RCB Ruling Clears Way for U. Park

By Joanne Stone

After a decade of demonstrations, hearings, and court dispute, the Line of University Park and the Blanche Street houses finally received conclusion last spring when the homes were moved to their new location on Franklin Street in Cambridge. The relocation of the homes was the last obstacle on the road to construction of a 200-room Senior Suite Hotel on that site and the completion of the University Park project.

For several years, the two MIT-owned three-story houses remaining on Blanche Street — occupied by a total of four people — had been the only thing standing in the way of MIT's completion of the plan for University Park: the construction of the hotel and convention center in the so-called Simplex parcel in Cambridgeport. The relocation of the homes to a site 1,000 feet away from their previous location had been approved by the Cambridge Rent Control Board in 1989 and was upheld in Middlesex County Superior Court last summer. MIT had agreed to pay for temporary housing for the four tenants and to provide care for any animals they own.

However, due to the July 1990 parking freeze in Cambridge, the case was brought in front of the Cambridge Rent Control Board again. The tenants claimed that the freeze changed University Park's situation enough to permit the board to declare the removal permits null and void.

At a hearing last January, the board found that circumstances had not changed, but denied the issuance of certificates of eviction "until MIT presents evidence to the [Rent Control Board's] executive director that it has received financing of the development proposed for the subject site." MIT decided to seek the Rent Control Board for what it saw as a violation of the original agreement. "The board made an agreement, we moved up to our side of it, we're provided all that we've demanded and now they're asking for more," said Scott Lewis, an attorney for Palmer and Chandler, who represents MIT in the case.

The board eventually voted to suspend the eviction.

Bob Dielros, associate director of the MIT News Office, noted MIT's enthusiasm over the fact that University Park can finally move forward. "We're very pleased that the project is moving forward and that it's one step closer to being a reality," he said. He also noted that this outcome serves to be a positive one for all the parties involved.

Even tenant Peter Valentine expressed his approval of the project for the first time in an interview with the Boston Globe.

"What I want about all these years is that there has been a relatively harmonious conclusion — I'm happy with the decisions that have been made," Valentine said.

In the past, Valentine had been a staunch opponent of the development project, and had come to represent the intangible bond that would be severed by the removal of their homes from their present site.

In a board hearing in 1990, Valentine testified that he could not be moved from his home because he was currently in karma with his energy fields and relocation might jeopardize this karma.

His testimony was accompanied by unmitigated evidence, including a bag of gray hair which Valentine claimed had from his own and a display of other hair which he said showed he had found a way to turn gray hair back to its original color without the use of chemicals, "in other words, to reverse the aging process."

Valentine claimed that if research like his were occurring at MIT, all efforts would be made to accommodate the researcher. He had said that he had to remain at his current residence, in its current location on Blanche Street, in order to continue his research.

The controversy surrounding MIT's planned development of University Park began about a decade ago, when three-story townhouses located on MIT property on Blanche Street were left vacant and uninhabitable.

The buildings entered the public spotlight in 1988 when protesters constructed a "Tent City" and asked MIT to allow them to renovate the homes to house the homeless. Some people claimed that MIT had purposely allowed these homes to deteriorate in order to remove them from the rental market and vacate the land, in an attempt to expedite the development of University Park.

"University Park development is a definitive improvement over what was there before," said Catherine Woodbury, Cambridge City project planner, who helped oversee the development of the University Park land.

"Prior to all of this, the character of that part of Cambridgeport was older industrial," she said. "They needed to be used, bigger, bigger, bigger buildings." Woodbury said that Woodbury speculated that University Park’s days are over perhaps, but if it did not, "It’s not always possible to identify what might become a controversial issue in the Administration, Students Revive Housing Debate

By Dave Watt

After years of false starts, serious discussions began in October on rehousing the dormitory system at MIT. In addition, the administration successfully provided the first glimpse of its plans for the construction of new on-campus dormitories.

The Undergraduate Association responded by forming a committee to propose an alternative to the Report of the Freshman Housing Committee, which one week with overwhelming student opinion that it was released in October 1989.

The committee, chaired by former Provost John M. Deutch, "will be asked to examine the way freshmen choose their living groups and areas where they first arrive at MIT. Among other things, the report suggested that all freshmen should live on campus, with rooms for independent living groups postponed until later that year.

Many administrators actively promoted the report. "The system of residence selection was designed for another era," said Administrators produkt, which was released before the summer, went back to the system.

While the Freshman Housing Committee's report was the first step in answering the calls for change, it is not clear what the committee's recommendations will be, if and when the problems will be addressed. We must be willing to look beyond our own personal interests."

But many students, concerned about the varied cultures created by ILG and dormitories, oppose any changes to the current system.

"Putting rush off to sophomore year would make freshmen more independent," said Burton House President Susan K. Rubin '90 at the forum. "Freshmen are the life blood of a living dormitory."

But demographic changes may force further housing reforms. The rising proportions of women and minorities at MIT make some sort of change inevitable, according to Director of Developing Orchid S. Simcha MCP '79, "Our female population is 30 percent. If we were to go up to 40 or 50 percent, the housing problems would be exacerbated."

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