

Ongoing construction at Auburn University and its impact on Auburn's residents

By Caroline Parks, Auburn University student

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Auburn University's campus has undergone significant transformations since the fall of 2021, with several construction projects affecting student and resident life. From multiple construction projects in the heart of the city to the demolition of 11 residence halls in The Hill, these changes have spurred conversations regarding the rapid gentrification and expansion Auburn is facing.

Since the fall of 2021, Auburn has experienced a handful of major construction projects in such little time. The Oliv apartment complex, The Culinary Science Center & Laurel Hotel, Hey Day Market Food Hall, and the Football Performance Center all began construction in 2021 and were finished by 2022.

The construction continued as a new Target opened in 2023 and the Graduate Hotel is currently being built and set to open in September of 2024. The majority of these projects took place on West Magnolia Avenue and South College Street, arguably the most busy and populated streets in the city of Auburn. Now, the Haley Concourse has just begun construction for new residence halls in response to the closure of Cambridge Residence Hall, predicted to be finished in the fall of 2026.

Another focus point of construction on Campus is at The Hill Residence Halls. The transformation began in the spring semester of 2022 when Auburn University initiated the demolition of 11 residence halls in The Hill, a landmark part of campus life since 1967. Originally home to around 1500 undergraduate students spread across 13 residence halls, The Hill was filled with student activity. However, by the fall of 2023, only two of the original 13 buildings remained standing, now housing about 400 students.

"The demolition was happening for pretty much the entire time I lived there," said Ally Keller, a resident of Sasnett Hall in The Hill. "It made it very hard to study in the building, so I spent a lot of time in other places on campus studying till late at night."

Auburn University teacher, Brooke Bacak, addressed the concerns of campus construction as well. She said, "I've even had to stop lecturing to wonder whether unusually loud sounds are normal activity or something more alarming to be investigated. These days, unfortunately, loud bangs on college campuses can bring more sinister possibilities to mind."

The predicament of Auburn's students highlights a larger pattern of urban renewal and rapid expansion that is permeating the city. Brooke, who is concerned for her students' learning, said,

“Students and classroom learning must be the priority when balancing short-term disruptions with even the most desirable long-term improvements.”

Auburn’s inhabitants’ and students’ voices serve as a realistic reminder of the changes this campus is facing. Brooke mentioned that her students' reactions to the construction have been overwhelmingly negative, emphasizing the need for Auburn to consider the voices of students when altering campus.

The residents of The Cottage, an off-campus passed-down sorority house that is scheduled for demolition, are victims of the urban renewal surrounding Auburn’s campus. Having to deal with the harsh reality of gentrification and housing inequity, these students are facing eviction in order to make way for posh townhomes, with price tags starting at \$1.75 million. The residents are left feeling abandoned by a system that puts profit before people.

“We feel super sad that our house is being knocked down and even more frustrated that they aren’t rebuilding affordable housing for students,” said Crosby Beckel, resident of the off-campus home scheduled for demolition. “We have lived here the last two years and have loved every second of it. We have so many memories here from having stuff before game days, to just having all of our friends come over for a movie night, we are really sad to see it go.”

Sam Jareczek, a resident at 320 West Magnolia apartment complex, has also spoken out about the constant inconveniences from the active construction next to the building. “Beginning early in the morning and continuing throughout the day, there are loud aggressive construction sounds,” Sam said. “This not only disrupts my studies but also my sleep at times. The construction has been going on since the fall and seems it will continue on until the next school year, meaning us residents will have to put up with the inconveniences for several more months.”

Recent events on Auburn University’s campus reflect a time of significant change for both locals and students. Mia Nathan, Auburn student and resident says, “Having grown up in Auburn for the last 11 years, one of the biggest changes I’ve noticed is the demolition and remodeling of infrastructure and buildings around the city.”

The opinions of Auburn’s citizens and students must always be heard during decision-making processes. “While frequent road closures and construction are frustrating at times, I do genuinely feel that the end product is worth the frustration,” Mia mentioned. If Auburn can foster open communication while honoring its history, Auburn can become a more powerful community as it advances with empathy and consideration.