

Oxford Tract Planning Committee Minority Report

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Introduction

This minority report presents the crucial components we believe are lacking from the final Oxford Tract Planning Committee report and emphasizes in the clearest terms possible that the report is not an endorsement of development. Our charge as the Oxford Tract Planning Committee was “to **evaluate** and **recommend** feasible options for relocating the programs and research activities at the Oxford Tract to one or more other UC Berkeley locations.”¹ We would like to emphasize that we were not able to fully complete either of those tasks due to not being provided sufficient information on site alternatives, and our insufficient expertise on conducting high-level legal, soil quality, environmental impact, and economic assessments of the other sites. As a committee, we chose to not use the word “recommend” as we are not recommending what is being portrayed as the inevitable development of the Oxford Tract.

Our three tasks in order to complete the charge were the following²:

1. *Developing criteria* to guide the assessment of the suitability of each potential new location for specific OT programs/activities (**completed**)
2. *Identifying and assessing specific potential relocation sites*, to include consideration of anticipated impacts on research, teaching, and outreach activities, and of ways to mitigate those impacts.
3. *Preparing a financial analysis for each option*, to consider costs associated with planning for the transition, preparing the new site(s), coordinating and supporting activities that may no longer be physically co-located, etc...

¹ Oxford Tract Planning Committee Charge from Chancellor Christ, 2017

² Oxford Tract Planning Committee Charge from Chancellor Christ, 2017

We were unable to complete tasks 2 and 3 due to issues explained above. Task 3 asks us to plan “for the transition”³ and to prepare the new site, again insinuating inevitable displacement for development.

Careful language is necessary when publishing reports such as the Oxford Tract Planning Committee report, which may have drastic consequences for the future of the students, faculty, and researchers within the College of Natural Resources, as well as the community at large. We found the committee process disorganized and many committee members were confused as to their role and the greater charge of the committee throughout the process, which is concerning considering the potential consequences.

Though our charge focused on the relocation of Oxford Tract facilities, this report also includes what some of us believe should have been included in the report regarding student housing, as this topic is implied when we explore mixed use options for the site.

Components of Report Supported

Considering the circumstances and complexity of this site, we appreciate and support many aspects of the final report. The following list explicitly states our gratitude for and approval of the following inclusions:

1. The report clearly and correctly outlines how and for whom the research at Oxford Tract is critical.
2. It clearly stated that many of the facilities could not be easily relocated.
3. The report identifies the factors that make the Oxford Tract facilities useful and unique to the campus community as well as neighbors.
4. It is emphasized that the demand for field access will only increase with burgeoning fields and increased research in urban farming.
5. The ultimate conclusion is that there should not be development on the Oxford Tract if it means disrupting the educational aspects of the facility.

There are more components of the report that we support, but our concerns are listed below.

Legal Concerns

In **Section 7: Recommended Next Steps**, the report addresses a mandate cited by the Secretary of Regents in 1948: “the Oxford Tract represents the minimum amount of land for outdoor laboratory purposes convenient to indoor laboratories and classrooms which will permit the University of California College of Agriculture to carry on advanced instruction and research in agriculture on the Berkeley campus.” However, the report fails to question whether its loss would jeopardize the land-grant university status of UC Berkeley. Moreover, the outside funding

³ Oxford Tract Planning Committee Charge from Chancellor Christ, 2017

received by the College of Natural Resources is not mentioned throughout this report. Agricultural Experiment Station (AES 19900 funds) account for approximately 27% of department revenue; and Department of Agricultural and Natural Resources (DANR) funding supports our Cooperative Extension Specialist program, salaries, benefits, and other direct and indirect support for CNR. How could we move forward with a potential development if a loss of facilities and resulting reduction in productivity threaten our ability to carry on that mandate or threaten departmental revenue? At no time has our department or the committee publicly commented on the potential loss of funds. Analysis of this funding needs to be addressed – and should be the first component considered as it could make the work of this committee unnecessary.

Imbalanced Representation on the Committee

We find it concerning that there was not an invitation to participate or representation from many of those who use the Oxford Tract facilities and fields. For example, faculty conducting agroecological and urban farming research, such as Professors Miguel Altieri and Tim Bowles, were not represented⁴. As Dean Gilles stated, the charge of this committee was primarily to give voice to the College of Natural Resources community and we wish this had occurred for those that are daily users of the Oxford Tract's instructional and research fields, rather than solely those doing research in the lab facilities and on transgenic corn in the fields. Additionally, it required extensive research and pressure by undergraduate students from the Student Organic Gardening Association (SOGA) to place a representative on the Oxford Tract Planning Committee. This should be known as we push forward as a campus community to achieve greater equity, inclusion, and representation across departments and programs. We ask that the University invite underrepresented populations, especially, in this case those who would be most impacted by the development, into these committees and decision-making processes in the future.

Soil Quality

The Oxford Tract is classified as Grade 3 (Fair) by the USDA Custom Soil Resource Report⁵. For clarification, the USDA delineations represent “an area dominated by one or more major kinds of soil.”⁶ This means that a small area, such as Oxford Tract, could easily be classified as Grade 3 even if it would possibly fall under Grades 1 or 2 (Excellent or Good). The fields have been planted for years and incredibly productive due to the build up of organic matter. From our research, there has not been sufficient soil testing and analysis of the instructional and research fields to determine their quality. Finally, according to the USDA Soil Report, “onsite investigation may be needed to validate these interpretations and to confirm the identity of the soil on a given

⁴ Oxford Facility Comments from students, faculty, board members pg. 3

⁵ Custom Soil Resource Report for Alameda County, CA. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2 February 2018.

⁶ Custom Soil Resource Report for Alameda County, CA. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2 February 2018.

site.”⁷ We ask that this investigation be conducted by an independent soil scientist and researcher to determine the quality of soil on Oxford Tract’s research and instructional fields.

Alternative Sites Considered

The Oxford Tract Planning Committee report states the alternative sites that we visited in order to consider relocation. We find a few components missing to accurately understand our methods and analysis. Firstly, we were not connected with users of the alternative sites (e.g. Gill Tract, Strawberry Canyon Facility, etc...) to understand how the potentially relocated Oxford Tract facilities would integrate with the current uses. Second, we were not provided sufficient information regarding the site criteria listed, such as sunlight, soil quality, and topography, to factually consider the viability of facility and field relocation. Lastly, though some of the greenhouses and supporting lab facilities may be larger than necessary, the instructional and research fields are completely put into use and, if anything, not large enough to meet demand. If the facilities are to be accommodated in new facilities with a smaller footprint on the current site, this should not impact the size and location of instructional and research fields.⁸

On Housing

Undergraduates report paying higher monthly rents in university-owned housing than non-university owned (\$1577 compared with \$1252), according to the Housing Survey Preliminary Findings⁹. An anecdotal comment included in the Housing Survey Preliminary Findings is: “The Berkeley Student Cooperative has given me the absolute best living situation I could ask for... It is extremely affordable and provides nutritious food, a welcoming and academically focused community and an abundance of amenities” – Undergraduate Student. If costs were lower, students could reduce commute time and associated costs. Building market-rate or above market-rate student dormitories will not address these realities and standards of living for students most in need. Price is shown as the #1 most important factor for undergraduate, graduate, and postdoc students¹⁰.

In **Section 5: Alternative Sites Considered**, statements regarding the survey claim that “undergraduate students rank the Oxford Tract more highly than the Smyth-Fernwald site.”¹¹ Placed after the graduate student and postdocs results, this statement is misleading because it does not include that undergraduate students ranked most sites (e.g. Unit 3 densification, Upper Hearst parking garage, Channing & Ellsworth) before Oxford Tract as well as shared cooperative housing rooms (after studio apartments) as the preferred housing types.¹² We encourage this misrepresentation to be taken into account.

⁷ Custom Soil Resource Report for Alameda County, CA. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2 February 2018.

⁸ Oxford Tract Planning Committee Report. 1 February 2018.

⁹ Housing Survey Preliminary Findings, pg 29.

¹⁰ Housing Survey Preliminary Findings, pg 29.

¹¹ Oxford Tract Planning Committee Report. 1 February 2018.

¹² Housing Survey Preliminary Findings, pg. 31-2.

Alternative Housing Sites

We would like to call for UC Berkeley to further investigate the following sites for student housing development and to release a thorough report exploring the current and future usages:

1. University Ave. and Oxford St.: This lot was going to be developed into a hotel, estimated to be 10 stories high and have 200 hotel rooms¹³. If the layout was reconfigured, this could house the same amount, if not more, students than at Oxford Tract.
2. University House: In order to genuinely address underutilized UC-owned property, let us consider the massive space in the Chancellor's garden and currently empty estate for student housing and additional food-producing campus gardens. The University House is ~2.5 acres, which is the same as the most aggressive housing development on the Oxford Tract and much closer to campus. Rather than using the University House "extensively for entertaining"¹⁴, we advise you to consider the urgent needs of students to be housed. See this as an incredible opportunity to break tradition by converting the University House into student housing and gardening space.

Recommended Next Steps

We agree that independent legal counsel is necessary to investigate the legality of claims above. This should be first priority.

Transparency and inclusion are crucial to this process. We echo the sentiments from the report on public discussion, with emphasis on the University hosting community forums before charging any more committees or making any lasting land-use decisions. When consultants are hired by the Director of Physical and Environmental Planning to conduct further analyses, members of the Oxford Tract Planning Committee must be included in these discussions **as well as** all current and known future users of the Oxford Tract facilities. This will help to address issues of representation in analyses used for decision-making.

More viable student housing sites, such as those listed above, should be investigated and assessed as soon as possible. Priority should be placed on options that would provide affordable housing options for low-income students, meaning below market-rate.

Finally, we wish to declare in the clearest terms possible that the Final Oxford Tract Planning Committee Report is not an endorsement of development - and development should be dismissed unconditionally if it infringes on research, educational opportunities, or impacts our departments funding or ability to fulfill Land Grant mandates as they relate to agriculture in the state of California.

¹³ "UC Berkeley plans to construct hotel on University Avenue and Oxford Street". The Daily Californian. 14 August 2018.

¹⁴ "New Cal chancellor shuns campus' pricey mansion." San Francisco Chronicle. 10 July 2017.