

[In these minutes: 1. Proxy voting, 2. Sweatshop Update, 3. Off-campus Housing]

SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

THURSDAY, APRIL 6, 2000

3:00 - 4:30

229 NOLTE

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate or Twin Cities Campus Assembly; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represent the view of, nor are they binding on the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: George French (chair), Mallika Arudi, Robert Brown, Mike Davey, Selma de Ridder, John Jensen, Wesley Matson, Mary Steinke.

REGRETS: Catherine Forseide-Hussain, Margaret Kuchenreuther, Jean Niemiec, Luis Ramos-Garcia, Angelita Reyes, Julie Sweitzer, Amelious Whyte Jennifer Young.

ABSENT: John Beatty, Joel Nelson.

GUESTS: Jan Morlock.

1. PROXY VOTING

Kelly Kleppe, from Asset Management, started by distributing a revised list of the University's stockholdings as of March 31, 2000, which listed the current stockholdings and actual meeting dates for each company. She mentioned that General Electric had recently been added to the University's stockholdings, and with it nine resolutions. Two of these resolutions are being supported by the Sierra Club of Minnesota, so information was faxed to all members so that a vote could be taken today. It was decided that for the other resolutions, members would have a week to read the resolutions and then vote by e-mail.

The committee then proceeded down the list and voted on each resolution. The following resolutions were voted for:

- Report on and commit to anti-PCB efforts
- Disclose costs of PCB cleanup delay
- Report on EEO
- Link executive pay to social criteria
- Take steps to prevent predatory lending
- Report on corporate tax benefits & subsidiaries
- Freeze executive pay during downsizing

- Stop sales/ensure safety of gene-engineered goods
- Disclose political contributions in newspapers
- Review/report on vendor standards
- Develop human rights criteria for China operations

No resolutions were voted against.

Kelley Kleppe then thanked the committee for their work this year.

2. SWEATSHOP UPDATE

George French reported that the WRC founding meeting will be held this Friday in New York City, and he has been asked to attend along with Mark Rotenberg, Bob Hicks, and two students. The group will leave Friday morning and return later that night. He stated that this will continue to be an issue for the committee, as to the University's involvement in the WRC. He reminded members that the FLA is also in its infancy.

The committee then made the following comments:

- Yudof took the University's global involvement and the moral power behind joining into account when he made his decision
- The name should be changed since it reminds some people of communist organizations
- University has conditionally joined and will know more after this meeting
- Nike is renegotiating its contract with Brown after they joined the WRC which has lead to speculation about what Nike does not like about the WRC
- Wisconsin, from the Big Ten, has also conditionally joined
- Nothing is happening yet in the countries since both organizations are still organizing

3. OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING

Mike Davey said that the University is building more on-campus housing but needs to take a more active role in affordable off-campus housing as well. For many students, rent costs are so high that they are priced out of an education. The University owes it to its students to work on cheaper housing options for its students.

He then distributed a chart comparing three apartment-style housing options to five off-campus private options, which are considered to be some of the most exclusive residences in the city. The average rent for a two bedroom apartment in Minneapolis is \$923 per month and in St. Paul that figure is \$755 per month, both below the average University rates.

Q: Why does the University need to be more expensive than these private companies?

A: Students are willing to pay the price to be close to campus. Money made on University housing can also be used in other areas of campus, although this should not be relied upon.

Q: Are the bedroom sizes between the University and private housing comparable?

A: I am not sure since square footage was not included on the chart, but this can be added for the next meeting.

Q: Do all residences increase every year?

A: Most likely, but I am not sure. Non-profit housing, such as the University, should be more insulated from these increases. The University also receives land tax exempt, which should help with construction costs on new residences.

Q: How can costs be compared since most private residences do not allow four people in a two bedroom apartment?

A: This condition usually depends on the landlord, although most exclusive residences would probably not allow it.

Q: Why are University apartments furnished?

A: This was probably a marketing strategy to fill all the rooms.

Q: Why are dormitories not included on this handout?

A: Since dormitories offer meal plans, they are hard to compare with apartments and therefore have not been included.

Mike Davey then noted that the Chateau in Dinkytown has cheaper rates because it is run as a cooperative. This is an area that the University should investigate for new developments.

Jan Morlock stated that the real issue is the lack of quality housing available in the Twin Cities. Market rates for housing are out of control, and unfortunately the University is a player in the market. University costs also increase because of building staff.

Mike Davey said that the city and state are both trying to tackle this problem. Perhaps a partnership between the University and these two groups is the only way to reduce costs and allow people to remain in the Twin Cities.

The committee then made the following comments:

- It is hard to convince the administration that students are not coming to the University because of high living expenses when all dormitories are already full and waiting lists exist.
- Transportation is intertwined with housing
- If campus amenities are reduced, costs should be too
- Current market is closed and skewed towards landlords

- The freshmen guaranteed admittance policy forces upper classmen out of campus housing
- Does excess housing funds go into the general O & M or does it stay separate?

Q: Why is Como Student Housing less expensive than regular undergraduate housing?

A: The property is owned by the University but management is self-contained by the property.

Jan Morlock said that the strained housing market has created a challenge for all housing providers. In these times, more funds are allocated towards housing for the poor, which, unfortunately, does not include students in its definition. The University needs to look at other examples of what is working and see if it can be incorporated for use here.

Mike Davey said that he would revise his handout to include square footage and staffing for all properties.

With no further business Professor French thanked all members for attending and adjourned the meeting.

Rebecca Hippert
University Senate