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Neighbors push MIT to build more graduate student housing

Posted by Matt Rocheleau October 3, 2013 11:12 AM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

An MIT working group will soon unveil its recommendations for how the school should factor an apparent need for more graduate student housing into its broader plans to develop 26 acres of property it owns in Kendall Square.

Meanwhile, neighbors continue to lobby MIT to find ways to house more – ideally all – of its graduate students, whether through new construction, converting existing residential buildings into student housing or other means.

At a “listening session” with more than two dozen area residents Tuesday night, Phillip Clay, chairman of the Graduate Student Housing Working Group, said that the panel hopes to finish its report and present recommendations to leaders of the institute “in a few weeks.”

For years, residents and some professors have urged the institute to house more of its students. Doing so, they say, would help reduce the heavy demand and high prices for rental housing in the neighborhood.

Lee Farris, a neighbor and member of the Cambridge Residents Alliance, urged the working group during Tuesday’s meeting to recommend that the institute build more housing for its graduate students soon.

She said students often room together in multi-bedroom apartments, squeezing out families for a type of rental housing that is in short supply.

“A bunch of graduate students coming together can afford to pay more rent,” than working families, Farris said.

Neighbors also asked that the working group recommend that the institute find ways to make student housing more attractive and more affordable to ensure students fill MIT housing.

Nadeem Mazen, a former graduate student, said MIT housing is often too expensive for students and that the institute is “way behind” in creating new housing options.

Some residents said the institute should create enough student housing for all of its graduate students and its postdoctoral students. The institute should start, neighbors said, by building thousands, not just a few hundred units, soon.

Clay, a professor of urban studies and planning and former MIT chancellor, said the

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residents' feedback will be considered as the working group develops its report and recommendations.

The working group **formed** earlier this year shortly after MIT **announced changes** to its proposal – which was first introduced in 2011 – to redevelop 26-acres of its property in Kendall Square.

In April, the Cambridge City Council **approved** those changes, which altered zoning rules to allow buildings in parts of Kendall Square to be more than twice as tall more than double the maximum height for buildings in parts of Kendall Square and on MIT's east campus.

MIT has said that the zoning changes will allow it to build more than 2 million square feet of office, lab, retail, housing, and academic space on land now used as parking lots.

The institute **announced recently** that it will select an urban-design firm this fall to help it complete the planning process for the development.

The **massive redevelopment plan** has come under fire by neighbors who say the plan does not include enough new graduate student housing. The plan calls for up to 300 housing units.

In the 1980s, the institute set a goal to house half of its graduate students, but only about 38 percent of the 6,200 graduates students are currently housed by the institute.

The rest live off campus, and the majority off the off-campus graduate students reside in Cambridge.

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mjrochele@gmail.com. Looking for more coverage of area colleges and universities? Go to our [Your Campus pages](#).

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