Fraternities face possible fixups

By Gerald Radack

A change in the fire regulations may force several fraternities to undertake expensive major renovations.

A new clause in the state building code apparently requires that the circular staircases found in several of the Back Bay fraternity houses be closed off, which would require major renovation, according to Associate Dean for Student Affairs Kenneth Browning '66.

Although past building codes have prohibited open stairwells in new buildings, Browning said, the new code is retroactive - it requires old buildings to meet this particular requirement.

Browning said that he was hoping to find an "offsetting provision" that would allow the fraternities to meet safety requirements without having to renovate, and added that the Dean's office will hire students over IAP to "go over the code with a fine tooth comb" to see if the renovations are necessary.

One of the difficulties involved in closing the staircases, Browning explained, is that "if you put more than 20 percent of the valuation (into a renovation) you have to bring the entire building up to code." This could end up costing hundreds of thousands of dollars, he added, citing the recent renovation of the Number Six Club house on the campus, which cost $600,000.

Browning said that so far "there have been no efforts that I know of of any enforcement authorities to come in" and make the fraternities alter their buildings.

The fraternities are inspected every year when their lodging licenses are up for renewal, Browning said. He added that the inspector can withhold the license if he finds what he believes are building violations. Any fraternity which did not have a license could be closed down by authorities at any time.

The Dean's office is not recommending any course of action to the affected fraternities while "we try to get this compilation of the code so we have some facts." Some of the off-campus houses were considering moving to the MIT campus anyway, he added.

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