

EPISODE 1: “Housing is a [BLEEP]” TRANSCRIPT w/ Citations

KACIE LUCCHINI BUTCHER: Ok, so listen to this.

[NEWSPAPER FOLDING]

On July 20 a meeting was held at the ... university ... attended by a quite diverse group of individuals: students, teachers, lawyers, aldermen, blue collar workers, white collar workers... Their one bond was that all were tenants in Madison and ... (they were there) to discuss the possibilities of a community-wide Madison Tenant Union.¹

ALEXANDRA PASQUALONE: What are we reading?

KLB: It's a *Daily Cardinal* article digging into housing issues in Madison.

AP: Ooh, OK

[MUSIC]

KLB: It says most of the people at this meeting:

“had at some time been confronted with the fact that the Madison housing market is characterized by high rents, inadequate maintenance, discrimination, and an artificially controlled shortage of apartments.

AP: I hear that.

KLB: Right? And it specifically gets into how any new housing going up near campus is all luxury high-rises:

[GETTING FASTER/BREATHLESS]

“Neighborhood residents now have no choice as to what kind of housing is being built because developers are all building high-rise, high-rent units...

The campus area and the city in general are not in need of luxury apartments but this is the kind of housing being provided by private developers...

They are designed for *profit* with little consideration given to the [people] who will be living in them...

AP: OK student journalists, go off!

¹ “Madison Tenant Union.” *Daily Cardinal*, August 1969.

KLB: I know. Not pulling punches. And just listen to these numbers they give about rent increases. According to one estimate, over four years:

“The average rent for most double apartments has increased about \$5-10 per month per year... This would mean that an apartment which rented for \$115 per month ... would cost about \$140 per month for the next school year.”

AP: I'm sorry, what?!

KLB: Yeah! That's a rent hike of like 20 percent!

AP: No, I mean \$140 a month? What decade is this from?!

KLB: Oh, did I not say? It's from 1969. Why do you think we added sound effects for an actual print newspaper?

AP: But everything they were talking about...

KLB: ... sounds basically the exact same as what experts were telling us in interviews for the podcast like last month?

[MONTAGE]

SARA GOLDRICK RAB: ... And these places are sometimes just really overpriced, sometimes just run by really lousy landlords who don't, you know, don't deal with health and safety issues.

KASIE STRAHL: these high rises just keep getting built. And so the lack of options, to have that affordable housing, just, just, don't exist.

JEFF NOVAK: There's only so much housing to be had, which is just unfortunately a market supply and demand issue. And students are really feeling the pinch of that.

SGR: ... And rent is for so many people, whether or not you're in college, just this major obstacle.

KLB: Everything old is new again.. Or whatever. I guess it could be kind of comforting to know that finding housing in Madison has always been a [BLEEP]?

[THEME MUSIC]

From the Rebecca M. Blank Center for Campus History, this is Reorientation, a podcast exploring the history of UW–Madison you won't get on your campus welcome tour. I'm Kacie Lucchini Butcher.

AP: And I'm Alexanra Pasqualone. For Season Two we're talking about where students live. (And faculty and staff and everyone else in Madison for that matter.) Housing is one of the most basic, fundamental things people need when they go to college. So why is it so expensive? And competitive? And stressful to find?

KLB: Why are these campus housing challenges so persistent, year after year, decade after decade? And if students are struggling to find a decent place to live, how does it affect their ability to succeed? ... And the university's ability to carry out its mission?

[MUSIC]

KLB: So, just a quick aside: that Daily Cardinal article we were quoting, it was from their August 1969 special new student issue that they called **[THROAT CLEAR]** "Un-orientation". And they quote, "aimed at showing the other side of the University, a side that isn't detailed in the University's orientation." **[THROAT CLEAR]**

AP: Ya know, great artists steal...

KLB: But as long as we're coming clean about being unoriginal hacks, we figured why not go all in on stealing ideas. So to kick this season off, we present our very own *RE*-orientation unofficial, quick and dirty newcomers guide to campus housing at UW.

[CHEESY MUSIC STING]

AP: Whether you're actually a new student or you've been around campus forever and you've always wondered '*why are things like this?*' consider this your one-stop destination for everything you need to know about living in Madison.

[AIR HORN SOUND]

KLB: So, if you're coming to UW as a new undergrad, chances are good that you'll start your housing journey in the most college-y of all college living arrangements: the dorms.

JN: ... we house upwards of 9,000 undergraduate students in our residence halls

KLB: That's Jeff Novak. He runs UW's Division of University Housing.

JN: Jeff Novak. I serve as an Associate Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration, and the Director of University housing here on campus.

AP: Jeff says UW-Madison isn't one of those schools that requires freshmen to live in the dorms but...

JN: We do capture 92% of the freshman class each year, and then have a little space for returners, those that desire to live with us.

AP: He says the dorms are a popular option with new students because they're affordable, (relatively speaking at least) and they're part of that quintessential *college* experience.

KLB: The dorms are often the first place new students start to find a community on campus. But these days being *close* with your roommates means really close quarters. Because freshman classes keep getting bigger and the residence halls stay the same size. Alright, alright, alright...

[Alright Alright Alright Audio]

JN: You know, when I started 11 years ago it was 6,500 in the freshman class and now it's at 8,500. You know and we have not had new housing in that time. And we've handled it through the use of tripling rooms, lounge space. And it's not ideal. It works right now.

AP: Wait, why does that sound familiar?

KLB: Maybe because they were talking about that same problem back in that 1969 *Daily Cardinal* article?

AP: Again with that?

[NEWSPAPER SOUND]

KLB: Yup. Here's a quote from it:

University enrollment has increased rapidly from the mid-fifties ... (but) since the opening of Ogg Hall in 1965, university expansion continued, enrollment has gone up, apartments have been demolished, and no new University housing has been built.

KLB: Not to dive too far down the history hole yet because we'll get into it much more in the next few episodes. But basically for its first several decades, there weren't that many students at UW.²

² For more on the early history of UW-Madison, we recommend Cronon, Edmund David, and John W. Jenkins. *The University of Wisconsin: A History*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.

AP: Going to college was something a few mostly white, mostly wealthy people did. And they lived in a few smaller residence halls on campus, or in rooming houses and apartments nearby.

KLB: But then came World War II, and the GI Bill, and the baby boom. Enrollment exploded, and to house all these new students, the university started building the big dorms we know today. But as both the Cardinal and Jeff Novak point out, construction has never really been able to keep pace with enrollment. It's been a decades-long game of catch up.

AP: The last time the university built new housing was back in 2013 with the opening of Leopold Hall. And even then it only added 175 more beds.

KLB: So is any new university-owned housing on the horizon?

AP: Short answer: not really. The university included a plan for a new 2,000-bed residence hall in their wishlist for the next two-year state budget. But state lawmakers refused to sign off. So the dorms will be extra cozy for the foreseeable future.

[MUSIC]

KLB: Okay, moving on. Say you're a grad student. Or you're an undergrad and you've had your fill of bunk beds and dining hall food. Now's your chance to dive into the totally sane, reasonable and orderly world of the Madison rental market!

KLB: Just kidding, it's none of those things!

AP: Do you like paying 1800 dollars for a studio? Do you like having the kinda halfway affordable house you lived in last year being torn down to make room for a whole highrise of 1800 dollar studios? Do you like having every lease start and end in August, regardless of whether that actually works for your schedule? Well you're in luck!

[AIRHORN SOUND]

KLB: All snark aside, finding a comfortable, affordable place to live can be one of the most challenging parts of being a UW student.

KLB: What makes it so tough? Well, back to that newspaper article again. What were those renters from the intro worried about back in 1969?

[REWIND SOUND]

“The Madison housing market is characterized by high rents, inadequate maintenance, discrimination, and an artificially controlled shortage of apartments.

KLB: I couldn't have said it better myself. To one extent or another, those are the *same issues* you'll see when you're renting in Madison today. Especially if you're a student trying to find a place near campus.

KS: **The experience of students and housing on this campus is one that I continue to learn more and more about, and I, I think the concerns are the cost, right? So affordable housing, I think is, something that I consistently have conversations about the rising costs, right?**

AP: That's Kasie Strahl.

KS: **My name is Kasie Strahl and I work at the Office of Student Financial Aid as Assistant Director of Student Engagement.**

KLB: We talked to Kasie because part of her job is finding ways the university can help students meet their basic needs. Basic needs like housing.

KS: **I wanna share with you all a statistic from our survey that we just did. It's a preliminary statistics, but I think it's really helpful to elevate this concern that our students have. So, 28.42% of the survey respondents indicated that they had a rent increase that made it difficult for them to pay for housing in the previous 12 month period. That's a really staggering percent.**

KLB: Picture it this way. In your 100 person lecture, 30 of your classmates are having a hard time with rent.

KS: **We live in a place that, you know, in my mind, is a college town. But affordability wise is not a college town.**

AP: To be clear, Madison is not New York or San Francisco. But in recent years it has consistently been near the top of the list when it comes to rising cost of housing in U.S. cities.

KS: So even if you choose to live some place one year that you think is reasonable, they may change the price or the rent the next year. So that's a huge concern and these highrises just keep getting built. And so the lack of options, to have that affordable housing just, just don't exist.

[MUSIC]

KLB: That's the sorta confusing part. If you walk around State Street near campus, you might think 'What? How can there be a housing shortage? *There's* a brand new 10-story apartment

building. *THERE's* a brand new 10-story apartment building. There's a giant hole in the ground where they're putting up a 10-story apartment building.' You get the idea.

AP: But even if you're building hundreds of new luxury apartments, they're still *luxury* apartments, with luxury apartment prices. Some students can afford them. Many can't. And for every new highrise that goes up, you're tearing down older houses and apartment buildings. So there are fewer and fewer affordable spots in student neighborhoods to go around.

KS: **It's a concern that we continuously hear and for students it, it ends up being scary. It brings a lot of feelings of anxiety, and it ends up being a really difficult choice for them. So do they live in a place that's really expensive, but it's close to campus so I can get to my classes fast enough. I have, I'm close to where I'm working, so that's nice. Right? Or do I make that choice where I live further away? Then the cost ends up being my time, my time on the bus. It's my time not being able to work that extra hour of that shift, and then I don't get paid there and. Or they're living with, you know, 10 other roommates and they're sharing this really small space and then they're sacrificing their privacy and those choices.**

KS: **And that in and of itself is a stressful decision. Students can feel really unseen and devalued to say, you want, you want me here, but how do I live here? So that, it's, it's really, I just got goosebumps thinking about it, right? Because it's a really hard choice for students to make.**

[MUSIC]

KLB: So you may have figured out by now that this isn't actually much of a quick and dirty guide to Madison housing ... we can't give you any foolproof hacks to win the rental market when you come to UW because, frankly, there aren't any. The challenges are really complex and really persistent. That's why we're dedicating a whole season of the podcast to this topic.

AP: But if you're a history nerd like we are, maybe you can find some cold comfort in understanding how we got to this point.

KLB: Maybe it helps to feel some solidarity with those renters back in 1969 who were ticked off at their own high rents and unaffordable highrises. Not to mention students throughout the university's history who fought housing discrimination and pushed for more affordable options.

AP: And not to kill you with optimism, but there are even efforts to fundamentally change the way universities think about their own roles in making sure students can meet their basic needs. All that and more is coming up on this season of *Reorientation*.

[TEASER MONTAGE OF QUOTES]

KS: If students aren't meeting their basic needs they're not going to be a successful student, right? So it is our role, it is our responsibility to do that.

SGR: Told me to my face that I was wrong, we didn't have homeless college students. We just didn't have any!

WALTER STERN: It was a violation of ethics, to introduce unwanted people, in, into an area to go against respecting racial segregation.

SIOBHAN RYAN: That pushes people who are not affiliated with the university further out, and further out, and further out.

JN: You're not unfortunately, in this market, going to get a State Street one bedroom for 1,000 dollars a month.

SGR: So if you don't make housing affordable for students, they are not going to enroll and succeed and graduate and go beyond and be successful in their lives and that means you failed as an institution.

NAMA PANDEY: You can find a full teaching guide for this episode on our website at campushistory.wisc.edu. That includes a link to the Daily Cardinal article from 1969.

Reorientation is written by Kacie Lucchini Butcher, APandra Pasqualone, Nama Pandey, Taylor Dickson, and John K. Wilson. He also produced and edited this episode. Additional help from Taylor Bailey and Dan Berman.

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