

# Apartment complexes to bring downtown traffic

By Kathryn Cargo The Shorthorn senior staff | Posted: Wednesday, February 12, 2014 12:30 am

With two new apartment complexes approved to be built near campus, Gincy Thoppil, City of Arlington Development Services planning manager, said the lines between downtown Arlington and UTA are starting to blur.

“I think it brings more liveliness to the downtown area,” Thoppil said. “The city really wants to have that kind of relationship with the university.”

The future complexes, Sapphire Inspired Living Apartments and Arlington Lofts, were approved Jan. 7 and Jan. 21, respectively. Both apartment complexes will have more bedrooms and dwelling units per acre than Midtown Urban Student Living and Campus Edge. Arlington Lofts will replace the Catalina Apartments, according to a previous Shorthorn article.

These complexes are key projects in moving forward the development of downtown, said Jon Weist, vice president for Arlington Chamber of Commerce’s Center for Public Policy.

Downtown is not heavily populated right now, and adding these apartments adds property value and helps attract students to stay in Arlington, he said.

“You can’t have business activity downtown unless you have people downtown to use these businesses,” Weist said. “We don’t support clusters of apartments just for the sake of apartments. Arlington Lofts were so important because it fits the university’s master plan.”

More housing density around the university could help meet overall housing needs for students, Weist said.

Demand for on-campus housing has increased significantly in the past decade, and UTA currently offers beds for more than 6,100 students, university spokeswoman Kristin Sullivan said. The residence halls on campus are 100 percent occupied with Midtown and Campus Edge and Maverick Place at 97 percent, said Lance Hanna, Greystar real estate managing director.

Off-campus housing is also reaching its limit. Currently, 21,000 students live off campus, Hanna said. The off-campus housing options are approaching 100 percent occupancy with the exception of an older property south of the campus, he said.

Hanna said he only sees housing this tight in major metropolitan areas such as New York and Chicago. The nationwide occupancy for student housing is 95 percent, and some housing around UTA has an occupancy of 100 percent. A healthy amount of occupancy would be 95 percent, Hanna said.

Although both of these complexes were proposed to City Council twice before they were approved, residents voiced concerns for the size of the apartments, the living density and overall safety of pedestrians and students.

The main concern for Arlington Lofts was the increased amount of students that would be crossing Abram Street. Hanna explained to residents during a City Council meeting about a pedestrian hybrid beacon system to be added Abram Street for safe travel from the apartments to the university and rapid flashing beacon to be added UTA Boulevard.

Arlington resident Sandra DenBraber said her main concern is safety for students. Students drive the wrong way on the one-way Mesquite Street, she said, and the 11 parallel parking spaces to be added to the street for the apartments and possible parking overflow concerns her.

“I think it’s a hazard because students speed going to school. The other is they don’t have enough parking for all the students to be in the apartments,” DenBraber said.

The City of Arlington Community Development and Planning helps developers who want to construct apartments like Arlington Lofts and Sapphire Inspired Living through the process of getting through planning and zoning commissions, Thoppil said.

Before the proposal is presented to the City Council, it must meet all the requirements such as how many parking spaces there must be per resident, and how many dwelling units per acre, Thoppil said.

The concerns DenBraber had were issues already happening in the area Sapphire Inspired Living Apartments will be built, Thoppil said. DenBraber was put in contact with the police department.

“We try to get the people or citizens who have a concern with a project connected to someone that will have it resolved,” she said.

If there are concerns after the project is approved, Thoppil said they stay in good contact with the developers to see if anything can be done to address the concerns.

“Not that the issue goes completely away, but it will at least be minimized,” she said.

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