

# Building boom transforming West Campus neighborhood

## Change in city's development rules encourages new building

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The West Campus neighborhood is under construction.

Three years after city officials approved a plan to encourage high-rise and high-density development just west of the University of Texas campus, a dozen large apartment and condo complexes totaling more than 1,700 units are under construction or just completed. At least three more large projects are planned, including a 21-story tower at the northeast corner of Rio Grande and 21st streets.

"It's pretty amazing, but I think it is indicative of what happens when the city comes into an area and says, 'We really are going to allow density to occur in this area in a planned and thoughtful manner,' " said market researcher and real estate consultant Charles Heimsath of Capitol Market Research.

Many of the new buildings have ground-floor retail shops and wide, pedestrian-friendly sidewalks.

It's the first major construction boom in the West Campus area since 1984, when tighter zoning rules discouraged denser development by preventing many property owners from rebuilding as many units as they demolished.

As a result, students spread out all over the city, including into nearby campus neighborhoods where single-family houses were converted into apartments or replaced by so-called superduplexes.

Seeking to preserve predominately single-family neighborhoods nearby while increasing student housing close to campus, neighborhood groups, property owners and UT students and officials cooperated in a yearlong planning process that resulted in the University Neighborhood Overlay.

The new development rules significantly increased the density and height allowed in the area, including base heights of up to 15 stories just west of the section of Guadalupe Street known as the Drag.

Developers who want to build to the maximum heights are required to price 10 percent of their units for moderate- or lower-income renters or pay a fee.

Mary Ingle, vice president of the North University Neighborhood Association, said the overlay plan is having the desired effect.

It has taken some of the pressure off neighborhoods like hers to house large numbers of students, and the new rentals in West Campus are forcing some landlords to spruce up their properties to compete, Ingle said

"They can't charge exorbitant rents for apartments over here if they are dumps when there are nice new lovely places over in West Campus just waiting to get snatched up," Ingle said.

The new apartments are pushing up the price of housing in West Campus, already one of the most expensive areas in the city.

**Uptown Realty broker Dan Brickley said new two-bedroom apartments, which are typically 850 to 1,100 square feet, generally rent for between \$1,800 and \$2,400 a month. That compares to rents of between \$1,200 and \$1,600 for units built in the 1980s.**

Parking, which is often free at older buildings, typically costs between \$75 and \$100 a month in the new ones.

The new projects haven't made student housing near campus easier to find.

Almost all of the apartments under construction are replacing older rental units, exacerbating the perennial housing shortage near campus.

"When they tear all these places down, they don't build it back up the next day, so we have a shortage," Brickley said.

"We'll have a shortage of affordable one- and two-bedroom apartments for quite a while."

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**