Safe Ride Should Also Serve MIT-Owned Apartments

Column by Josh Hartmann
contributing editor

If you read Tuesday's issue of The Tech, you'll notice that I was mugged last Sunday. [Student Robbed in Central Square, Apr. 13]. I've never been mugged before, so it wasn't until Sunday that I knew what it must have been like for the many victims I've interviewed when reporting for The Tech and other newspapers.

I was on the way home from The Tech's office at about 10:45 p.m. when it happened. I live about three blocks from the heart of Cambridge Square in a building owned by MIT and reserved exclusively for the housing of MIT-affiliated people (who tend mostly to be graduate students in this particular case).

Two blocks away from home, I was confronted by two young men who claimed to have a gun. I wasn't about to argue. The thugs affiliated people (who tend mostly to be graduate students) in my building aren't the sort of people who tend to be aggressive. I felt it best to withdraw.

I had asked the drivers repeatedly to take me home from the Student Center, but alas, I was forced to get off at the Shell gasoline station at Lafayette Square (near Alpha Delta Pi and Women's Independent Living Group). Only once, in a driving snowstorm last year, did a driver take me all the way to Magazine Street.

It is hard for me to reconcile this in my head. My building is at least as far away from campus as Pika, and it houses more MIT students. It is also in the same general direction but is equally isolated from other living groups. And yet the residents of Pika receive some general assistance from the Institute about their safety which the people in my building apparently are not entitled to. (I don't mean to single out Pika; I could use Epiklon Theta or Zeta Beta Tau just as well, although those two living groups are in the opposite direction of Central Square.)

This opens a basket of worms for the Institute. MIT owns other buildings around Cambridge which are used for similar purposes, and some of those are even farther away than mine. Plus, graduate students could legitimately argue that since the Institute forces them (through high rents and lack of housing supply) to live off campus in such remote regions as Somerville, MIT should ensure their safety when traveling to and from campus.

At the very least, though, MIT has an obligation to extend Safe Ride to the buildings it owns either by adding a new van to the Cambridge routes and increasing their radius or by instructing drivers to serve the MIT-owned apartment buildings with on-demand service (as was the case with ZBT and ET until the new schedule-based system took effect). The students who have chosen to take advantage of this housing alternative that MIT has presented to them deserve the same benefits others receive.

On a related matter, credit where credit is due. Although this particular crime took place off campus, Campus Police officers were very helpful when I reported the incident to the department after reporting it to Cambridge police. The MIT officers were extremely courteous and offered genuinely useful hints to try to recover my stolen belongings.

Josh Norman '93 is an economics major who doesn't particularly like columns written in the first person.