Four students consulted upon new dorm rents

By Bert Halstead

The Housing Office has been consulting with a student committee about next year's dormitory room rents. Three undergraduate dorm residents and one representative from Ashdown House have been meeting with Director of Housing and Dining Services Howard F. Miller and members of his office and the Dean's Office.

Every year the Housing Office has to look at the projected budget for the "consolidated dormitory system" (all dorms except for married student housing) to determine room rents for the coming year. Last year, a group of students sat down with the Housing Office planners for the first time, but there was concern that they had become involved in the decision-making process too late to have any real effect. This year the Dean's Office suggested that a student committee be involved from the beginning and therefore nominated the four students who are now serving on the committee.

The Housing Office budget is rising sharply, pushed up by increased costs for electricity and heat, as well as higher physical plant charges. Mr. Miller attributed this to new regulations requiring the use of low-sulfur fuel, among many other things. Not so long ago, he said, MIT would go three or four years without changing room rents. This situation does not seem likely to recur in the foreseeable future, however. Rather, it appears that the budget will have to be reviewed on a yearly basis because of uncertain costs.

Stating that room rents are bound to rise next year, Miller explained that the group is up against a wall to a certain extent because most of what could be done has already been done in past years to hold down the size of rent increases. This includes such items as the discontinuance of in-room cleaning and new damage-control policies. The $50 room deposit and the associated machinery were introduced so that liability for damage could be assessed against the small group of individuals responsible for it, rather than being spread over the entire dorm system in the form of higher rents.

Knowing the approximate size of the increase in terms of dollars per man, the group is investigating several possible ways of reducing it. One possibility is the replacement of Institute-supplied desk service with voluntary desk service in each dorm. This would result in a substantial rent savings. However, it did not look terribly hopeful because many dorms want at least as much desk service as they now have, and seem loath to part with the current arrangement.

This had led to speculation about a two-tier rent system, part of the charge being fixed by the Housing Office. The other part would vary and would depend upon the amount of desk service, the level of power usage in the dorm, and other such things. There is also the possibility of increasing summer session rents, but these must remain competitive with other summer housing. Finally, if the Housing Office can find someone to take over the presently unused Burton House dining hall, its mortgage and utility charges will no longer be on the budget.

In the not too distant future, as soon as some of the preliminary problems have been reached, the group will sit down with the entire Dormcon (the presidents of all the dormitories) and finish the planning for next year.

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