

# FAQ about the Save the Domes Campaign

## What are the Domes and the Baggins End community?

**The Domes is a hub for social and environmental innovation at UC Davis, a Davis landmark, and a vibrant cooperative community.** For 39 years, the Domes has been on the cutting edge of green building, solar technology, sustainable agriculture, alternative transportation, and the local food and co-housing movements. In addition to providing affordable, land-based student housing, the Domes is an educational resource and creative think-and-do-tank that is home to: UC Davis classes, community workshops & forums, demonstration gardens, organic agriculture education, visual & performing arts and research ranging from community governance to beneficial insects.

## What's happening with the Domes now? (the short version)

**Student Housing is planning to close the Domes on July 31, 2011.** Although students are committed to maintaining their homes and property, in January 2011 Student Housing made plans to bulldoze the structures, absorb Domes reserves and close the community, effectively planning to destroy a nearly 40-year legacy of environmental stewardship and student-led experiential education<sup>1</sup>. We are asking the University not to destroy this valuable treasure, but instead to strengthen Baggins End.

**A coalition has formed to save the Domes.** Residents have worked with faculty, alumni, and local nonprofit, Solar Community Housing Association (SCHA), to create an affordable, 5-year plan that addresses university concerns, builds Domes reserves, and keeps the community intact while a long term plan is developed. *The university has not yet formally responded to this plan.*

**We need people to join our coalition to save the Domes by expressing their support.** Tell University administrators why you value the Domes and the importance of keeping the community intact & on this historic site. Write a letter, donate to our independently managed fund, show up at a rally, or volunteer your time today!

## Isn't it too expensive to fix?

Based on our coalition's line-by-line analysis of Student Housing's own reports, the Domes can be brought into code compliance for **less than \$60,000**. This plan is backed by engineering faculty, local contractors and SCHA. Our coalition has already **raised \$30,000** for this effort, and there is already **over \$43,000** in the Domes reserve funds. The Domes is a self-sustaining project which costs UCD no money, and has a 39-year history of funding their own maintenance and repairs.

Student Housing has justified its planned demolition by estimating costs based on an ambitious reconstruction and ADA overhaul -- which would extend the life of the structures for another 40 years, costing over \$900,000. This plan includes completely gutting and rebuilding the interiors with all new materials and hiring an out-of-state contractor. *In contrast*, our coalition's plan uses recycled materials, skilled volunteer labor, student interns, and low-impact spot repairs to address maintenance issues and ADA compliance. Our plan would extend the life of the structures for another 5-10 years, while a long term plan is developed.

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<sup>1</sup>**Campaign update:** As of May 4, 2011, Student Housing's plans to bulldoze the domes and absorb funds have been halted indefinitely, while plans to evict students remain.

# FAQ about the Save the Domes Campaign

## Are the Domes safe to live in?

**YES, the Domes are safe.** The Domes were built according to building codes written in 1972 and are just as safe as any residential buildings from that time. The Dome structures only need routine maintenance and the entire site needs proper ADA accessibility.

## “But I heard the structures have problems.”

**The Domes need minor repairs to electrical wiring, insulation, and interior fixtures. Residents can do the work!** For the past 39 years, students have maintained their domes and controlled their reserve funds, successfully performing major work including: seismic retrofits, re-plumbing, fiberglass and foam repair. Students are fully capable of doing the work, already own the tools, and just need to be allowed access to their own reserve funds.

The primary cost concern is not maintaining the domes, but ADA compliance & renovation. Domes residents have been setting aside funds for ADA compliance for 4 years, and are ready to do the renovation in partnership with a professional contractor. Residents need UCD administration to authorize the work and allow these already encumbered funds to be spent for the intended purpose of these earmarked funds.

## Why don't domies just fix it themselves? That's what we did, when I lived at the Domes....

Students have already addressed multiple code compliance concerns, but Student Housing has refused to re-inspect the property. Additionally, Student Housing has actively prevented insulation repairs and referred some students to Student Judicial Affairs for entering and repairing one dome against Student Housing's orders. Also, materials need to be purchased with the reserve funds accumulated from rent that are controlled by Student Housing.

## But doesn't the University have long-term plans for the Domes (Domes 2.0)? Isn't this what Domies want?

**To date, the University has no long term plans for the Domes.** There is no firm plan to relocate the current Domes community, no official commitment to keep students on the historic site, and no funding to build new structures.

Rather, the University is “planning to plan” through the Sustainable Living/Learning Task Force(SLLTF), a planning group composed of faculty, staff, and students. In the words of Chancellor Katehi, “the group is looking at an approach that would create a shared vision for a new community (California Aggie, April 2011).” In other words, they are planning to plan a brand new community, not nurture or transition the existing Domes community through redevelopment or to new buildings. “Domes 2.0” is an optimistic student-given nickname for a re-design of the Domes that might come out of the SLLTF. **To date, there is no funding, no plan, no design, and no solid commitment from administration that Domes 2.0 will ever come to pass.**

While Domes residents support the Sustainable Living/Learning Task Force and appreciate administration's support for new cooperative housing, this does not represent any solution to impeding evictions and the destruction of 39 years of shared community history and knowledge. **We are asking**

# FAQ about the Save the Domes Campaign

for administration to foster community continuity, and to allow the Domes residents and their allies to maintain the structures until new buildings become a reality. Say it: “Transition, Not Demolition!”

## What do students want in terms of a long-term future for the Domes?

Students have diverse opinions about the future, but are united in a core vision. Students want:

- to preserve a heritage of student leadership, autonomy, and self-governance
- to stay on the Domes site, cultivating their historic land
- to continue to maintain their own structures and manage their own finances
- to work with administration to create redevelopment plans for the site to either a) renovate existing historic structures or b) co-design new student-built structures
- to maintain links with community members and Domes alumni who return every year to visit
- to maintain the community’s low-density, semi-rural character
- to preserve 40 years of oral tradition, social networks, and community continuity
- to build on a 39-year relationship with the land through gardening and small-scale agriculture
- to build a better relationship with UCD administrators through an alternative management structure

**What is most critical is that any future plans build on the assets of the existing community and its historic site, engaging current residents, alumni, and concerned community members in their future.**

## Why should I care about this issue?

**The Domes is an educational resource and creative think-and-do-tank for the City of Davis, the state of California, and the global community.** Domes alumni have been instrumental in the formation of entities that defined the Davis community, including: the Davis Farmers Market, the Davis Food Co-op, the Davis Feminist Film Festival, and the Davis Bicycle Collective. Over the years current and past residents have also taken on leading roles on the UC Davis campus through their contributions to the Student Farm, KDVS, the Bike Barn, Outdoor Adventures, Project Compost and the Whole Earth Festival. The Domes is a regular host of UC Davis classes, community workshops, voter forums, and informative demonstrations on sustainable living practices. As an innovation hub at the influential University of California, the Domes helps California maintain its role as a world leader on sustainability.

**The Domes is an irreplaceable historical landmark for Davis and the state of California.** Their molded fiberglass and polyurethane foam construction is one-of-a-kind in the world. While society has moved onto more renewable construction materials, the Domes buildings still demonstrate cutting-edge concepts on energy efficiency, resource consumption, neighborhood planning, and landscape design.

**The Baggins End community is a vibrant co-housing community tied to historic place and land.** The Domes houses the only co-housing community for students anywhere in the United States, and possibly the world. It is the only student-built, student-governed, student-maintained student housing at any University in the country. It is unique, historic, and powerful. The university’s current plans to evict the community would uproot 39 years of oral tradition, social networks, and community continuity - and would provide no guarantee that any post-Domes plans would incorporate the same crucial elements of student leadership, innovative housing, and an unforgettably beautiful agricultural environment for the houses. The long-term plan for the Domes needs to build on from the unique assets of the current Domes and cannot be developed by bulldozing them.

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# FAQ about the Save the Domes Campaign

**The Domes represents the best of UC Davis: a center for independent learning and a steward of our environmental legacy.** The Domes carries on a legacy of green leadership from 1970s through today and into the future. For students, the threat to the Domes represents a stifling of independent student learning and innovation on the UC Davis campus. In an era of peak oil, when climate change, dirty energy technology, and war threaten our global well-being, the Bagins End community values of environmental sustainability, participatory democracy, and cooperation are more relevant than ever.

## What needs to be done?

**We need to convince UCD officials to keep the community intact and on their historic land.**

## How can I help?

**Write a letter about why the Domes is a valuable asset to UC Davis and to you personally.** Stress the importance of keeping the community intact and on the land. Send letters to:

Linda Katehi, Chancellor, UC Davis, 1 Shields Ave, Davis CA 95616 (530) 752-2065 [chancellor@ucdavis.edu](mailto:chancellor@ucdavis.edu)

Fred Wood, Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs, UC Davis, 1 Shields Ave, Davis CA 95616 [fewood@ucdavis.edu](mailto:fewood@ucdavis.edu)  
(530) 752-6866

John Meyer, Vice Chancellor, Administrative & Resource Management, UC Davis, 1 Shields Ave, Davis CA 95616 [jameyer@ucdavis.edu](mailto:jameyer@ucdavis.edu) (530) 752-7941

Emily Galindo, Director, Student Housing and Associate Vice Chancellor, UC Davis, 1 Shields Ave, Davis CA 95616 [ecgalindo@ucdavis.edu](mailto:ecgalindo@ucdavis.edu) (530) 752-2034

Robert Segar, Associate Vice Chancellor, Campus Planning Department, UC Davis, 1 Shields Ave, Davis CA 95616 [rbsegar@ucdavis.edu](mailto:rbsegar@ucdavis.edu) (530) 752-2172

Clayton Halliday, Asst Vice Chancellor/Campus Architect, UC Davis, 1 Shields Ave, Davis CA 95616  
[challiday@ucdavis.edu](mailto:challiday@ucdavis.edu) 754-1073

## **Keep writing letters!**

- Address them to Davis City Council, your local state senator and assemblyperson. Ask them to advocate for the Domes, and tell them why the issue is important to you personally.
- Send letters to the editors of local papers: The Davis Enterprise, The Sacramento Bee, and the California Aggie. We need to demonstrate public support on a daily basis.

**Donate money!** Help us meet a \$20,000 matching grant from the Berkeley Student Co-op to strengthen the Domes. Money will be used to support the Save the Domes campaign and to improve the Domes structures or property. Send checks to: SCHA (Memo: Domes) P.O. Box 72408, Davis CA 95617

**Offer your time!** We need help, both 1) dedicated, skilled labor to coordinate outreach events & campaign committees and 2) occasional help doing fun stuff like tabling, making art, and flyering. Contact volunteer coordinator Molly: [molly.reagh@gmail.com](mailto:molly.reagh@gmail.com)

# FAQ about the Save the Domes Campaign

*But what's the point? Won't Student Housing do what they want to do anyway?*

**We can win this campaign!** Our coalition of students, faculty, and community leaders have been in negotiations with administrators for months. We have addressed many of their concerns through a comprehensive 5 year business plan, and have ongoing, positive conversations with some top administrators. But we still need to jump through major bureaucratic hurdles of contracts, liability, ground leases, the board of regents, etc., etc.

Administration is not of a singular mindset -- it is made up of individuals, who have varying opinions about the Domes. Some administrators are our advocates, some are neutral, and some want the Domes to disappear forever. To succeed, we need to harness public support to keep momentum going for the Domes throughout our negotiations with administration. We need to make Mrak see that the easiest, most responsible path is to keep the Domes alive for future generations to treasure.

*Details please! What's the long version of the current threat to the Domes?*

Since you asked... In fall 2010, student residents approached Student Housing with a request to access their reserves to purchase maintenance supplies for repairing polyurethane foam insulation. Student Housing refused to let residents access their reserve funds, ending a 39-year history of successful student maintenance. Instead, Student Housing ordered a series of university code inspections that deemed the houses out of compliance with university code.

To address code concerns, Student Housing paid for a single contractor to bid repairs, who focused on the radical approach of gutting all the domes and completely rebuilding the interiors. Deeming a complete interior reconstruction and ADA renovation too expensive, Student Housing stopped issuing leases for student residents beyond July 31st. Student Housing has discussed plans to bulldoze the current historic structures in Summer 2011, leaving behind only the community room known as the Yurt. Student Housing would fund the proposed demolition with Baggins Ends' own reserve funding.

A coalition of faculty, students, alumni, and community leaders developed an alternative management and maintenance plan that would keep the community intact and on-site. This plan would cost less than 1/10th of Student Housing's estimate, by focusing on spot repairs instead of radical reconstruction. This interim plan would allow the structures to last for another 5-10 years while a long term redevelopment plan is created through the existing Sustainable Living/Learning Program task force. The interim plan relies on volunteer labor, recycled materials, and community fundraising to reduce cost. Funds are available, and local housing nonprofit Solar Community Housing Association is willing to manage the project. UC Davis administration has not yet officially responded to this plan.

# FAQ about the Save the Domes Campaign

*What's really going on here? I don't understand the University's motivation.*

It is important to understand that the University is made up of individuals. Some of those individuals (including administration) have been very supportive of the Domes. Others have been less supportive or openly oppositional.

We don't know why Student Housing made this decision! We can only guess:

- In recent years, the University has been under increasing pressure to find new sources of funding. Historically, Student Housing aimed to break-even while providing high quality, low cost housing. Now they are under increasing pressure to make profit that can be used to fund much of its overarching department, Student Affairs. The Domes doesn't cost the university anything, but it also doesn't turn a profit that can be used to fund other programs.
- There are cultural differences between Student Housing and the Baggins End community. Student Housing is a hierarchical, top-down institution designed to provide quality housing to the highest number of students for the lowest cost. The Baggins End community is a non-hierarchical, consensus-run education organization with a mission that includes: community education, personal growth, organic agriculture, and reduction of ecological footprint. With such differences in approach and mission, some conflict is inherent.
- Student Housing does a very good job at overseeing housing units whose purpose is solely to house students. However, Student Housing is not designed to deal with innovative community structuring, student-led decision making, and nonprofit-driven goals. The Domes does not fit easily into the model that Student Housing has for management and maintenance. Student Housing has a mission, and that mission does not include nurturing innovative and educational community structures.
- With the construction of West Village, the Domes will change from its relatively obscure site to a highly visible location, located on a major bicycle/pedestrian through fare at the UC Davis campus. Some people have speculated that administration would prefer a more conventional appearance.