

San Luis Obispo and Cal Poly criticized for fraternity housing management

Neighbors or rivals? How can San Luis Obispo residents and college students live peacefully?

by Fiona Hastings and Katy Clark
November 12, 2025



Anika Loganathan / Mustang News

*Update 4:41 p.m., Nov. 13: This story was updated to remove the graphic of the family featured. The two individuals featured in the graphic had no relation to the story and we have since removed them from our site, social media and updated **online print spread**.*



San Luis Obispo City Councilmember Jan Marx used to live on Albert Drive right by Cal Poly's campus, an area that has a high student population. During the pandemic, the number of garage parties taking place

elevated, eventually becoming too much for Marx and her family. They moved to a more “family-oriented neighborhood.”

“Across Grand Avenue and up in the hills used to be very well integrated and over time it’s become dominated by student-aged people,” Marx said. “So the few remaining long-term residents in those neighborhoods are the ones that are under tremendous stress.”

These stresses, which stem from topics including **illegal street parties**, satellite fraternity housing outside of their designated zones and high noise levels, have resulted in numerous complaints by residents that led to a Grand Jury investigation.

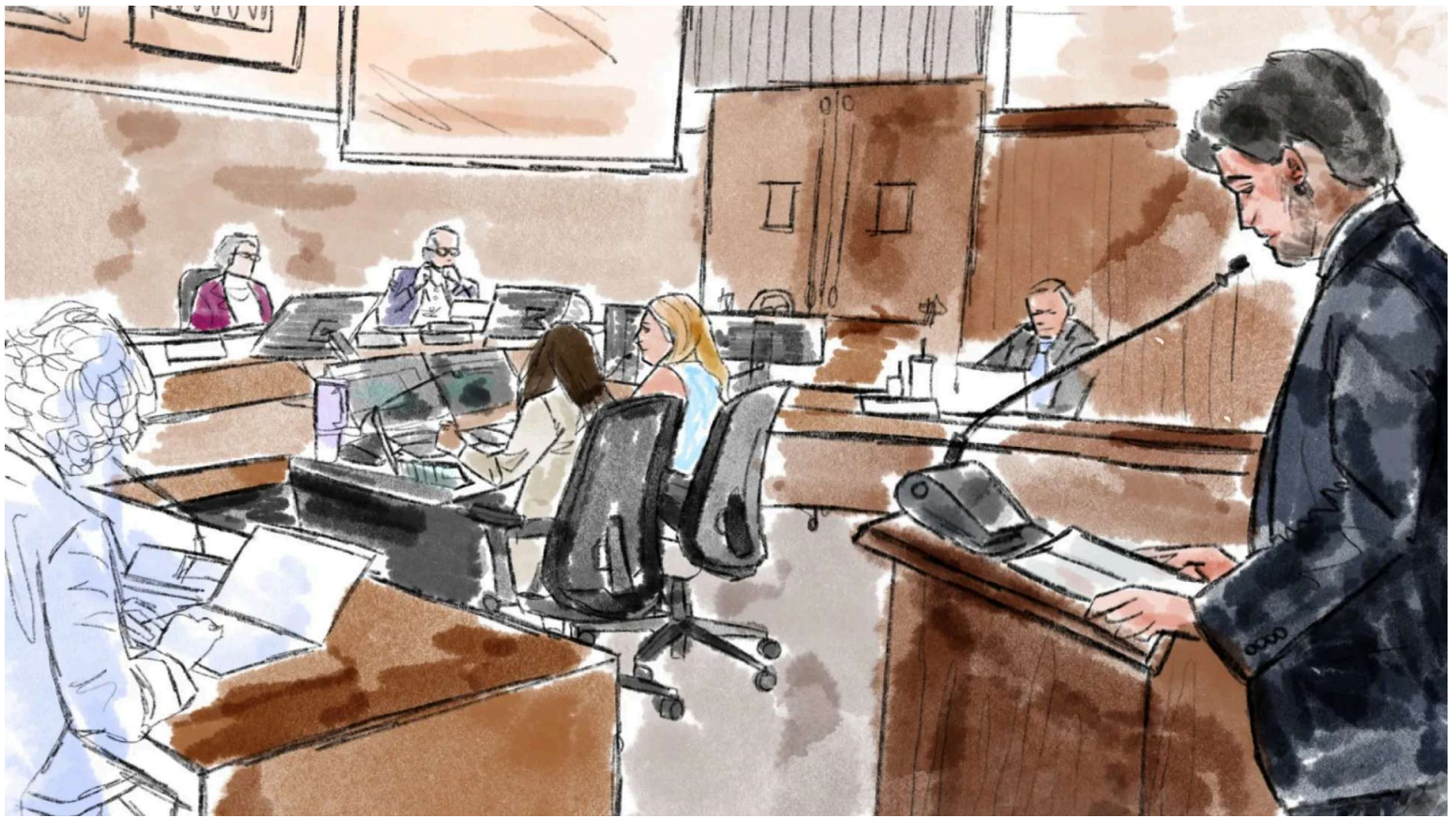
In June, the San Luis Obispo Grand Jury issued the report, “**Round & Round with Town & Gown**, investigating and discussing multiple complaints by long-term residents about neighborhood livability, including unauthorized fraternity houses operating in zoning-restricted residential areas. The city **responded** to the report in September, detailing which recommendations they will accept.

The role of the San Luis Obispo Grand Jury is to investigate matters of civil concern, according to the SLO County **website**.

The Grand Jury determined six key **findings**, including the failure of the city to enforce the prohibition of fraternity and sorority activity in low- and medium-density residential zones that do not allow Greek life houses. The Grand Jury also found a failure to enforce conditional use permits (CUPs), which is a permit that allows a specific land use, according to the **SLO County website**.

Fraternity and sorority members operating an active Greek life house must apply for a **CUP**. The permit for fraternities and sororities has regulations that permit holders agree to follow; permits can be revoked if these guidelines are not followed.





A court room. Anika Loganathan / Mustang News

However, San Luis Obispo Mayor Erica Stewart believes the Grand Jury overlooked the city's work to ease tensions and improve safety for all, such as the **alternative St. Fratty's** event that resulted in fewer citations and student misconduct that morning, according to previous Mustang News **coverage**.

"It was a little challenging in the Grand Jury report to have barely a nod to all of the work that had been done to make a huge difference from last year to this year," Stewart said. "It felt a little late to be coming in from the Grand Jury, and a little almost like a slap in the face to, as though we didn't care at all."

The city did accept four of the Grand Jury's **recommendations**, including the continuation of the city's collaboration with Cal Poly to shut down illegal street parties, for the SLO City Manager to develop a process to identify illegal fraternity housing and for more uniform conditions and enforcement of CUPs.

The city is not planning to implement the other three recommendations, including **R4, R5 and R7**, saying they are unwarranted or unreasonable.

"I think there's a long-term frustration from community members who have lived here for a while, feeling as though Cal Poly administration hasn't always enforced their own rules or hasn't had strict enough rules on behaviors that are inappropriate," Stewart said.



Marx said that communication in the neighborhood has diminished.

“People are more inclined to just not talk about it, call the police,” Marx said. “And some of the student-age people are just like ‘It’s a college town, get over it, I’m going to piss in your front lawn.’”

Stewart said that while there are existing noise issues associated with fraternity and student parties, the consistency of these complaints have resulted in a spike of regular day-to-day complaints with things such as 8-year-olds playing basketball in the neighborhoods and quinceañeras.

“I think we are at a place too where we have to bring things a little more together,” Stewart said. “People get to make some noise.”

Neighborhood livability is a current goal for 2025-2027 for San Luis Obispo, according to **previous Mustang News coverage**, as an effort to address these issues.

Long-term residents feeling neglected by city and Cal Poly

A number of residents have been forced to move, said Brett Cross, a representative for Residents for Quality Neighborhoods on ASI’s Student Liaison Committee.

Cross talked about a family who purchased a home next to the wife’s father so they could be next to the father as he got older.

“They were forced to leave and sell, and the father was forced to leave too,” Cross said. “It’s terrible. I mean that shouldn’t happen. He lived in that home for 60-plus years and then had to leave because of the impacts from the satellite fraternity activity happening in those neighborhoods. It was really heartbreaking.”

The Grand Jury report also discussed residents’ complaints about being ignored by city and Cal Poly officials, as the complaints alleged failure to enforce existing rules and municipal ordinances towards fraternities, and that they did not take enough action to restore order.

“They’re having really serious impacts on their neighbors,” Cross said. “And I don’t know what it’s going to take to get them to recognize that. I wish they would recognize that, because it would make everyone’s life a lot better.”

Cal Poly removed the addresses of sanctioned events in their annual reports made in accordance with **us-Recognized Sorority and Fraternity Act**, according to John Mezzapesa, code enforcement
is for the city.



University spokesperson Matt Lazier said the university made the decision to remove these addresses out of concern for student privacy, and they comply with the act, which was designed to keep track of fraternity and sorority life at each institution of higher learning in California in publishing the addresses of chapter houses and events where misconduct has occurred.

“These changes to how information is collected and reported eliminate the city’s ability to administratively determine if violations have occurred,” Mezzapesa said. “The city now must try and collect evidence such as social media posts and perform inspections and interviews to determine if a sanctioned event has taken place.”

Citizens complained about “illegal fraternities” in low- and medium-density residential zones, with party-related noise as one of the most frequently brought up issues, according to the Grand Jury’s report.

“It’s not a real word,” Stewart said, referring to people using the term “illegal.” “The illegal part is based on our municipal code, where we have a fraternity house that may not be following the code. However, we also have a code that says you can’t have your trash can in a certain place. You don’t become an illegal house because you have your trash can in a certain place.”

Stewart clarified that the community uses the illegal term in response to a house that is operating “like a fraternity house,” due to the possibility of not following Cal Poly or city rules.

Fraternities can not apply for conditional use permits **in low- and medium-density zones**, according to Stewart. Fraternities and sororities are only able to apply for a conditional use permit to operate their house in medium-high and high-density residential zones.

Fraternities impacted by the tension

With Cal Poly fraternities at the core of the investigation and community complaints, recent action has reflected the imbalance between Greek life presence and long-term SLO residents. Recently, fraternities like **Sigma Nu and Delta Chi** have had their conditional use permits revoked, and these revocation processes have sparked conversations around fraternity life in the city.

The presidents of Sigma Pi, Sigma Phi Epsilon, Phi Sigma Kappa, Delta Upsilon, Sigma Nu, Alpha Sigma Phi and Delta Chi declined to comment for this article. Mustang News has reached out to other fraternity presidents including Phi Gamma Delta, Phi Delta Theta, Kappa Sigma, Beta Theta Pi, Phi Kappa Psi, Theta Chi, Delta Sigma Phi and Pi Kappa Phi and has not received a response. The web version of this article will be updated upon any response.



t. 21, the City Council **voted** 4-1 to deny Delta Chi’s appeal to the decision to revoke their conditional permit on their house on Monte Vista Place. However, the permit was conditionally revoked, meaning that

within a 60-day timeframe, the fraternity can apply for a modification of the CUP, which is a quarter of the cost for an application for a new CUP. That 60-day period expires on Dec. 20.

Councilmember Marx proposed the chance for modifications and said they should not enable a continuation of a party culture that is destructive to the city.

“I heard a lot of ‘Give us another chance, we want to collaborate,’” Marx said. “I didn’t hear any remorse. I didn’t hear any apology for what this particular fraternity has created for us.”

Marx believes it is important to set standards to hold young people accountable who are going to go out into the world.

Delta Chi Treasurer Jack Werle told city council his fraternity chose to appeal in order to remain in the city’s framework and promote positive change.

“Revoking our CUP now before a new model is even in place would remove one of the few organizations working with city staff to build a stronger, more effective system,” Werle said at the city council meeting in which Delta Chi’s appeal was denied.

Jesse Grothaus, Delta Chi and Cal Poly alumnus and current San Luis Obispo resident, said during the public meeting that while living next to student housing is not always easy and the frustrations are real, he has seen another side of the story in regards to Delta Chi.

Grothaus said revoking the CUP would get rid of the tool that enables progress, as he believes his chapter is invested in engaging positively with their neighbors and taking accountability for issues on their end.

“This is a town that prides itself on unity,” Grothaus said. “When challenges come up, we show up. We talk to each other. We look for solutions together and that’s part of what makes SLO so special. We don’t turn away from problems, we work through them as a community.”

Stewart and Marx recognized this relationship between long-term residents and students goes both ways, as mutual safety and enjoyment are a leading priority.

“We’re trying to do our best to do kind of a course correction now for a future where people can live in harmony and really enjoy all the good things about living in the city,” Marx said.



Story originally appeared in a printed newspaper on Nov. 12. For more stories from the November print edition, check out the featured print section on our [website](#) or the full [edition](#).