

Bennington College

4.32 Preliminary Report on Student House Program

Lisa Tate has chaired a subcommittee of the Faculty Art and Architecture Committee on a program for additional student houses. Attached is her first report to the Art and Architecture Committee, sent you for your information. This is a working document which does not at this point call for action by the Buildings and Grounds Committee nor by the Art and Architecture Committee, which received the report on December 23. The Committee added to the report instructions to the architect to make every effort to avoid the summer heat problems experienced in the Barnes houses.

Also enclosed is a report to Mrs. Tate from the Student Art and Architecture Committee.

December 30, 1969  
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PROPOSED PROGRAM FOR NEW STUDENT HOUSES

(for approval by Faculty Art &  
Arch. Comm., Trustee Art & Arch.)

The building of new houses and this proposed program can be viewed as an extension of considerations which were very thoroughly discussed in 1964 (see the Betty Brown report). These considerations have been recently rediscussed against the tangible backdrop of the three new houses built in 1967, in an effort to affirm those features of the program and the houses which work positively, and to signal those features which work less well or not at all. In this (much briefer) program, it is assumed that shortcomings of the present new houses attributable to material and/or construction mistakes or false economies (with special attention to the problem of noise) will be avoided in any new student houses to be built.

I. NEED FOR STUDENT HOUSING (based on a total enrolment of 600)

Assuming that 15% to 20% (or 90-120 students) will be permitted to live off-campus, the College must provide on-campus housing for 480-510 students. At present the 12 old student houses (originally designed for 250 students) accommodate 355 students. This capacity has been accomplished by doubling single rooms and by taking over for student use 8 apartments (25 beds originally designed for faculty housing). The new houses hold 90 students, for a total on-campus housing capacity of 445.

~~Under~~ New housing should in the first instance allow us to relieve present crowding by <sup>15-</sup>25 (some undoubling, and/or some reversal to faculty housing of one or two faculty apartments). Additional housing will be needed for 35-65 students, depending on whether 20% or 15% live off-campus. It is recommended that we plan housing for <sup>80-</sup>90 students if possible.

## II. SIZE AND NUMBER OF HOUSES

It is agreed that rough equity of size with the present houses should be maintained. The present "capacity" of the old houses (in an overcrowded situation) now ranges from 26 to 35; the capacity of the three new houses is fixed at 30 each. Rough equity of size could be stretched to mean 25-40, although the students recommend 25-35. These figures point to two or three houses, depending on arrangement number, size, and variety of suites and on ratio of doubles to singles.

## III. LOCATION OF HOUSES

New houses should be sited in reference to the present pattern of houses, though they need not be absolutely symmetrical to that pattern. If possible, they should not closely hem or constrict the present pattern, though their proximity to Commons should fall within or close to the present range of walking distance of the other houses.

## IV. DESIGN OF HOUSES (external)

Hopefully the feeling of uniform sameness could be avoided through the design, siting, and landscaping of new houses. In scale design and materials they should seem as little institutional as possible - in other words, houses as opposed to boxes or dorms. Some kind of courtyard, quasi-quadrangle, patio is needed as an integral part of the design. The possibility of joint houses should be considered. Their close reference to their site is important, and their scale should fall



within the same range of scale as the present houses.

V. INNER SPACE (small to large, private to public)

A. Single Rooms

Although we have considered maximizing the number of singles, consideration of class size and the political pressures of the priority system point to building houses that contain both doubles and singles. To really unlock the priority system would require more houses than economy permits. The most positive feature that the priority system protects is the mix of classes in every house on campus, which is still deemed important.

The proportion of singles to doubles in the present new houses (3:1) seems approximately right. These new houses have also proved that singles can be small yet attractive as long as they provide ample put-away space (large built-in closet-cabinets, under-the-bed storage). Variety in size<sup>and shape</sup> of singles is recommended (some variety at least). Moveable furniture is also recommended.

B. Double Rooms

These should never be clumped together but instead scattered throughout the house. If they could be designed to allow some modicum of privacy, one roommate from the other, it might even result in some sophomores choosing to remain in a double instead of pressing for singles. Some suites could even contain two doubles of slightly different size, if indeed they allowed some privacy.

C. Suites

These should accommodate from 4 to 7 students, possibly 8.

Certainly some of the (desired) domestic quality of the old houses hinges on the fact that the suites are not identical in size and design, so variety in this area is recommended. They should be designed to loosely contain those who live in them, without making them feel <sup>entirely</sup> cut off from the rest of the house. Their hallways should not feel like tunnels, nor the bathrooms like closets. Each suite should have its own bathroom. Also its own telephone.

D. Sitting Rooms (vs. cardrooms and/or typing rooms)

The students have recommended a comfortable extra room (on a small scale) for every suite. This idea has much to recommend it in terms of space to spill out to for a variety of reasons; social, study, privacy, brief change of locale for change's sake. It could also be used for typing if acoustically designed that way. It would replace the ambiguous functions of the present cardrooms in the old houses, and the function of basement typing rooms in the new houses. Since one in each suite could have the effect of separating the house into as many units <sup>social</sup> as there are suites, it is recommended that we try the idea of such a room for every two suites. The economy of such a room could in part be justified by dispensing with cardrooms ~~or living room~~ typing rooms, and less formal living rooms (see below).

E. Living Rooms

These should be casual and informal in design, scale, and decor, in the first instance. They should nevertheless be large enough and comfortable enough for house meetings, workshops, coffee hours, parties. Formality should give way to comfort but not to the



extent that they become rumpus rooms. ~~The~~<sup>Their</sup> location should not be arbitrarily divorced from living space (given adequate sound proofing) but need not dominate the house either.

F. Kitchens or Kitchenettes

Students would also like a kitchenette for every suite. This could be considered in conjunction with the sitting-room idea. In any case there should be a full kitchen in conjunction with the living room. It should have ample working space and sitting-down-for-breakfast space.

G. Storage Space

The storage closet in each suite of the new houses is a great convenience to students. As a result, not all four of the storage rooms in the basement are fully used but some <sup>approx.</sup> storage room is essential.

H. Entrances, Hallways

Several different entrances are preferable to one main one.

Large hallways are not essential, but some kind of entryway is needed in which to stomp off mud or snow. *Several stairways rather than just one would add flexibility to the house.*

I. Closets, Maids Rooms

Provision should be made for guests' coats (near living room) for cleaning materials for the house, for trash, plus a small room for the maid to relax in and a small room for her cleaning materials.

J. Guest Lavatory

Needed, near living room. One for men, one for women, so that guests need not enter student living area.

K. Ventilation, Heating, Windows

Windows should be functional, that is openable in such a way as to ~~xxxx~~ let a breeze in. Their location/size is important;

some of our most content students claim that their content is in part due to the view they get from their rooms. Ventilation is of high importance, esp. since students will continue to paint in their rooms until they are of the seniority to be assigned studio space. Heat control should not depend on a thermostat located in just one bedroom of a suite.

#### VI. Male Housing

Male students in student houses have presented only two problems so far. One has to do with the use of bathroom facilities, where there is a general reluctance to share, the other their adamant refusal to go on living with a roommate if they don't want one. If suites are mixed in the future, the architect has suggested that the location of the male guest lavatory could in part resolve that particular problem. Their refusal to live with a roommate has no architectural resolution. Lurking, though still intangibly, is the possibility that <sup>the</sup> a greater degree of physicality on the part of the male <sup>student</sup> could lead to greater abuse of student houses. For this reason, though not for this reason alone, simple sturdy construction and materials would seem wise.

Lisa Tate  
23 Dec. 1969



From: Student <sup>Art & Arch.</sup> Comm.  
RE. NEW HOUSING

The student Art and Architecture Committee is in agreement with the major assumptions of the Betty Brown Report as to the importance of the house as a political and social unit, and the maintainance of the suite as a smaller and more private unit within the house. House size should remain between 25 and 35 and if possible the density in the old houses should be reduced. Suite size should also remain between 4 and 7, but we would like to stress the need for variety in both the size and arrangement of rooms in each suite, as well as the need for variety of room size so that the members of each suite will be likely to be members of different academic years. We would also like to emphasize the need for various exits and entrances to the house as well as variety in the routes of traffic through the house. This is one area where the Barn's houses fall short of the older houses.

In trying to pin down the reasons why the suites in the Barn's houses were not as liveable as those in the old houses, we decided that part of the problem is that when the doors to all the bedrooms are closed there is no common room on an outside wall in the new houses to let light and air into the halls. Because the bathrooms in the old houses are on an outside wall and are open to the suite hall, they serve this purpose. We also decided that it would be desirable to have one small common sitting room or study per suite, possibly equip~~ed~~ with a kitchen unit such as those used in the Welling Town House. This should be a place to study in for those students who live in doubles or who feel that they need a change of scenery from their bedroom. It could also be used for entertaining on a small scale, for relaxing, and talking.



If equipped with a kitchen unit it would take the place of a larger house kitchen, and cut down on the messiness and food waste that seems inherent in the large kitchen. It would also diminish the importance, but not preclude the need for, a large house living room for house meetings, coffee hours, and large parties.

- ✓ We feel strongly that the elegant gesture of the Barn's House living room need not be repeated; all that is needed is a reasonably pleasant space that is large enough for the whole house to use at one time. It would be nice to have a fire place there and some comfortable furniture, but given proper room-to-room sound proofing, the room does not
- ✓ have to be a primary place within the house. The smaller sitting rooms would take away the need for typing rooms by providing a less regimented and more private place to study. It would also cut down on the noise problem if each suite were equipped with a house phone, and each floor with a pay phone. Each house should have its own laundry and each floor should have its own cleaning closet for brooms, etc. Vending machines would be nice too.

A very careful balance must be maintained between sociability within the house and privacy from the house. Both should be available to any student, and can come naturally from the design of the house. The suite should be as private to its members as they want it to be, completely private if that is desired. At the same time the living room, the pay phones, the laundry will be used in common by members of different suites. The routes of traffic through the house can also be a cohesive element. It would be nice to have more than one kind of outdoor space common and private to the members of each house; a sun deck (perhaps not as large as those in the Barn's houses), and also

some enclosed ( or semi-enclosed ) garden/lawn/patio space for reading and sunbathing.

In reference to the ratio of singles to doubles, we felt that it would be desirable to have as many singles as possible so that some freshmen could be offered the option of living in singles. This might reverse the trend which has become established for all students to want singles as soon as possible... especially if the doubles were made large, attractive and more liveable than in the past. Perhaps something like large L-shaped doubles, offering lots of space and some privacy would help the problem.