

St. Catharine's College MCR Open Meeting

Friday, 20th March, 2009

Present

Doug, Helen, Becky, Julia, Katie, Tom, Amy, Alex, Cat, Gee, Sam, Charlie

1. Potential College Rent Increases

This discussion began with a recap by Doug of the meetings he and others have had with college recently. Essentially, the Senior Bursar has proposed to raise college graduate rent rates by 5% (2% inflation, 2% environmental, 1% because it was a bad year for the college). While college does get final say on this matter, the Senior Bursar wants our opinions.

A point was raised by **Alex** about ensuring that college has tried to make cuts elsewhere (ex. getting rid of some of the extra employees to save money, though **Helen** pointed out that there would be no increase in wages).

There were several issues raised with the "environmental" factor in the rent increase. Some are still unclear on exactly what this means and want to know exactly what environmental things college has been spending money on. There are new environmentally friendly boilers in college, but why should those impact off-site rent rates? **Helen** suggested maybe putting the graduate residences on meters to help save money, rather than simply paying a flat rate. It was also suggested that perhaps the environmental costs should be split between college bills and rent rates.

Several points were raised about the discrepancies between each of the graduate residences. **Amy** pointed out that it is often the rented properties (not college owned) that pay the most rent (ie. Warkworth, Whichcote last year). **Charlie and Gee** made the point that little to no money has been spent on South Green in recent years and the residence could definitely do with some help, particularly in terms of the kitchens (no dining area) and the extreme lack of common space available. College did agree to purchase a dryer for South Green, but it has yet to be installed. **Doug** suggested perhaps widening the gap in amount of rent paid – ie. Russell Street could pay a bit more as they have ensuite rooms, whereas South Green could pay a bit less because it needs some serious work!

Another complaint was raised about the seemingly irrational and unnecessary rationing of toilet rolls and other supplies at the graduate residences.

Tom pointed out that some off-campus housing is actually quite affordable, so college needs to be careful if they want to stay competitive. Who is subsidizing whom here?!

Finally it was resolved that **Nick Carr** should be present for all negotiations with college.

2. Budget Presentation

This discussion began with a presentation by **Becky** of the current state of the MCR accounts and budget. The presentation showed that the MCR is right on target in terms of spending for the year, but that we have excess money, to the tune of about £17,000, in our college account. The discussion was mainly concerned with ways in which to spend

this money and how much of it should be spent. Two options were laid out: A – provide cheaper formal halls next term to members of the MCR; B – make some sort of one-off purchase to benefit the whole MCR.

The following were suggested as possible one-off purchases:

- a gazebo, greenhouse, or shack to be used as a communal space in the garden at South Green (**Charlie**)
- punts; we may be able to get mooring space at Trinity, or to have one on reserve at Scudamores, and would need some sort of online sign up system in order to ensure that it was hired out properly
- more food and drink for the MCR; please bring back good coffee, says **Alex**
- more channels for the new TV, as well as HD (**Charlie and Gee**); having more sports, movie, music etc channels might persuade more MCR members to stay and watch major live events in the MCR, rather than going over to the JCR where they are currently usually only available
- new gas BBQ and accessories, to be left at Russell Street, or South Green
- a printing and binding fund for theses; but it was pointed out that students often receive money from college for this; perhaps buying printing and binding equipment for all to use?

Although not exactly solving the problem of spending the excess money, the idea that generated the most discussion was having a cash bar in the MCR. Such a bar would be open after formals, and during events in the MCR for the purchase of cheap drinks and possibly a few snacks (crisps). It would be manned by an appointed barman. Most seemed to be in favour of trying this bar, although there were a few concerns about safety and the issues that could arise from having really cheap drinks available late into the evening, especially after formals. It is worth talking to the MCR at Pembroke, where a similar bar operates. It was decided that the bar should be tested during Easter term on 2-3 occasions.

Other Business

Amy brought up the issue of the electrical testing that never happened at Warkworth Street, but for which residents of the house were still charged. It was suggested that residents simply don't pay for it, as Julia did, and she hasn't been kicked out of college yet.