A coalition of neighborhoods is asking for a moratorium on new residential development in their area until a community plan is adopted to solve what is seen as a problem of density.

The coalition, Save Our Neighborhoods, is made up of private citizens and community groups representing City Heights, Normal Heights, University Heights and North Park, an area the city Planning Department calls "Mid City" and one that has gained approximately 21,500 residents in three years.

Developers have brought new residents to these older neighborhoods by demolishing many of the small single-family residential units that have dominated the areas for more than 60 years and replacing them with apartment complexes.

"It is changing the very character of the neighborhoods," said Jim Villars, "and putting a strain on city services, particularly park and recreation and public schools."

Villars, president of the Normal Heights Community Association, said the change from single-family units to apartments has been going on for years "without anyone providing any increase in services, parks and schools, primarily, to handle the increased population."

Mid City is bounded by Interstate 8 on the north, State 94 on the south, Interstate 805 on the west, and the La Mesa city line on the east. Approximately 120,000 persons live in its 13 square miles.

"All of the apartment building has definitely changed the character of the neighborhoods, esthetically," Villars said. "If you drive down many of the streets of the area now, you see stucco-box apartments with concrete slabs out front full of parked vehicles instead of the old single-family bungalows with well-landscaped front yards."

Mayor Hedgecock, Councilwoman Gloria McColl, Supervisor Leon Williams and School Board member Susan Davis have been invited to a meeting tonight at Adams Elementary School to discuss the proposed moratorium.

A community plan for the area, written in 1965, was to have been updated as early as 1975 but has not been, according to Villars. Part of the problem has been a turnover in council members representing the district -- McColl is its third council member since 1975.

"Lack of parks is a big problem," Villars said. "Normal Heights, a neighborhood in the area, has more than 12,000 people. Based on General Plan standards it should have three parks. We have a basketball court which they call a park."

He said as many older residents in the area die or sell their property, families with children are moving in to the apartments going up on former single-family parcels because of the relatively cheap rent.
"I don’t want to sound like an elitist who is against this kind of housing," Villars said, "but when some neighborhoods are as high as 70 percent rental, then we are out-of-balance."

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