

Summary of MIT Planning 1960-2000

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In response to the increasing size of the school's student body, the actions of the MIT Planning Office during the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by planning for development of the academic campus. Since that time, planning and development actions have been focused more on the provision of supportive services and housing for students, as well as profit-seeking commercial real estate ventures.

Launched in 1960, the Second Century Fund Campaign raised nearly 150% of its original goal spurring the largest number of capitol projects in MIT's history. At the same time, the Office created a Long-Range Planning Committee consisting of members of the Academic Council, faculty, and administration (but few students) and charged them with creating a long-range plan for the school. The resulting 1960 Campus Master Plan directed development to the existing campus area recommending that land be used very intensively through redevelopment projects, and some limited land acquisitions.

The MIT Housing Plan promoted many of the same goals that surfaced some 40 years later in the report from the Task Force for Student Life and Learning. Both stated that students and faculty need more opportunities to interact on campus, and that providing housing for students and faculty on or near campus would facilitate reaching this goal. The Housing Plan, created after surveying students, faculty, and staff, recommended constructing student housing at west campus, a goal which came to fruition in projects like McCormick Hall and Westgate, as well as developing projects like 100 Memorial Drive where faculty and staff could live (which did not occur). The plan also recommended providing favorable mortgage programs for faculty who wanted to live in Cambridge. Funding was the primary obstacle to implementation of many of this plan's goals. Thus, some are still major concerns today.

The 1974 Transportation, Circulation, and Parking Plan was a milestone for MIT planning. This plan provided incentives for good transportation planning like underground parking, MBTA passes, new and improved bicycle paths, pedestrian orientation services, and safety upgrades to cross-walks. Subsequent revisions have pushed a campus shuttle service, supported the "Urban Ring" idea, and seen underground parking come to fruition in the new Stata Center.

A number of other plans played important roles in MIT's planning during the 1960s and 1970s. The development plan provided more direction for capitol improvements and echoed the Housing Plan's call for more interactions on campus, here through building and campus design. The Landscape Master Plan recommended tree-lined paths, public spaces, and more aesthetic appeal. The East Campus Plan, North Campus Plan, and Sloan Campus Plan all made specific capitol development recommendations for their respective areas of campus. Participants in the creation of these plans were more likely Planning Department officials, designers, and occasionally faculty than students.

It is interesting to note that during this period, few students were involved in the planning process and things like housing and support services were often ignored or poorly planned or designed. Since that time however, students have sat beside MIT planners, faculty, and staff more often, and this focus has shifted. Projects like the Johnson Athletic Center, the Medical Building, the Classroom Needs Study, and the Memorial Drive Safety plan are putting the non-academic needs of students at a level closer to that of the planning that goes into their academic surroundings.

Another change in the development work of MIT in the latest 2 decades has been a willingness to develop MIT owned property for profit. The school's independent real estate arm can purchase, sell, and lease properties and attempt to build resources for the school. Notable examples of this type of work include University Park and the Whitehead Institute.

This idea of using university-owned land to develop more funds is already one of great conflict for the university given another great conflict it will always deal with at its present site – space for future expansion. Stakeholders involved with the University Park project included campus administrators, Cambridge authorities, and commercial businesses given the opportunity to reside there (as well as some amount of upper-end residential clients). Students and faculty were not involved in the decisions to create this project and could conceivably have hoped to be able to find housing affordable to them at such a site.