Housing Strategy Group
February 15, 2011, 12pm-1pm, 4-110

In attendance: vrajesh (VM), humphrhe (HH), afpierce (AP), cortiz (CO), tschenk (TS), crj226 (CJ), colins (DC), ccolombo (CC), arayo (AR), mroth (MR), tgearty (TG), spatocco (BS)

Attachments:
Housing Packet (5 pgs)
GSC Northwest Safety Survey (19 pgs)

An asterisk followed by parentheses in the notes below indicate editors’ notes and are included to clarify the meaning of sections that may otherwise be confusing or ambiguous. Minutes were taken by Vrajesh Modi, edited by Vrajesh Modi and Henry Humphreys, and reviewed by the committee.

Summer Housing
- DC: Buildings we’re planning on closing: Bexley, New, Next, Random, Phoenix
- CC: Housing stock from Phoenix will go back to Graduate housing
- DC: Student housing – East Campus and Macgregor; guest housing will be Baker, Burton Conner, McCormick, Senior, Simmons; still deciding on timeline and plans for storage; *(see attached timeline); last year, we had 84 students take advantage of movers; have put it to Saturday to give students who are working during the week a chance; Maseeh Hall opens on Monday, August 15. *(see attached information sheet on Move and Storage Options); price went up from $300 to $315; will try to resolve issues from last year; self-storage also an option
- MR: Self-storage enough for about 3 students
- CO: Condition of units?
- DC: Very good condition; dry, etc.
- CO: Insurance
- DC: Yes, up to $1000
- CC: And can get addl. insurance if they want.
- DC: Ready to go – can do an announcement this week if everyone’s ready to go. Letter from Dean last year? Can work with Tom.
- CC: With closures, I know Next will have work done. Others?
- DC: New House – fire alarm system, sprinklers; last dorm with no sprinklers in bedrooms; housing is working with facilities to put in new generator; large enough to handle Macgregor too. New house is one of the few that is A/C, but from 1975, and barely runs, so all of that will be replaced.
- HH: A/C will all be energy efficient.
- DC: Correct, will save on utilities.
- CC: Meetings with Macgregor and EC housemasters?
- DC: Sent e-mail to all housemasters today, let them know that we’d do a formal announcement soon.
- VM: Why did price go up for storage?
- DC: Last year was first year; small adjustment.
CC: Dormcon and UA okay?
MR: Senior house was the only place where there was a concern.
DC: We will be using Towers this summer. Also, McCormick limited because of Maseeh. Burton Conner will be 100% full.
VM: How should students report complaints with moving/storage issues?
DC: Report to Metropolitan directly.
CO: Anything different in process from last year?
DC: No, just the specific buildings. This year, moving students into summer assignments early, so dates for summer housing look longer; there won’t be a price increase because of that.
CC: Next is having a general house meeting tonight. Can we announce?
VM: Will work with Henry after the meeting to look over the minutes, send them out.
CC: Everyone in agreement? *(everyone: yes)
HH: Work will be going on in all dining dorms to upgrade kitchens to prepare for new meal plan.
CC: Thank you for everyone who has worked on this. Suspect we’re ready for next topic …

Report on Safety from GSC
TS: Don’t know where Brian is. Two other matters … furnishing issue for Westgate, and rail crossing issue – longer term issue around noise at Warehouse. Don’t know if any updates there …
CC: We were going to check into rentals …
HH: No, but will get an update.
TS: Not incredibly timely, but wanted to flag that.
HH: Several companies in Boston area.
TS: If GSC can do something with housing, get a volume discount.
HH: Will follow up with community affairs
DC: As far as I know, will start in March
TS: So maybe that issue is more timely; question around if it’s going to cause disruption
BS: Brief context for survey … number of incidents last October and November; GSC initiated survey around perception of safety in Northwest; worked with MIT Police, Chief DiFava in doing the survey; wanted to understand how safe students felt, vs. how safe they actually are, so can reconcile
CO: Timing of survey?
BS: November to end of year; postponed it because there had just been one incident; had highest response rate ever for GSC survey (30-40%); representative in terms of year, gender
CO: IR?
BS: Did not go through IR.
CC: Have shared with IR?
BS: Not yet.
CO: Statistical analysis … should share with IR; they can help with that.
BS: Ok. Wanted to get idea of what it’s like to be a grad student in Northwest; more than a quarter return home after 10pm; lot of them walk, and by themselves; many choose to go down Albany Street; three major flags …
HH: Albany because easiest, or because of crossing of tracks?
BS: Didn’t ask that question specifically; my intuition is that three residences are on Albany; whether they’ll go over tracks depends on degree of revitalization; students feel it’s a little shady, so depends; Vassar is better lit and more open

AP: Hopefully because we’ve encouraged students to use Albany, and not cross tracks …

BS: Often, trains sit there

DC: Train sitting there for 3 weeks now …

TG: Difference in crime along tracks vs. along street?

AP: If anything happens along tracks, nobody will know about it until next day, even if simply tripping and falling

BS: Getting to the real crux of the survey, asked “How safe do you feel.” Same buckets as a 2004 IR survey. Didn’t know what to think about it, but, as went to higher resolution data, as students return home later, students feel less safe; compared to 2004 data, average has moved lightly towards “unsafe”, so that was a little troubling; should note that it wasn’t clear in 2004 survey what “on campus” and “off campus” meant. Another important fact about data – 2004 data is all grad students, not Northwest, but still, this is a first pass. Next step for us is to contact IR and ask for them to give us higher resolution on data from 2004. Overall, from first pass, students feeling slightly less safe, on average. Number of free responses … gave students a choice of five separate possible things that could be implemented; overwhelmingly, students wanted better lighting along Albany Street; also, increased visible police presence. Chief DiFava is very supportive of these, as well as blue light call boxes; glad to hear that there are potentially plans for the next year.

AR: Lighting situation?

BS: Often flickers, or stretches without lighting; call boxes sometimes aren’t visible from one side of the road; third issue is that there’s a lot of nooks and crannies that jut off of the edges

TS: Know you don’t have quantitative, but do you know why Campus escort program is lowest ranked?

BS: Did not receive any comments, so can’t really say.

AR: Current plan to improve lighting?

BS: One of the recommendations from survey.

AR: Up to MIT?

AP: Depends … bit of both *(MIT, Cambridge). Sgt. Vossmer works periodically with City of Cambridge … have to get few different entities.

AR: Cambridge willing to work with us?

AP: As far as I know, yes. Sgt. Vossmer has a very good relationship with Cambridge.

BS: Instead of telling where to put lights, were hoping to work with Facilities in an iterative way. MIT police requested a series of questions about where students get information … got feedback that a lot of Housemaster / House Manager alert is done through e-mail. For most students, time elapsed is less than one day; we feel this is adequate.

CC: Not alerted because crime wasn’t against MIT individual?

AP: Could be too, that nobody will have a chance to send out alert until the beginning of the week, if incident occurs over weekend.

BS: Became clear in October and November that students received alerts in a timely way; not as concerned about this as about lighting.

TS: What’s the purpose of alerts?
• AP: Just to keep the community aware about issues that might be cropping up. If there’s a particular spot that has heated up, want you to be more aware of the area as well.

• TS: Is there situation where it’s urgent?

• AP: Best example – student center incident. We knew that the threat had left, and did not want to draw attention back to the scene.

• TG: That incident also changed the way that the information system worked. Prior, that would not have qualified. Now, will be put to command bridge – maybe we have to send out an alert, just so people know what happened.

• MR: To speak from a dorm point of view, people felt unsafe that they were hearing from news media before hearing from MIT.

• DC: I was there that night … hadn’t heard about it. They’ve made some changes to make sure that doesn’t happen again.

• CO: Question about alerts: description, in terms of race/ethnicity. After one of the alerts, particular group felt uncomfortable.

• AP: Have been doing it for 34 years … was actively looking for this particular person. The more information, the better … type of clothing, etc. Very important that we put that information out to the people that are looking.

• BS: Will wrap it up, then … e-mail is best alert method; no reason to get tech-savvy and hope that Twitter feed will be the best method; conclusions from survey are clear – grad students are disproportionately affected by crime; live further, and walk home alone; worse lighting on path. Not as concerned about alert methods and timing, so major recommendations are to install and increase visibility of call boxes and address lighting issues on Albany Street. Know that there are a lot of options, but regardless of specific implementation, support any increase in lighting. Also support increased police presence.

• AP: In the process – were looking for two new hires, and had over 200 applicants; looking to start one new officer in July, and adjust shift hours. Northwest is very high priority.

• BS: Please let us know how we can help.

• CC: Can I add a recommendation – really important for each semester that houses do some sort of education program with MIT Police to close doors, lock belongings, etc. Everyone should be conscious of safety precautions and services that are available. Program will be more useful through dorm governments and housemasters; we have programs at Next all the time, and MIT Police are always willing to work with dorm.

• AP: More than willing to be involved.

• TG: Grad students disproportionately affected by street crimes?

• BS: Working with MIT Police on getting statistics; would like to have a heat map.

• AP: Will work with Captain Perault on mapping.

• CC: Crossing Briggs Field also an issue, etc. Would love to see a heat map, and see who is really affected.

• TG: Information important – if we know where things happen, students can be encouraged to not take that way home.

• TS: 60% of grad students live off campus; this is low-hanging fruit, but greater vulnerability in those areas.

• TG: Used to live closer to river, but looked at statistics online, and realized Central Square was actually less safe.
CC: Can’t overemphasize role of educating community on this. Appreciate all the work that was done. Anything else?

TG: Let me know when you are willing to publicize.

BS: Not giving out raw data now, but willing to give out these slides now. Heat map would also be particularly sensitive.

CC: Thank all committee members who worked with Housing on summer plan. Good way to work on this issue. See you at the next meeting.