Center Plans Released But Funds Lacking

By David E. Trewett

MIT's proposed Student Center is under scrutiny by the administration as it is the most important unrestricted goal of the Second Century Program. Although the necessary funds are not yet available, efforts are being made to secure a number of substantial gifts for this purpose.

The plans presented by President Sloan Monday are the preliminary plans which have been approved by the Joint Building Committee; by the time the final plans are ready, the Institute Structure Committee should be in a position to begin construction immediately on this, the second largest building of the Second Century Fund. It is hoped that ground may be broken for this project next spring and that the building will be completed in the spring of 1965.

A Plus—a Purpose

In order to appreciate the plans for the Student Center, one must understand what constitutes a structure and the effect it is to have on the community as a whole. Dean Robert E. Haldeman's committee (see article on page 10) gave the following direction: The student center should be a focal point for undergraduate activities outside of the classroom, dormitory, and the fraternity.

It should play an integral part in the non-academic educational life of the Institute. As a structure it should have a distinctive architectural character, expressive of its purpose and meaning in the MIT community. As a living entity it should be a place where intellectual traditions are developed and where the undergraduate may discover many different opportunities for intellectual, social and cultural broadening, which should be attractive both to individual students and to groups.

Towards a Community

A late statement made to the Committee was the basis for a "new academic community of students"; the idea will be discussed. The Center should not become, as the Committee report put it, "a cultural building and fall in its major purpose.

In line with these objectives, it was agreed that the Center should provide facilities for greater cross-facilitation and stimulation of free activities more accessible to the student body as a whole and provide space for formation of new social activities; for relaxation and informal student discussion. It is possible facilities such as the Rathskeller—which would naturally draw people together; and it medical facilities for various programs and exhibitions of science.

Other objectives for the union include a control tower for campus social events and inclusion of commercial facilities which would service the needs of students or the Institute in a whole.

Some Activities Not Included

The Committee report stated that undergraduate professional organizations which are closely tied with academic departments should continue to have their headquarters within the department. Certain other student groups, which require large specialized areas of space for a few people—such as the Model Railroad Society—or access to laboratories—as the Rocket Research Society—might also be located in the main Institute plant than in the Center.

The report then stated that "in the opinion of the chaplain, religious centers should be removed from any main stream activity, separation, isolation are important, and the building at MIT Memorial Drive nearly fulfilled time requirements." The church would continue to operate out of the Memorial Drive and "be a relationship to the Student Center similar to that of dormitories and fraternities.

The Final Phase

It was with these ideas in mind that Prof. Eduardo Catalano conceived and formulated the following building:

- Occupying a space roughly equivalent to a football field the Student Center will be set back from Massachusetts Avenue between the present and Student Athletic Center; it will face onto the plaza (i.e., towards the Charles River).
- Total floor space should come to about 150,000 sq. ft.
- The Center will consist of a basement and ground floor primarily for commercial facilities; a main floor and mezzanine for social activities and dining; and a top floor for student organizations and individual student recreation.
- The basic structure and the roof will be designed to allow the future addition of a fifth floor, as the roof will be enclosed by a parapet, such an addition would not affect the building's outline or appearance. All the floors of the Center will be connected by the two stairways and by two elevators. In addition, a large staircase will connect the main floor to the mezzanine. Eventually the basement levels of the Center and Building Seven may be connected by a tunnel under Mass. Ave.
- Main Floor—Mezzanine

The main floor and mezzanine will hopefully serve as the food point for MIT's social activities, this section of the Center will be accessible from the outside. In addition to a large stairway to the main floor in front of the building, there will also be a similar though smaller stairway at its western side. The main features of this social section are the dining hall and the multi-purpose room, each two stories in height. For varying degrees of privacy, the dining hall will be sub-divided into three small dining rooms seating about 20 persons at one end of the hall; the main section, seating about 170, in the middle; and a medium-sized hall at the other end, seating about 80-90.

Adjacent to this hall will be a "supermarket-style" serving area; an attempt to eliminate long lines, this innovation will hopefully allow students to enter the serving area with no delay, pass directly to those food-dispensing areas which interest them, and then leave through several check-out counters.

Other dining facilities will include three additional dining rooms on the mezzanine floor along with a children's room seating 100. As the Committee said, "the Rathskeller should be an inviting, intimate and unique that it can itself grow to be an MIT tradition. The mezzanine's dining halls will be used by activities, student clubs, groups, etc., for informal dinner or dinner-meetings, or they can double as regular meeting rooms.

The multi-purpose room will be located on the west side of the building, symmetrically opposite the dining hall. Holding a maximum of about 200 people, it will be available as a lounge, banquet room, movie house, or small theater, a wide corridor connecting the two large rooms will be flanked by two rows of bookcases, with rotating cabinets, suitable for art exhibits and specialized shows of student activities. In this area there will be bourses to provide waiting areas for those attending social events in the mezzanine space and room, and at other times, to be used for branches, small parties and dance parties.

Three additional lounges, one with a balcony, will be located on the mezzanine floor. The basement library on the mezzanine will contain newspapers, periodicals and fiction and will have seating space both at tables and in easy chairs.

Activities Floor

The top floor will house students activity facilities. The Technology Community Association will be centrally located, facing the central recreation center, equipped for the use of as many as 500 persons at one time. The Undergraduate Association will have a meeting room and a handball court. The Lecture Series Committee will have offices, The Tech Technique, Van Den, Tech Engineering News, and Yawget will have offices with nearby desk space. Other offices will be occupied by Musical Clubs, Drama Society, Drummer, APD, Religious Groups, IFC, Debate Society, and Science Fiction Society.

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A large amount of space will be devoted to activities for individuals and small groups. Included will be a dark room, six music practice rooms, a room for arts and crafts work. The open spaces and browsing library on the mezzanine, as well as an eight-hour beauty salon in the basement, will be open to these groups.

Ground Floor—Basement

The ground floor of the Center will be devoted entirely to commercial facilities. Its main occupant will be the expanded Coop, similar in its scope of operations to that in Harvard Square. A bank and a drugstore are also hoped for on this floor. The basement may also have a barbershop and office, a shoe repair shop, a laundromat, and perhaps two or three commercial units; there will also be space available for the Coop, the IFC, and the Ouzing Club on this level, as well as the bowling alley and a large kitchen.