The Campus Planning and Development Committee was asked by President Bacow to gather and process feedback and concerns from the Tufts University faculty and staff about the new Campus Master Plan. This report contains a summary of the information that we have gathered over the past two semesters. In particular, we asked individual faculty members to write to us about their specific concerns relating to the summary of the draft of the Campus Master Plan that was distributed to faculty members and the presentation at the AS & E faculty meeting by Doug Johnston of Rawn Associates on September 15, 2004. Further, the Campus Planning and Development Committee held a series of meetings to talk about the Master Plan. We invited members of the faculty and staff to attend these meetings as well. We also invited special guests to come share their views about the Campus Master Plan with the Committee. These guests included William Rawn and Doug Johnston of Rawn Associates, John Roberto, Dean Abriola, and President Bacow.

The issues that were raised can be put into the following 8 categories

1. Uniqueness of Tufts
2. “Integrity” of the campus
3. Boston Avenue/College Avenue intersection
4. Integrated Lab Building
5. Parking
6. Handicapped accessibility
7. The focus on interdisciplinary activities and the existing/ensuing fragmentation of Departments
8. Communication and faculty/staff involvement

Each of these 8 topics will be discussed in turn. We hope that this document will provide useful feedback to the Steering Committee. We would like to emphasize the importance of the continued involvement of faculty, staff, and students in the development of the Campus Master Plan. This will help to produce a Master Plan that the whole Tufts community can be proud of.

1. Uniqueness of Tufts

There is a strong feeling among the faculty that the Master Plan should do more to reflect the uniqueness of Tufts University. First, Tufts is unique in its typical small liberal arts college layout, but within its very urban location in Medford/Somerville. The beauty of Tufts tends to be lost to many who see it from afar because of its urban setting. Further, the fact that Tufts lies on a hill adds to this unique setting, and also presents opportunities to enhance its visual/aesthetic appeal. The topography also causes challenges for planning. Some of the points that relate to this aspect of Tufts are discussed further under topic 2 – the “integrity” of the campus, and topic 6 – Handicapped accessibility.
Recent discussions for strategic planning have identified areas in which Tufts defines its strengths: 1) global focus, 2) life sciences and environment, and 3) active citizenship and public service. Tufts is well known for its commitment to the environment stemming from the early Center for Environmental Management, its efforts with recycling and greening the campus, climate change studies, work at the Veterinary School, the Talloires Declaration, and membership on the Chicago Climate Exchange. Many faculty members found this aspect of Tufts to be missing from the Master Plan. We are seen as a leader among colleges and universities who take action on environmental issues and this should be made clearer in the Master Plan. Specific examples of how the Master Plan can emphasize Tuft’s commitment to the environment are given in Topic 2.

2. “Integrity” of the campus

One place where Tufts can improve its physical image is in the sense of arrival when one enters the campus. The parts of Tufts that are evident as individuals pass along the periphery of campus fail to display the beauty and character of this campus. Part of this issue ties into the major problem posed by the Boston Avenue/College Avenue intersection since this is the point on the periphery of campus that gets the most through traffic. Another example that was brought up was the view of the used tire shop (?) across the street from the Science and Technology Center at 4 Colby Street that visitors first see as they enter the Tufts campus at this point. More thought needs to be given to ways of improving the image that visitors first get of the campus.

It is felt that much more can be done to promote the “green campus” that Tufts is known for. Far more creative ways of building and landscaping should be integral to the Master Plan. A commitment to a high LEED standard for new buildings is one step we can take. Professor Rich Vogel from the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department made a presentation to the Committee on new ideas about low impact development and integrated management practices that reduce the impact on the environment. He also discussed some student projects on sustainable landscaping that Tufts could implement. Professor Vogel is just one example of the many faculty and staff at Tufts who have important areas of expertise that we should tap into in the process of producing this Master Plan. This issue is addressed in more detail under Topic 8: Communication and faculty/staff involvement.

3. Boston Avenue/College Avenue intersection

One issue that really struck a chord with the Tufts faculty is the problems generated by the Boston Avenue/College Avenue intersection. Primarily, this is a safety issue. While the traffic light system has helped to increase pedestrian safety, it is felt that this is still too dangerous a crossing. Further, there is a sense that this intersection divides the campus and that Boston Avenue, such that Arts and Sciences will be even more physically separated from this will be even more of an issue with the further development of Engineering. This is an area where real innovative thinking is necessary. Solutions to consider include a pedestrian bridge or tunnel to more radical approaches that change the way traffic is directed through this area (e.g. Tufts own “little” dig).
4. Integrated Lab Building

The one structure that is specifically mentioned in the draft Master Plan is the so-called “Integrated Lab Building.” President Bacow stressed that this is a top priority after the new dorm and music building are built. It appears at this time that the Integrated Lab Building is still a very fluid concept, so there is ample opportunity for input of ideas from the Tufts community. There are many different ideas about what the integrated lab building will be used for and who will use it. There is concern among some faculty that this will lead to a fragmentation of some departments. It is also felt that the communication about the Integrated Lab Building has been lacking and this has led to an unnecessary level of frustration among faculty members. This relates to the general issue of inadequate communication that is discussed in more detail in Topic 8.

The Committee feels that a specific plan of action needs to be put in place sooner rather than later. Efforts to coordinate the input from affected parties/departments must be undertaken to ensure that the lab reflects the greatest needs for all involved. If particular, this includes coordinating the plans/efforts across Arts and Sciences and Engineering. If necessary, this Committee is willing to facilitate this process.

5. Parking

Parking is always an important issue on campuses located in urban areas. The addition of the Dowling parking facility has made a huge difference in the ability to park on the Medford Campus. But there is a feeling that more parking needs to be provided for users of the downhill side of campus. This is particularly true given the long-term loss of parking in the Cohen lot and the increased demand for parking created by the construction of the new dorm and music building.

6. Handicapped accessibility

The topography of the Medford Campus means that it is already difficult to traverse the campus for people who are mobility-challenged, either permanently or temporarily (on crutches because of injury, e.g.). We commend Rawn and Associates for paying particular attention to how individuals make their way around campus and integrating this into the Master Plan. However, their study was heavily weighted by input from people who are not mobility-impaired. We further would like to stress that easier access around the campus should be a guiding principle of the Master Plan. Tufts should go above and beyond the level of accessibility inherent in the Americans With Disabilities Act. We should not be a campus that simply meets the requirements and letter of the law; we should use this planning opportunity to think creatively about building, pathway/roadway, and landscaping designs that are both functional and truly accessible for all the members of our community. We urge the architects and administration to consult with faculty and students who face mobility challenges for their valuable input, as well as perhaps the EEOC, who is working on disability issues on campus.
7. The focus on interdisciplinary activities and the existing/ensuing fragmentation of Departments

There is a concern among faculty members that the focus on increasing the interdisciplinary activities on campus may generate further fragmentation of departments. One gets the feeling from those involved in the Master Plan that they consider porous boundaries between departments as a positive step in promoting interdisciplinary activities, however some faculty view this as fragmentation of coherent departments. Of course, there is no reason to believe that the mere fact of close proximity of departments necessarily results in collaboration by these departments in research and teaching. For the most part, the dispersion of departments around campus makes it more difficult for that department to coordinate its own activities and interactions. Further, there is a belief that the new Integrated Lab Building will lead to some departments being split up.

8. Communication and faculty/staff involvement

There is a general belief among the faculty that the communication about the progress of the Master Plan could be much improved. The lack of communication about the specifics of the Integrated lab Building is a case in point. Too often, members of the Committee find out about significant facilities issues from the Tufts Daily. This lack of communication leaves faculty with a feeling that they are being shut out of the decision-making process and that their opinions and input are being ignored. The Master Plan is more likely to be embraced if the Tufts community is better informed about its progress. There are many members of the faculty who have expertise in areas that related directly to the Master Plan. The presentation by Professor Vogel as discussed in Category 2 is such an example of this expertise. Another interesting presentation was made by Professor Edgers from the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department about the advantages of building underground. We have experts in planning and programs in Architectural Studies and Engineering in Architectural Studies that could provide interesting student involvement. The student project on sustainable landscaping mentioned in Topic 2 is a good example student input. Another source of untapped potential is Tufts staff, particularly those in Facilities who work day to day on the physical plant of the campus. To our knowledge, there has not been a presentation by Rawn and Associates that was specifically targeted to the staff.

For the Committee:

Jeffrey Zabel, Chair

Committee Members:
Daniel Abramson, Art/Art History
Jane Bernstein, Music
Anne Gardulski, Geology
Leon Gunther, Physics
David Guss, Soc/Anthro
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