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OPINION

San Anselmo-Fairfax Patch Answers: What Does the Seminary Actually Own?

The San Francisco Theological Seminary is consolidating; which buildings will remain and which will be sold?

By **Pamela Feinsilber** December 10, 2010

There's a timely reason to be asking where exactly the seminary ends and the town begins. A couple of years ago, the seminary asked Novato real estate developers [HartMarin](http://www.hartmarin.com/hartmarinhome.html) (<http://www.hartmarin.com/hartmarinhome.html>) to look at the number of students versus the number of properties the seminary owned. Over time, as enrollment grew, the campus has spread into surrounding neighborhoods; now, however, the supply of buildings exceeds the demand for them.

[HartMarin came up with a plan to consolidate all housing on the historic site, in the process selling the 18 homes and 39 apartments off campus—which will, according to its Campus Plan 2010 \(aka the Master Plan Amendment\) \(<http://sananselmofairfax.patch.com/articles/seminary-unveils-biggest-project-in-decades>\), "provide a substantial smart-growth economic boost" to San Anselmo. The city is studying these plans now.](http://sananselmofairfax.patch.com/articles/seminary-unveils-biggest-project-in-decades)

The fairytale castle-on-a-hill that is the San Francisco Theological Seminary actually started with a building on Haight Street, hence the "San Francisco" part of the name. (Before that, the four professors and four students met at the Presbyterian City College, on the site that became Union Square.) Eventually, the board of directors felt "a more commodious site," as the school's official history puts it, was needed, and soon it was considering spots in "salubrious Marin County."

The residential campus opened in San Anselmo in 1892, when the beautiful stone Montgomery and Scott Halls were dedicated. The tiny town had been named just a few years earlier and began to grow after the Seminary was built. According to the San Anselmo Historical Society, the castlelike buildings "stood like sentinels on what was then a barren knoll, looking down on the summer folk who camped along the creek." By then, six professors were teaching about 20 students.

In the late 1890s and early 1900s came the third stone building, Montgomery Chapel, and the Victorian houses along Bolinas Road, Seminary Road, and Kensington Court. By the mid 1920s, with 106 students, the seminary was the third largest Presbyterian seminary in the country. The next phase of development lasted from the late 1930s through the 1950s, with the construction of Hunter, Landon, Baird, and Oxtoby Halls, the student-residence units; Alexander Hall, where students and faculty ate; Geneva Hall, a library and chapel; and an administration building on Kensington.

Just as everywhere else, the seminary saw great growth and expansion after World War II, with more than 300 students by the mid 1950s. During the 1960s and 1970s, the school added married-student housing north of the central campus, at the J.R. Little and Leslie Dobbins apartments, as well as Lloyd Center, on the central campus.

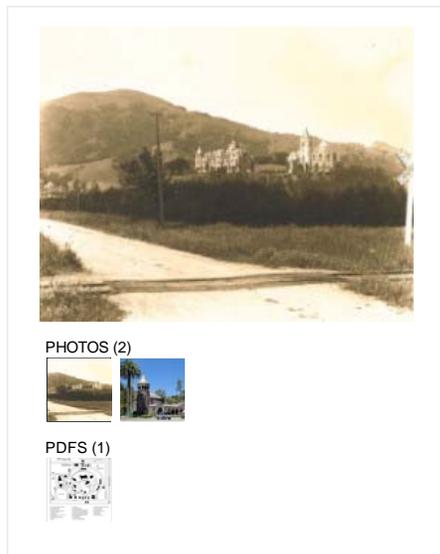
Fulltime student enrollment peaked in the mid 1950s. That's probably when the seminary acquired all those houses, duplexes, apartment buildings, and vacant lots in San Anselmo, Fairfax, and Ross. Fast forward to 2009, when there were fewer than 100 fulltime students living on campus. It's expected that number will shrink to 87 over the next few years (although the number of part-time students should rise). In addition, as of late 2008, just 21 of the school's 53 employees lived on campus.

The plan for consolidation reflects a national trend favoring green growth in cities, with infill, or multistory projects in the urban core, replacing sprawl. The Seminary's Master Plan calls for adding 18 student households to the campus by building a student village and remodeling Landon and Hunter Halls. Seven new cottages on a Faculty Row will replace five bigger homes. More housing will be sold than will be built.

The 18 off-campus homes are in San Anselmo: 28 Austin Avenue; 300 Bolinas Avenue; 59, 63, 67, and 67A Kensington Road; 116 and 118 Mariposa Avenue; 43A, 101, 115, and 117 Ross Avenue; and 17 and 35 Waverly Road. In Ross: 77, 79, and 109 Bolinas Avenue. In Fairfax: 32 Valley Road. The 39 multifamily units are 19 and 21 Belle Avenue, 100 and 108 Mariposa Avenue, and 108 and 111 Ross Avenue.

HartMarin principal Rob Hart said the town government is in the midst of doing an environmental review of the project, and "from our perspective, things seem to be going very well." He expects the review to be done in about 60 days.

You can view [the seminary's master plan here](http://www.hartmarin.com/hmportal/sftsmpla.html) (<http://www.hartmarin.com/hmportal/sftsmpla.html>). And check the campus map at right for an idea of what buildings are part of the seminary.



PHOTOS (2)



PDFS (1)



What are your favorite parts of the seminary? [Tell us in the comments.](#)