

# SEAN STRICKLAND

## *Strictly Speaking*



The following is a reproduction of a column that was previously published in the Waterloo Chronicle.

### **Letters from the E-Mail Bag**

When I first started this column I encouraged readers to write in with their questions and/or comments and I would do my best to respond. I have written columns on a variety of topics, Janet Jackson, Don Cherry, Waterloo North Hydro, city budgets, urban planning, universities and downtowns and student housing. All of these topics generated some correspondence from readers and I have responded to all emails. I must confess that I haven't picked up on answering all the questions that some readers would like to see in print. (don't worry, I'll get to them). So for this week I'm pleased to share with you some of the feedback I've received on a couple of topics. It is no surprise that many of the emails have been centred on the Universities, after all we do live in a University town.

The correspondence has been edited.

#### Universities & Downtowns

“Planners must draw from a number of theories from planning and other disciplines to map out a process and plan for their downtown - each unique, each different. Universities provide numerous employment, development, cultural, and business development opportunities. Moreover, they provide opportunities to educate and disseminate research findings to help improve “community” and propel efforts of revitalization. The rules of engagement that they follow are based on selfish reasons (i.e. self-preservation), academic inquiry (i.e. contributing to the broader knowledge base of urban revitalization), and civic responsibility (i.e. helping individuals and community). Tensions do exist with such partnerships and university administrators and community leaders must come together to provide strong leadership and keep ongoing dialogue.” Mr. J.L. Waterloo.

Mr. J.L. from Waterloo shared his dissertation on the role Universities can play in revitalizing downtowns. The excerpt above is a mere sample of his very thoughtful work. It is clear that if done correctly Universities can play a key role and have a positive influence on revitalizing downtowns. As J.L. points out the success of these efforts is largely determined by the motivation of the University. If the only motivation for moving campuses to downtown areas is to grab cash incentives from municipalities the effort will be a failure. If however Universities are motivated by a sincere desire to help shape a City's downtown revitalization efforts, these experiments have a better chance of success.

#### Student housing can be a problem for some

“I live near the University and reside within the so-called student community. I first moved in this area ten years ago when mostly families resided here and it was a quiet, beautiful area to live in. Since then, it is completely taken over by students. The Superintendent does not live here so problems constantly go undealt with and tenants are told to call the police. I am sick of the yelling and screaming every time they drink and get totally obnoxious. Beer bottles are thrown on our front lawns as well as fast food garbage on a daily basis. No sleep because of partying at all hours of the night because they do not stagger home til 3:30 - 4:00 a.m. This is the reality of living next to unruly students and it is not fair to put them next to hard working, tax paying citizens. As soon as we can we will leave too and never look back. My suggestion is to put them all together since they seem to think their behaviour is acceptable, and see what kind of reflection some of these students really have on our community. Look at other cities; they end up calling them slums and ghettos for a reason. The Universities are taking their business and money and should step up to the plate and offer more residence accommodations and be more socially responsible for the student housing problem.” Mr. & Mrs. P.M., Waterloo.

Unfortunately living near students can be a problem. Obviously these experiences are troubling. I will however, stick with my point of view that our City has fared as well as it has because of the Universities and the overall positive impact students have on our community. Creating an isolated and/or designated student community is not the answer. Where problems exist remedies must be found. Tougher bylaw enforcement, more student accommodation (but not all) on campus, and greater accountability for absentee landlords are needed in some situations.