Federal funds may be available to pay for MIT dorm construction

By Mike McNeese

MIT's problems with financing New House and a proposed new dormitory may be eased a little by new developments within the federal government.

A conference committee of the House and Senate, and the Senate has approved language which would enable the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to re-open the College Housing Program, which was closed in 1973.

Such an action would make about $136 million in long-term, low-interest loans and deferred-service grants available to colleges and universities to help finance new dormitory construction, completion of on-going dorm expansion plans, or renovation of existing campus housing facilities. MIT, which is still waiting for the release of $810,000 of funding for New House and which hopes to replace $5.9 million worth of dormitories used in that construction, is planning to "take a hard look" at the congressional action to see if the Institute can qualify for the low-interest federal program.

"The College Housing Program, formed under the Housing Act of 1950, provided funding for dorms as long as 23 years ago," said Director of MIT's Financial Services Department Edward Sorenson. The program was closed, he explained, as a result of an action by the Congress the very same day that the House subcommittee voted down the bill.

MIT would probably have used the loan money again in financing New House had the program continued, according to Sorenson. "It's a program which may be closed now. We were just getting ready to take an application to them to consider for new dorm construction when the program was closed," he explained.

New House was therefore not designed with any thought towards federal funding, and it might be difficult for the Institute to qualify for aid.

"But their standards for dorm construction were lower than ours in so many ways that we were really constrained in using their money," Sorenson explained. The HUD standards were geared to "high-rise, moderately-constructed dormitories," not house for schools which were undergoing rapid expansion. "Their figures on square feet per student and dollars spent per square foot were really not the same as we had to build to," Sorenson said.

As a result, MIT "took some spaces and called them something else" to qualify for funds. "They had money for things other than dorms, and so we treated some dorm space as different facilities to get around their low limits on spending," Sorenson said.

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