple University is walking a fine line as it seeks to expand within its footprint, growing vertically to make more room for students to learn and live on campus.

To some degree, Temple President Ann Weaver Hart is trying to make up for some of the mistakes of decades past when the university shifted from being primarily a commuter school to drawing students from across Pennsylvania and beyond — without providing enough space for those students to live in.

Although developers sought to fill the gap, Hart acknowledges there have been growing pains in the neighborhood that are common to many so-called “town and gown” community and college relations.

Residents want to go to bed as students are going out on the town. Noise on the streets, public urination and parties in homes rented by students can be disruptive to longtime neighbors. Student safety, in a neighborhood that can be dangerous, also is a major Temple concern.

“A safe environment is a busy environment in which people are moving around,” Hart said.

The plan Hart outlined in a meeting with Philadelphia Business Journal reporters and editors this week (see Page 1) sets out to open up the campus, particularly around its main Broad Street thoroughfare. Buildings accentuated by windowless walls will be redeveloped with glass. Hart envisions a new library with a small auditorium that will “invite and entice” members of the community, making Philadelphia archives and special collections, for example, more accessible. She also seeks to address little things, such as a trash container that was screened on the university side but fully visible to neighbors, acknowledging a need to do better.

Hart said the university has sought to work closely with Philadelphia City Councilman Darrell Clarke, in whose district Temple is located, to address community concerns.

Clarke called the relationship with Temple ever-evolving. While he has proposed a bill that would add rules for landlords who house students in a bid to make someone responsible for neighborhood unruliness, he’s not pushing it for now.

The Temple Area Property Association, a landlord group, is trying to address some of Clarke’s concerns voluntarily. Herb Reid III, the group’s political liaison, said landlords are paying for trash collections. Reid, who is an officer with Maze Development — owner of 20 homes near Temple — said landlords needed a seat at the table. The group is trying to address problems, he said.

While there’s talk of a special services district, such as University City District, Temple isn’t anxious to do what the **University of Pennsylvania** has done in West Philadelphia and take on the role of prime funder.

There are advantages to having Temple in the midst of the neighborhood too. The redevelopment of nearby Progress Plaza, with the addition of a Fresh Grocer, and the construction of the Pearl Theater would not have happened without the student population. More development proposals, including retail and residential, also are in the works. Temple is an anchor for revitalization.

Clarke said federal and state subsidies have helped to increase home ownership surrounding Temple to ensure longtime residents aren’t displaced by gentrification — one of his major concerns.

The tension won’t be erased by any development plan, but listening to each other, as Hart said the university has done in devising its plan, is essential. Reid, who is optimistic about the Temple area’s future, said it pretty well: “It’s going to take all of us working together.”

*Bernard Dagenais, editor of Philadelphia Business Journal, can be reached at bdagenais@bizjournals.com.
([Twitter.com/berniedagenais](https://twitter.com/berniedagenais))*