

# Recommendations for the management and development of Tufts faculty housing resources

Prepared by the AS&E Work-Life committee  
April 25, 2018

## Executive Summary

The majority of peer institutions that reside in high cost-of-living areas provide either subsidized housing or mortgage assistance or both. Existing Tufts faculty housing through the Walnut Hill properties has recently been reduced in terms of number of available units and the removal of subsidies. For families, this exacerbates the problem of lack of childcare support which this committee has highlighted in the past. The high cost of living in the greater Boston area including childcare and housing affects Tufts faculty hiring and retention.

We provide both short term (low cost) and long term recommendations to make our policies more competitive with those of our peers. These recommendations are the result of discussions within the committee, with members of the faculty, representatives of Walnut Hill Properties and members of the Campus Planning and Development Committee. These recommendations have widespread faculty support, would help improve hiring and retention, and help Tufts sustainability goals.

### Short term recommendations:

- Faculty/staff housing management should be an explicit charge of Walnut Hill Properties, where the units currently available for housing (68 units) are fixed as such in perpetuity.
- Priority should be given to housing for incoming faculty; however a modest number of units for long term faculty residents should be available.
- Improve the Tufts housing website to clearly outline on and off campus housing options, communicate campus housing usage policy and provide more detailed descriptions of the available units and de-lead status.
- De-lead units as they become available.

### Long term recommendations:

- Mortgage assistance to help lower upfront cost and/or provide better interest rates.
- Increased commuter benefits which may include a new Tufts shuttle to serve the Medford/Malden corridor as well as a 'crash pad' for long distance commuters.
- New housing development, especially where has the potential to serve multiple campuses.

## **PART I - Faculty housing benchmarking**

Our committee looked at 20 institutions including several in the Boston-area, including both high and low cost-of-living areas.

**9/20 offered temporary or long-term on/near-campus university-owned housing to faculty.**

— *of those that do not, several offer mortgage assistance programs which take different forms, e.g. covering closing costs, providing low interest loans to cover some fraction of cost (e.g. help with downpayment), controlling a subsidized housing market*

— *others are in moderately low cost of living areas (compared to the Tufts area) (e.g. Cornell, Duke, Emory, Univ. Arizona).*

**12/20 offer mortgage assistance.** Those that do not are typically in moderately lower cost of living areas compared to Tufts (e.g. Cornell, Duke, Emory, Univ. Arizona, U.Michigan, U. Virginia).

Only Georgetown and Boston College are in expensive areas and do not offer on campus housing and/or mortgage assistance.

## **PART II - Status at Tufts**

Until relatively recently, Tufts Medford campus was located in a lower cost-of-living area. With rapidly rising costs in neighbouring/nearby communities including Somerville, Medford, Arlington over the past two decades, this is no longer the case. There is a need for an explicit policy with regard to faculty housing - especially in support of incoming faculty.

Rising housing costs are part of an overall rise in cost-of-living especially for families. In the Tufts Medford campus neighbourhood, one needs a budget of a ~700K to purchase a home (not a single family home in Somerville, Medford close to Tufts, or Arlington for example).

Regardless whether rent or mortgage, housing costs in the vicinity of Tufts (for a family) are roughly 2.5-3K/month. Infant childcare is 3K/month. Preschool cost is ~2K/month. Depending on whether or not one has 1 or 2 children and their ages -- ***childcare+housing alone can range from 4-9K/month. Therefore childcare affordability and housing affordability are virtually inseparable issues for families.***

These high housing costs lead to new faculty purchasing their first home as far as 1-1.5hrs commute away from Tufts. ***Commuting benefits that incentivize carpooling or using public transit also connect the issue of housing affordability with the wider goals of sustainability at Tufts.*** Lastly, the above costs are anecdotally (we lack hard data on that)

beginning to **compromise Tufts hiring practices**. Below we list the available housing and commuting related benefits at Tufts.

**Existing Housing resources:** Tufts owns 121 units (within woodframe houses as well as the Capen School house) which were purchased over the years as a buffer around the Medford campus and as a resource for future use through the Walnut Hill Properties. These properties currently serve as office space, as faculty and staff housing and 27 of them (about a quarter) are being re-developed as student housing villages. In the past, the only official transitional (3 year limit) housing has been in the former school house. At present, aside from long term residents who are being grandfathered, new residents are only given 3 year leases for both the Capen School units and any other Walnut Hill properties.

The transitional housing was subsidized but this has recently ended. Currently all units are given at market rate. However, while not nominally subsidized, they are effectively so since according to Walnut Hill, they are on average in somewhat poorer condition which decreases their market value. These recent changes in policy have led to some confusion among WH tenants due to varying price levels for apparently similar units. Availability of more affordable units close to Tufts, especially de-lead ones is a real issue (see below). This means that while not subsidized, **the availability of these units continues to represent a real benefit for the faculty that is cost neutral to Tufts.**

### **Walnut Hill Properties Inventory – Snapshot March 2018, Subject to Change Inventory courtesy of Robert Chihade**

*(The three categories below are mutually exclusive.)*

Units that will not be used for Junior/Senior Housing:

|                                    |           |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| · Faculty                          | 36        |
| · Staff                            | 17        |
| · Graduate Students                | 10        |
| · Greek                            | 4         |
| · Medford Housing/Affordable Units | 3         |
| · No Tufts Affiliation             | 3         |
| · Tufts Offices                    | 9         |
| · Retail                           | 5         |
| · Beelzebubs (Tufts a cappella)    | 2         |
| · Vacant/Under Construction        | 5         |
| · <b>TOTAL</b>                     | <b>94</b> |

Units that will be used for Junior/Senior Housing in Medford:

*(Accommodations have already been made for faculty and staff who need to relocate; all units will be vacant by Jan 31, 2019)*

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| · Faculty | 3 |
| · Staff   | 5 |

|                             |           |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| · Tufts Offices             | 4         |
| · Vacant/Under Construction | 7         |
| · <b>TOTAL</b>              | <b>19</b> |

Units that are likely be used for Junior/Senior Housing in Somerville, pending feasibility study Summer 2018:

*(Some of these tenancies are purposefully short term based on the knowledge that these units are likely to be re-purposed for Junior/Senior Housing)*

|                             |          |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| · Faculty                   | 1        |
| · Staff                     | 3        |
| · Tufts Offices             | 2        |
| · Vacant/Under Construction | 2        |
| · <b>TOTAL</b>              | <b>8</b> |

**Off-campus housing resources website.** <http://ase.tufts.edu/och/rentalListings/>. Maintains a spreadsheet of housing options near the Medford Campus. Helps connect people with available housing with people who seek housing. Also provides links for temporary housing options.

**Mortgage Discount Program:** Tufts does nominally offer mortgage assistance, but it is not widely used as people who have looked into it say it is not worth it in its current form (insignificant in value).

**Commuting Benefits:**

If you work on any Tufts campus in Massachusetts, you are eligible to receive a **transit subsidy** as an incentive to use public transportation. The 2018 subsidy is 35%, up to a maximum of \$40 per employee per month. There are also options to find carpool partners such as via **MassRIDES** and **MassCommute**

**PART II -- Feedback from faculty**

The committee conducted two faculty liaison meetings this year as well as solicited feedback via email and in conversations with faculty. The first meeting was in November 2017 and its purpose was to gather opinions and suggestions re Tufts faculty housing resources and related issues. The second meeting was in April 2018 and its purpose was to gather feedback on the particular recommendations given in this report. Below we summarize the key points that were brought up to us.

— Assistant professors in particular want to live near campus/have a short commute to work, whenever possible. This directly impacts their productivity! This also gives people time to familiarize themselves with the area before tackling a hard housing market as buyers. **There is widespread support for guaranteeing housing (e.g. for 3 years or as much as possible) for all incoming faculty.**

— Tufts faculty housing usage varies significantly from department to department and is not for everybody. Some people live farther from campus due to the demands of a dual career family, being near family or other reasons. For some departments nearly all assistant professors and many tenured professors live in faculty housing (e.g. humanities, arts, UEP) while in others hardly any (e.g. engineering).

-- Many people value living near campus long term if they can. Faculty who do live near campus are typically more available to students, and are positioned to help with university service especially outside of the classroom activities such as evening and weekend events and performances. Such activities are important to campus life as well as to Tufts community relations. However, with rising home prices, the trend is for fewer people to be in a position to buy or rent on the open market in the area. ***We need a diversified approach that supports incoming as well as existing faculty, supports living near Tufts as well as further away.***

-- People find that the biggest hurdle for their purchasing a home is the up-front cost, less so the monthly cost. The up-front cost amounts to ~150K in downpayment+closing costs typically. Most mortgage assistance programs are designed specifically to help with this up-front cost. Overall the feedback we got suggested ***more substantive mortgage assistance would be very welcome*** -- as is in fact common practice in our peer institutions that are also in high housing cost areas.

— ***There is circumstantial evidence that the cost of living (housing+childcare) in the area is indeed affecting our hiring practices.*** Several people reported that in recent years their departments are much more successful in hiring people from the Boston area who already have some equity build in the area. The cost of living has contributed to people turning down offers from Tufts.

—***Tufts should communicate much more clearly its policy re usage of Faculty Housing and related benefits.*** Existing benefits are often not known to their intended recipients which leads to frustration and dissatisfaction. As an example, people are very ***concerned with availability of de-leaded housing***, but do not know that Tufts 100% of the time de-leads faculty housing when a family with a small child is moving in. This in itself is a clear benefit of faculty housing, since finding de-leaded accommodation on the open rental market can be extremely challenging as we heard at the liaison meeting. We understand that roughly 35% of assistant professors have (typically young) children, which is therefore the fraction of assistant professors looking for de-leaded accommodation.

— There is clear resentment from people being displaced now (units being turned into student housing) when they were expecting their homes to be available to them long term. We heard from people who felt this was a double blow after the transition TEDCC-Bright Horizons in 2014. In both cases, a key issue was ***how the matter was handled without input from the faculty***, including those directly affected by the changes. In the future, such issues can be avoided re

faculty housing by having the terms of the lease thought through carefully and laid out much more clearly.

— People were concerned with impact on work-life balance and wellness of single parents both incoming and already at Tufts.

## **PART IV -- Recommendations**

### **Short term**

-- Explicitly re-define the role/purpose of Walnut Hill properties to include Faculty Housing. Manage the existing housing stock as a resource to best serve the housing needs of the Tufts community where the needs of the faculty need to be considered alongside the needs of students. While a quarter of existing units are being re-developed toward junior/senior student housing, there is no clarity on the long term status of the remaining 94 units. ***We recommend that at a minimum the units that are currently available for housing (68 units) be fixed as such in perpetuity.*** This leaves roughly equal number of units for potential future student re-development which equals the number already slated for this purpose in Medford and Somerville. However, any such future redevelopment will come via moving offices exclusively. ***This housing is to serve faculty, staff (including postdocs), and graduate students which mirrors current usage.*** If this is predominantly transitional housing, and considering that not all assistant professors will be willing/able to live there, we believe this is a minimum option that roughly meets current demand, although does not provide for future increases in demand (which is why we also include future development planning in the Long term recommendations section).

— ***Establishing clear policy for usage of faculty housing and communicate it clearly via the AS&E housing site or via Access Tufts.*** We suggest initial up to 3 year leases (as at present) for incoming faculty. However, there should be options for yearly lease renewals, contingent upon availability.

-- The philosophy is that the highest priority goes to housing for incoming faculty. Having at least a modest number of resident faculty units however is important for campus life. This includes but is not limited to people like the university chaplain, and people in performance and event-heavy departments who have regular late on-campus responsibilities. ***We also recommend that the student villages being developed have official resident faculty units.*** These should be added to existing resident positions, and options therein should be clearly communicated to incoming faculty.

— ***The Faculty housing units available via Walnut Hill Properties should be described more clearly via a static website that provides images and more detailed description of the number, configuration (e.g. 1bedroom, 2bedroom etc), and de-leaded status.*** The website is “static” in that people still need to contact the Walnut Hill office for availability, as in current practice.

-- **There should be a 1 stop website providing housing options information for incoming faculty such as the Walnut Hill Properties, off-campus housing resources, and scholars-in-residence options** -- which is a great benefit and should be expanded for new planned student villages.

-- Walnut Hill should **continue to delead properties as they become vacated** -- with a plan to eventually delead all properties. Their website should indicate explicitly the availability of delead units. People assume none are delead otherwise and do not even apply on those grounds.

-- **Conduct "Exit interviews"** both for faculty and staff who were Tufts employees but left as well as for people to whom offers were made but who ultimately declined. These would help better understand the factors that affect Tufts hiring and retention and help guide future policy changes to address any issues identified. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these issues include the high cost of living (including housing and childcare); however, we need more concrete data.

### Longer term:

— Study pros and cons of various options to mitigate the long term increasingly less affordable housing in the area through **meaningful mortgage assistance**. Options include co-signing loans, partnering with local community banks for better rates for Tufts affiliates, offer mortgages through Tufts, controlled "local" housing market. These all help allow for lower interest rates and/or allow purchase with lower level of downpayment. **This would help build goodwill with existing faculty and staff and attract future ones.**

— Study options to help the increasing number of people who face longer commutes: 1) **increased commuter benefits** (increased MBTA benefits, carpool benefits, 1-2 more shuttles depending on where people live); 2) covered bike racks, bike lanes, fix EV charging station (such benefits directly tie with sustainability at Tufts); 3) consider "crash pad(s)" (brought up by people at the SMFA as well as this campus) to help faculty with long commutes who need to stay late or are snowed in. The later can be modelled on the student commuter house (Hillside House).

-- Increase the number of available faculty/staff/grad student housing units via **a new development nearby** (e.g. Medford Square or Malden; this option gives easy option to multiple Tufts campuses). This can be done via partnerships, and our own UEP expertise is key in an effort like this. Might be tied to the point re mortgage assistance if this is the case of "controlled market". The option of nicer, newer properties that people actually own in nearby communities will be attractive to people and help with **Tufts community relations**.