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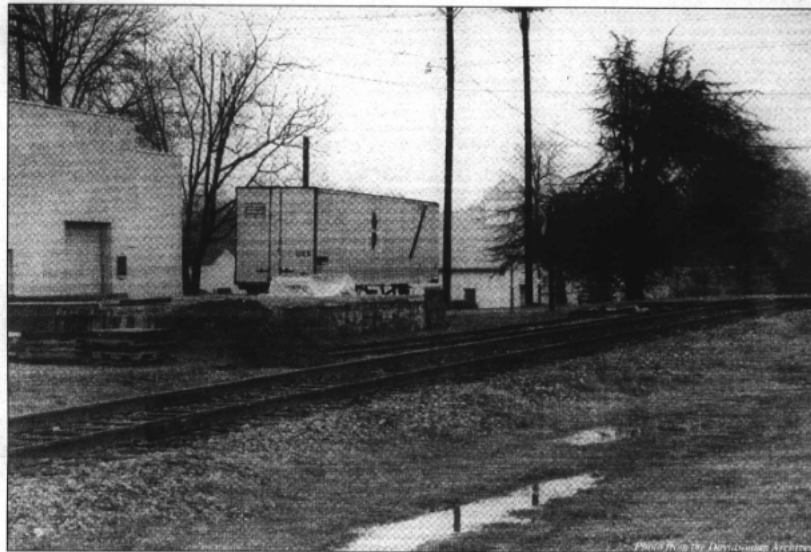
Griffith Street greenway spawns controversy

By AARON HOUCK
Staff Writer

Over fall break, three houses on Griffith Street (the street that leads to Main Street from Interstate 77) were taken down. These events brought about increased criticism from members of the community opposed to the creation of a greenway entrance to Davidson College. One home was moved by the college at the request of the owner, one was razed (it also was to be moved, but, being a concrete block house, that option was too expensive), and the third was burned by the Davidson Fire Department in a training exercise. In each case, the residents were relocated to better houses at the college's expense. "I've really enjoyed working with those folks," Irvin Brawley of the Davidson Physical Plant said. "I feel good that we've done something good for the people."

Since 1984, the college has acquired property along Griffith Street with the intention of creating a "ribbon of green" as an entrance to the college from the interstate. "We realize that many people visit the college who have never been here before and many things can make a first impression," said President Bobby Vagt. Irvin Brawley explained, "The houses that were there were not in good repair. The approach to the college is important and a greenway space is better than those homes."

Reaction from the community, however, has often been negative and sometimes quite harsh. Most of the families who lived along Griffith Street were African-American and were of lower economic means. Some people, telling of widespread dissatisfaction in the area, have described Davidson College and its policy as "conniving" and spoke even of "ethnic cleansing." "I don't understand why Davidson College, as a Christian institution would want to move lower-income people out to make a beautiful, green entrance," said one member of the community who wished to remain anonymous. "I'm not against Davidson College, but I feel that this was a bad thing — not just for the people moved out, but also for the



◆ A view from the East side of the tracks facing the northwest after a rainy day in Davidson. The nearby Griffith Street community lies just beyond the trees toward the right.

college."

Guydell Connor grew up on Griffith Street in a house his father built. "It was not a house, it was a home — where we experienced love, sadness, pain, everything you experience in life," said Mr. Connor. His childhood home was one of the houses removed recently. "What was once a vital, vibrant neighborhood is now gone," he remarked.

Mr. Connor is upset with the college, feeling that it had no consideration as it single-mindedly pursued a grand entrance.

The college stresses that it is concerned very much for the well-being of the people being relocated. The resident of one of the homes was given money to purchase a new house in Lakeside Terrace. Two other families were moved into a

duplex built by the college. Ms. Margaret Latter, who was moved to the duplex, says that she was "very well pleased" with the arrangements. "The college was very nice," she reported. "They bought my house and reduced the rent, built me a new house and reduced the rent again." Mr. Brawley,

◆ See *Greenway* on page 4 for continuation

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Davidson partners with Biosphere 2

Greenway debate brings college's aims into question

♦ Story continued from front page

speaking of Ms. Latter, told how upon seeing him now "she gives me a big ol' hug around the neck."

Others contend, however, that the college should not be engaged in relocating people of modest income levels. Dr. David Kaylor, Professor of Religion, is a member of the board of the Davidson Housing Coalition and was on the board of the Davidson chapter of Habitat for Humanity for its first years, serving as its president as well. He explained that the people being moved out are "essentially people without power, and feel pushed in ways hard for people with power to understand. If the houses all around you are being torn down, you feel some pressure to get out while you can." Kaylor believes that the college should be sensitive when dealing with the people to be relocated, and should help them to deal with the issues of moving such as property taxes.

"My problem is that I want them to build something, not just let the land lie there when people need homes," said Evelyn Carr, who lives on Griffith Street. Approximately two years ago, the town came up with a "Village-Center Master Plan" for downtown Davidson that called for low-income housing on the college's property on Griffith Street, but the college was not interested at the time. "Two questions I had of the town plan," said President Vagt, "were 1) why was all of the affordable housing on the West side of the train tracks, and 2) why was it all on college property?" President Vagt said that the college would like to see affordable housing developed throughout the town, not "segregated" to the West side. In response, Ms. Carr said, "It is already segregated—we can't afford to live on the East side. The college should pay its employees enough for people to be able to afford to live over there."

"Right now there are no concrete plans for the

land on Griffith Street except for it to be a greenway," said Irvin Brawley. "We are not going to create a maintenance nightmare by planting flowers." There are many different ideas, however, about what should be done with the property. Some advocate allowing businesses to move into the accessible, convenient location. Dr. Kaylor says that the Davidson Housing Coalition would also be interested in the properties: "The lots are so deep you have space to have affordable housing units as well as a green-way space. Affordable does not mean it has to be a slum."

Davidson College would "consider any reasonable plan that had affordable housing all over the community," according to President Vagt. "We're open to suggestion," said Irvin Brawley, "but there has not been a good suggestion that meets the needs of everyone."

Many people suggest that much of the problem stems from a lack of communication between the college and the community. "Davidson College should be an integral part of the community—not just the students," said Mr. Connor. "If the president would come and walk through the community and say 'Hello,' we would not feel segregated," suggested Ms. Carr. "I like to talk to people; if you see me in the post office, say 'Hi' and let's chat."

Davidson College does not feel removed from the community nor does it want to be. "For thirty years," Vagt explained, "this college has been a positive force behind affordable housing. It is an important goal that this community continue to have affordable housing, but that is only half the quest—the other half is making certain that this affordable housing is not segregated to one specific area." In doing so however, people like Guydell Connor wish that the college would allow affordable housing to be replaced along Griffith Street. Mr. Connor protested, "In years to come, people will forget there ever was a Griffith Street community."

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Chris Pruitt '00

Davidson's Griffith Street land is our land, too

Let's face it — 80% of Davidson students probably didn't notice that bulldozers leveled two homes on Griffith Street while we were gone for Fall Break. With the release of Aaron Houck's article on this Griffith Street land use controversy, questions are sure to arise on the subject. (I suggest you stop and read Aaron's article on the subject if you haven't yet, as my editorial assumes an understanding of the facts delineated there.) If you're like I was at first, you're probably thinking, "What's the problem? There's nothing wrong with a greenway; it makes our entryway look nicer. But, why is the community expressing such mixed feelings?"

The issue of confusion is that something greater than the creation of a manicured entryway is at stake here. In Davidson, affordable land is scarce. Since the construction of Lake Norman 20 some years ago, population in this area has skyrocketed, and so have property values. The land along Griffith Street is some of the only affordable land left in this town. Estimates suggest that the average tax value of a Griffith street lot and home is \$36,053 while the average tax value of a lot and home in the greater Davidson area is \$199,513. With high-priced homes becoming the norm, the underprivileged are being effectively "priced out" of this community. Even if it is unintentional, it is still economic segregation. By owning 18 of the 25 lots along Griffith Street, Davidson College is participating in this trend. We're not just creating a greenway; we're hoarding inexpensive land at the risk of pushing out those who can't afford homes anywhere else.

Davidson College has done nothing illegal here; we forced no residents from their homes. That doesn't mean what we're doing isn't still wrong. I've heard a lot of irate voices lately who say that the college is attempting to hide from prospectives and visitors the poverty that is a real part of this community. In light of Davidson College's long history of supporting Habitat for Humanity and the Ada

Jenkins Center I want desperately not to jump to such a conclusion. I do wonder though, why are the administrators of this project suddenly washing their hands of this tradition? If Davidson College really cherishes diversity, economic and racial, like we say we do then we will work to preserve it in our surrounding community. Beauty is relative and I hate to see Davidson College embracing such a narrow definition of the idea by replacing simple affordable homes and porches filled with smiling faces with empty lots of trees surrounded by perfect little piles of pine straw.

So, now what? We've already bought the land and razed the houses. That doesn't have to be the end of "Davidson College Development Company's" involvement on Griffith Street. The lots are deep and could accommodate new affordable homes, design specifications of which the college could dictate. While I don't pretend to understand the logistics of overseeing an affordable housing project, I do know we have to do something because I'm tired of grimacing every time I drive down Griffith Street and think of how wasteful my college is being. I understand that Davidson College is not solely a charitable organization, but if we didn't want the responsibility that comes with buying up scarce affordable land, we never should have started buying it in the first place.

I keep saying 'we' and 'our' because the land is titled in the name of Davidson College: it is our land. As students, faculty, staff and alumni we are responsible for what is occurring on Griffith Street. It is time to take responsibility and to let our voices be heard. Whether you agree with the greenway or not, e-mail Bob Collins in the Physical Plant or stop Bobby Vagt in the hallway and tell him. This project reflects upon all of us and it is time we had some say in the matter.

Lydia Wilson '01