

**Title:** Orchard Downs

**Author:** Brian Frost & Briceida Rodriguez

## **Evoke**

### *About the Ethnographer*

My name is Briceida, I was born in Chicago, and I am an urban and regional planning student at the University of Illinois. One of the reasons as to why I became interested in urban planning is because I was originally interested in architecture, and having taken architecture classes in high school I was given the opportunity to participate in many architecture competitions in the city of Chicago. Participating in these competitions gave me the opportunity to attend many lectures given by many architects. One of the lectures that I attended was given by an urban planner who works for the firm VOA, since that lecture I became very interested in urban planning and changed my decision of majoring in planning instead of architecture. Recently, I have come to find out that I miss designing and coming up with new concepts work with, like I used to when I was taking architecture classes in high school. I am now looking into taking architecture as a minor. However, I am extremely interested in the Orchard Down project because I believe that this housing opportunity is an important resource for international students. I am not an international student myself, but I believe that it is important to have resources for people who might need them. RODRIGUEZ

My name is Brian and I am a concerned university of illinois student. I care deeply about this university and its international reputation. I am also an urban planning major who is very interested in fair housing. I believe that this is a project that needs further investigation to make sure that everyone's needs are being taken care of in this situation. I am not an international student and both of my parents and some grandparents and aunts and uncles are all alumni of the U of I. Therefore, I have a small inherant bias that makes me symphathetic of alumni and less understanding of International students and families. I hope that this project will show me about the international world and open me to what their life is like. FROST

## **Explore**

### *Question*

The information on the website makes me want to emphasize certain aspects. What are the differences between the green/goodwin apartments and orchard downs? Why is there a 20-200 a month difference in rent? Are the OD people all going to have to move to the green apartments? Will they build new housing or aquire new property? Is there going to be a change in rent because of the fascility change? If yes, will the university provide extra financial aide? What percentage of families living in Orchard Downs recieve aid? FROST

Sub-Questions:

- 1)What is the motivation for the changes to be made? Is there an ulterior motive? What is behind this project?
- 2)What will be the impact of this project on the students and their families presently living there and students and families who would potentially live there?
- 3)What is their game plan for relocation? How do the families/students feel about this?
- 4) What is the view of this project from alumni?
- 5) Is there an alternative solution?
- 6)Do the means justify the cause?
- 7)What will be the effect on the univerisity's global standing as a haven for international students?
- 8)How will this reflect the feel on campus?

Our over-riding question is to examine the effects of the Orchard Downs project on the entire university. Below is a set of sub questions.

## **Plan**

We now have our set of questions. There are 10 of them. These are not going to be formula questions simply designed to get statistics form the residents. Rather, these questions are only ment to facilitate a dialogue between us and the residents. This dialogue will hopefully generate two different productive outcomes. First, it will create quality quotations to be used in the paper. Second, it will help us to gain a better understanding of the feelings of the residents on a broader scale. This will help us expound on the views of the population more clearly and accuratly.

Tomorrow, a planned visit to Orchard Downs will generate this information for us. This is not be our only visit. As discussed earlier, it is important to not be too concentrated in interviewing because it creates inaccuracies in the data collection. FROST

There is something else very important that this meeting made me see. I saw how important these meetings are and how crucial they are to the procedings of the development process. It is therefore a good idea for us to make an effort to find a transcript or primary source (video or audio recording) of the previos two meetings. There is very likely a copy floating around. I know this because the third meeting was professionally video taped. We will contact the City of Urbana and inquire the whearabouts of the footage. It was a public meeting so it is a part of the public record and therefore must be made available to us if possible. FROST

We have now attended the only forum scheduled for the duration of this assignment. That was a very efficient way to hear the views of community members living near the Orchard Downs development. However, there was an obvious under-representation of residents of Orchard Downs. This means that we should focus our interviewing on the residents of the development rather than the community. We already know what the latter wants. FROST

There are 3 more areas that we must focus our efforts towards.

- 1) Asking residents in an around the community
  - 2) Investigating the information through Urbana planning department
  - 3) Investigating the information through the University's planning department
- FROST

We have now read virtually every local article (and for that matter, every article) written about Orchard Downs that is relevant. Our next step will be the town-hall meeting. At that meeting, we will be given all the information to date that the university is willing to give us. We have been told that no employee of the facility knows anything and those who do know are not permitted to talk about it. This is partially because there is 500,000 dollars of contracted money floating around. The developers will not speak to us about their specific plans until they go public in the spring because that would be unfair. Therefore, this means that unless a lot of information goes public before we write the paper, we will not be having many more extensive interviews with university personnel. We can try and ask them hypothetical questions, however they will most likely not answer. This is because officially, there is no plan to redevelop orchard downs. Therefore there is no plan to relocate, there is not plan for alumni, there is no justification and so on and so forth.

In addition to being informational, the townhall meeting will be a great time for us to interview residents for their feelings on the "rumors" of redevelopment.

This means that before Wednesday, we will have our interview questions ready to go. They will be created in a meeting we will have on Tuesday. After their creation, they will be posted on this website. FROST

Sub Questions Plan:

- 1) Ask university officials for their official stance and reason. Examine other effects to see if there is more to it.
- 2) Ask present and future residents of Orchard Downs what effect there will be.
- 3) Get game plan from administrators, get response from residents.

- 4) Interview members of alumni groups and other alumni, especially candidates for the new condos.
- 5) Analyze all factors to see if there is another way out. Ask others for ideas too, especially administration and those involved in the planning of this project. What previous plans were rejected?
- 6) Weigh factors
- 7) Ask international families how this makes them view the university. Now what advice would they give to prospective international students?
- 8) Ask nearby residents how this construction will affect them.

Our primary question will be answered by drawing a conclusion from our sub-questions.

### **Observe**

From the interviews that were conducted it was understandable that Orchard Downs provides many useful resources for its residents, especially those with children. Residents with children benefit greatly from the daycare and elementary school that are available within Orchard Downs. One of the residents lives here with her husband, who is a student of UIUC, working on his PhD. He said that her children benefit a lot from the various activities that Orchard Downs has to offer. She mentioned that the daycare has an after school program in which her children participate in.

One of the interviewees mentioned how helpful Orchard Downs has been to her. She explained that before she arrived to Orchard Downs she was living in Purdue, where her husband is a student, and how the housing is better there but it does not provide all of the things that Orchard Downs has to offer. For example, she felt that for her two kids Orchard Downs was a lot safer.

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Obviously this is a very hot topic. From the sources that we have talked to, there seem to be a lot of conflicting opinions and differing interests. The biggest trend however that I have seen is people look out for themselves more than anything else. People don't want the traffic near them, but seem to be ok with it concentrated elsewhere. People without transportation want a grocery store, while those with want nothing larger than a coffee shop.

In our paper we must use extreme caution. Every topic has a minimum of two sides to it because it hurts some people and harms others. When writing, we must be sure to explore all sides. We must be careful to not be overly biased or blind. It is important to see facts and not get overly involved in only one side. Both sides have valid thoughts based on real concerns that must be explained. There may not always be a correct answer. What is good for some is not good for all. FROST

The meeting that we attended helped us get a better understanding on what the residents from around the community think about the re-development of Orchard Downs. I would have liked to see more actual residents that live in Orchard Downs there, but unfortunately there wasn't. The people that spoke in the meeting had many opinions on what they would like to see there. Some would say that they wanted retail on one street, but then others would say that that is not what they wanted. There were many opinions on what they wanted as far as traffic control. The community did make some points on what should be done with the residents of Orchard Downs but that was not their main concern they seemed more concerned with what was going to happen to Orchard Downs in different aspects. Someone did say that the reason that Orchard Downs is not as liveable as it used to be is because the university does a bad job at maintaining its property, if it is re-developed will it be maintained. RODRIGUEZ

We made many observations at the community meeting that we attended. Through this meeting, we were able to see how difficult this process is. Different people in the community want conflicting things. It is therefore very difficult for the developers to make a decision that pleases everyone. The members of the community were very very passionate about their topics. The passion of their tone is very adequately reflected in our recording of the proceedings. We will be transcribing their thoughts. Following this post, we will draft a copy of all their points and put it into a list. I will try and make sure that the list also reflects the frequency of the subject being brought up by the community. Hopefully, it will also reflect the conflicting opinions. The observations we made at the meeting were priceless and gave us a first hand experience for this project. It was especially helpful because it put faces with the issue. It humanized the concepts and made them come off of paper. It also showed us how much of a "hot topic" this was within the community. These people really truly care about this complex and what will happen or not happen to it. However, I must make painfully clear, the representation from the actual residents of Orchard Downs was pitiful. There were only approx 4 residents that spoke versus probably 50 community members. True, the residents that spoke, spoke with great passion and had productive things to say, it was not nearly enough. There is strength in numbers. However, as one individual pointed out, there are a handful of restrictions imposed by "the man" that may have resulted in the lack of resident participation. For

example, one person commented that they found it to be quite ironic that the meeting regarding Orchard Downs was not being held at Orchard Downs. Actually meeting notes to follow. FROST

We visited the Orchard Downs development in an effort to get some quality first hand information. While there, we toured the grounds and facilities. We also questioned an employee of the facility. He was vitrually useless with information. He said that he only had the information that had been made public in things like newspaper articles. He said he had no inside information and there was nothing that he could tell us. However, the tone of voice and his manurisms were very suspicious, I believe that he knows more than he is telling us. He did however provide us both with Orchard Downs brochures. He gave me his business card. We have since then exchanged emails with contact info. He has given me his word that if he recieves and updates or information, he will let me know.

Since he said all of his information was in the newspapers, we then went to the library and did an extensive internet and archival search of the newspapers. We read several articles and learned a lot from them. Our discussion of points learned will be added to the "link" section as all useful articles were found electronically.

While at Orchard Downs, we also made another very important discovery. We learned that for the time being, the project is in something of a holding pattern. However, it looks as though they will be doing something very soon. We became aware that there will be a town-hall style meeting this coming wednesday at 530 for issues on Orchard Downs. Based on what we learned from the articles, it appears as though this is more of a symbolic meeting than anything else. The last several that have been had, the room was filled to standing-room-only. Many of these people were there to protest redevelopment on the land. However, in the past, they were protesting the comercial redelopment, now it looks as though it will not be so commercial in nature. We will be attending this meeting and closely observing it. For now, there is not much that we can do other than archival research because all sources are being tight-lipped about this project. It is also temporarily stalled until this meeting. That will be a turning point in our research and should provide us with a plethora of information. We will also bring with us lots of IRB forms because it will be a great oppurtunity to interview people.

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## **Discuss**

I posted a link to the City of Urbana and described it in the Observation section. I am posting my conclusion about it all here. Like I said this is a very high priority project it seems like for the city of Urbana. The city has a lot to gain. When considering those two factors, there are two conclusions that can be drawn. First, this is such a priority for Urbana, that the chances of a plan being accepted and put in to action is very high. Second, the city does not want to mess this up. It is a big deal to them and there is a lot at stake. The city has millions to gain or lose and the university is in a similar position. A botching of this project would be devastating. The city will closely consider proposals to see what is best from all. This also explains why they are paying closer attention to the public than ever. FROST

I am wondering how you feel about the actual writing of the paper. It is my opinion that we should write the physical paper over the Thanksgiving Break. Then, upon our return, we can resume conferencing with each other and make sure everything is correctly in place. Also, this will allow us to do any extra exploring or asking if we still have unsolved issues.

Also, I have another thought. After tomorrow's interviews with the residents perhaps we should have a meeting and finalize the outline for the paper. Then do you think that we should consider dividing the tasks up? I am unsure. What are your thoughts? FROST

I had mixed feelings about the meeting we attended. On many fronts, I was very pleased. I was thrilled to see the communities enthusiasm either for or against this project. It shows that people care one way or the other and want to speak up for what they want. That is truly the best way to get your views incorporated into a plan. I was conversely, very disenchanted with the City of Urbana. Although I did not experience it first hand, many comments were made that the first two meetings did not adequately incorporate the citizens. What was the city thinking? If the point of the meeting is to involve the community, then it must be structured in a way that actually involves the community. Also, this is apparently one of the first efforts of this nature that the city of Urbana has made to involve the residents in development proceedings in this type of way. I don't understand this. It is commonly held that planning is for the people and must incorporate their thoughts. How is the city supposed to know what the people want if they never ask? While I am glad that they have finally been included in these plans, I am disgusted that it has not already happened in the past.

I am also torn on another topic, the demographics of the participants. The residents of the community had a great showing. They did a great job of showing up in large numbers and saying what they had to say. However, on the same note, I was disgusted at the lack of representation from actual residents of Orchard Downs. I think of it as other people fighting the battle for them. For hours people came up and preached about how the residents of Orchard Downs must be taken care of. Yet, there were no members of the community there to say it for themselves. I know that there are a lot of explanations for why the turnout was the way it was, but never the less, the comments from the residents were the most powerful comments made. Perhaps a stronger turnout would have reflected a different opinion with the developers. While there were people there to say stuff for them, if they had said it themselves it would have been more emphatic. FROST

## **Reflect**

### ***Link***

A search of the University planning page yielded nothing worth noting. FROST

Here is a link to the Urbana homepage. For some reason the web address does not update when browsing the website. There are several articles however on the website that reference Orchard Downs. Go to the search box and type "Orchard Downs" to access them.

<http://www.ci.urbana.il.us/Urbana/>

FROST

As I was looking at the website <http://www.housing.uiuc.edu/odproject/>

I noticed that they posted something about the last two forums that were held about Orchard Downs. They do not provide a transcript, but they do provide a summary of what was spoken about during the meetings. BR

<http://www.dailyillini.com/media/storage/paper736/news/2005/02/03/News/University.Plans.Growth-850397.shtml?nrewrite200610191639&sourcedomain=www.dailyillini.com>

<http://www.dailyillini.com/media/storage/paper736/news/2005/03/30/News/City-Planning.Draws.Controversy-906025.shtml?nrewrite200610191637&sourcedomain=www.dailyillini.com>

<http://www.dailyillini.com/media/storage/paper736/news/2005/10/19/News/New-Housing.Complex.Markets.To.Mature.Students-1025484-page3.shtml>

<http://www.dailyillini.com/media/storage/paper736/news/2006/01/18/News/Ui.Expansion.Shrinks.Urbana-1434980.shtml?nrewrite200610191629&sourcedomain=www.dailyillini.com>

<http://www.dailyillini.com/media/storage/paper736/news/2006/02/01/News/Herman.Defends.University.Expansion-1546833.shtml?nrewrite200610191626&sourcedomain=www.dailyillini.com>

<http://www.dailyillini.com/media/storage/paper736/news/2006/02/02/News/Ui.Adopts.New.Strategies-1596350.shtml?nrewrite200610191625&sourcedomain=www.dailyillini.com>

<http://www.dailyillini.com/media/storage/paper736/news/2006/09/07/News/Board.Of.Trustees.Discusses.Problems.With.Banner.Operating.Budget.Development.Of-2261384.shtml?nrewrite200610191624&sourcedomain=www.dailyillini.com>

<http://www.news-gazette.com/ngsearch/index.cfm?&page=displyStory.cfm&yearfolder=the06news&file=090606%5Fngstory%5F69046%2Etxt&search=orchard%20downs&theorder=asaphrase>

<http://www.news.uiuc.edu/news/03/1015orchdowns.html>

<http://www.dailyillini.com/media/storage/paper736/news/2005/04/20/News/Residents.Demand.Orchard.Downs.Answers-930791.shtml?nrewrite200610191621&sourcedomain=www.dailyillini.com>

[http://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/2006/09/06/orchard\\_downs\\_on\\_board\\_of\\_trustees\\_agenda](http://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/2006/09/06/orchard_downs_on_board_of_trustees_agenda)

FROST

Here is a website that deals with the Orchard Down Redevelopment Project....

<http://www.housing.uiuc.edu/odproject/>

<http://www.news.uiuc.edu/news/03/1015orchdowns.html>

[http://www.orcharddowns.uiuc.edu/public\\_input.htm](http://www.orcharddowns.uiuc.edu/public_input.htm)

### ***Implications***

This study and its data, reflections and conclusions will have deep meaning for the people of Orchard Downs. Hopefully, regardless of its findings, it will be noticed by the administration and influence their actions regarding the project. FROST

### **Other**

We need a game plan. In this box let's put a set of sources to examine for the week. Here's what I've got.

- 1) setup meeting with director of orchard downs
- 2) check archives for when OD was built what was their mission statement etc.
- 3) what was there before? why did they have to build it?
- 4) statistics on foreign students at the u of i over the last many years. try to see if there is a correlation between that data and the development of OD
- 5) interview college counselors at a few high schools with good international populations and families that would be potential candidates for OD housing....how does this project affect their recommendations?

FROST