

Suggestions from a Neighbor with Over 25 Years of Experience With Living Near Student Party Houses

I know that college students have always, and will always, want to drink and party. However, that doesn't mean there is nothing that can be done to make the situation safer for them and more tolerable for us neighbors. The primary focus should be on party houses (ie: Boarding Houses) which have been grandfathered in, so they don't have to abide by the city ordinance which states that no more than two unrelated adults may live in one unit. These houses with five to eight students in them will obviously attract students that like to have big parties. They are set up for that. That said, the even more focused attention should be on party houses which share a common backyard. These big, common backyards are the setting for almost all the outrageous, out-of-control outdoor parties.

To deal with these problems, I think everyone should finally admit that efforts, so far, have been ineffective. Efforts by the police, Notre Dame officials, and student leaders to talk to students and encourage good behavior have not worked in the past 25 years, and there's no hope that they will work in the future. The fundamental problem, assuming the students even care if they are admonished, is that each year a new group of students show up in the 24 party houses in our immediate neighborhood. Assume each of them has an average of two obnoxious parties before they get a friendly or stern warning from the police or Notre Dame officials. Even if they comply and behave well for the rest of the year, that means we have, on average, 48 of these parties every single year with no end in sight. That's exactly how it's been and will continue to be. It's intolerable.

While I'm grateful to the police—especially—and to the officials from Notre Dame and student leaders for their efforts, I think the following ideas will finally make a real difference.

Ideas for the City:

1. Go back to the legislation which South Bend was set to pass before the naive idea that a CCAC (Campus and Community Advisory Council) could solve the problem. The proposed language in 2007 stated that "any person or entity desiring to host, conduct or permit a special event at a boarding house, where 25 or more persons are invited and would have access to alcoholic beverages of any kind, must first obtain a Conditional Use Permit for a Special Event at a Boarding House."
2. Require that these party houses (ie Boarding Houses) have back yards separated by six foot fences at the property lines.
3. Toughen up the noise ordinances. Currently police dispatchers tell me that on the weekends the police can't go out and quiet down parties until after 11PM, so parents have to tell their sleepless children, "I'm sorry, Honey, but there's nothing I can do until 11PM." (11PM is past my wife and my bedtime, too.)
4. Toughen up the nuisance property ordinance. My understanding is that currently, in order to be considered a nuisance property an individual property must have at least 5 visits from the police in 60 days. That is so lenient (from my perspective as someone who is surrounded by 24 of these party houses) that it is laughably useless. The law should also be changed to count fire department visits to extinguish huge, dangerous bon-fires as a nuisance call.

5. After 10 years, eliminate the status of a grandfathered boarding house. I understand that investors bought these houses for a price assuming they would be able to make a lot of money renting to many students. But it has been over 20 years since the ordinance was passed disallowing more than two unrelated adults in one unit. Must these houses be allowed to be a scourge forever? If the City truly, legally can't do anything about it, might the City and Notre Dame be able to offer the landlord some money to give up the boarding house designation? (I'll pitch in!)
6. The city should pass an ordinance in which no more than three people with alcoholic beverages should be allowed on a roof lest they be subject to fines. These wild parties almost always have numerous drunken students on the roofs or porches and garages. One day, someone is going to fall to their death.
7. Code enforcement should drive by these houses the Monday after each football weekend and the day after Halloween, Fat Tuesday, and St. Patrick's Day in order to see who should be cited for litter and trash. They should also come by during the first week of school, graduation week, and during unseasonably warm weather during the winter.
8. The Property Assessor should consider the unique pecuniary value of these Boarding Houses with common backyards and assess the property taxes accordingly.

Ideas for the Police:

- A. Ticket the students; don't just ask them to quiet down.
- B. Work in conjunction with other law enforcement agencies to conduct raids in which under age drinkers and those who host them are busted.
- C. The police should ding each house for a nuisance call that has parties on the porch and in the backyard instead of just the one address that they got the call about. They all contribute to the din, so they should all be held accountable.

Ideas for Notre Dame and the Other Universities:

- I. They should realize that just talking to students will not keep our neighborhoods livable and the students safe. These students are in grave danger of alcohol poisoning, injuries connected to drunkenness, rape connected to drunkenness, and more shootings. They should speak in favor of reforms such as these instead of trying to block them.
- II. Rude off-campus party behavior should be banned by the university's code of ethics for their students. When I was at Notre Dame, a friend of a friend got in trouble for some lewd, yet legal, behavior while on spring break in Florida. His friends said it was none of Notre Dame's business what he did off campus. Notre Dame felt differently and suspended him.
- III. Campus police should work in conjunction with the city police. They should do raids together. They should come to a working agreement in which they are authorized to ticket and fine their own off campus students and report them to the college disciplinary system. If that really cannot be done, then the Notre Dame Police and off-campus employees should drive down the streets late at night during these predictable party nights and call the police themselves, rather than residents having to, once again, drag

themselves out of bed to do so. They also can make their own notes of which students are in violation of their code of ethics.

- IV. The Universities should no longer list these Boarding Houses on their list of landlords who are interested in renting to students. By doing so, they are facilitating a dangerous, unhealthy year for their students and as well as the degradation of our neighborhoods. I would think they are morally, as well as perhaps legally, responsible for what goes on in these houses if they help facilitate these rentals.

Matthew P. Costello
120 N. Notre Dame Ave.
South Bend, IN 46617
minimana@att.net
574 233-3205