

Spaces & Experiences

CHESTNUT RESIDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RAC)

November 19th, 2024, | 5:00 - 6:00 PM

University Room, Chestnut Residence

Meeting Minutes

IN ATTENDANCE

Name	Role
Steve Masse	Dean of Residence and Director of Student Life
Aisalyn Templin	Administration and Communications Assistant (Secretary)
Alicia Whitfield	Manager, Residence Admissions
Andrea Nelson	Rooms Manager
Chelsea Chen	Chestnut Residence Council Vice-President, Social
Eliza Davies-Greenwald	Assistant Dean, Residence Administration (Chair)
Farheen Khan (virtual)	Chestnut Residence Lead Don
Jessi Sidhu	Assistant Dean, Residence Life
Kevin Dancy (virtual)	Director of Residence Operations
Obii Udemgba	Chestnut Residence Student
Sangeeta Jeyakumar	Manager, Finance, Administration and Operations
Tapur Verma	Urban Crew Manager
That Thiri Oo (Tina)	Chestnut Residence Student
Young Mo Lee	Chestnut Residence Council Vice-President, Finance

REGRETS

Name	Role
Jordan Craig	Occupancy and Admissions Coordinator
Joshua Cheng	Chestnut Residence Council President

AGENDA

- Introductions
- Admissions report
- Finance report
- Residence Council report
- Other Business

Note: this meeting was chaired by Eliza Davies-Greenwald, Assistant Dean, Residence Administration

INTRODUCTIONS

Eliza Davies-Greenwald opened the discussion by welcoming attendees, sharing the land acknowledgement, and inviting everyone to introduce themselves.

Attendees included residents, student-staff, as well as full-time staff members.

Terms of Reference

Eliza provided an overview of Residence Advisory Committees (RACs), which are established to provide residents with a structured platform to express their ideas and opinions, fostering communication and dialogue between residents and residence staff. Eliza explained that RACs are empowered to discuss, deliberate, and make recommendations in the following areas: residence services; residence programming and education; policies and procedures; facilities projects; communications; and budgetary priorities.

Eliza highlighted that RACs shall meet no less than **three times per year**, on dates/times that seek to maximize attendance.

The membership of each Residence Advisory Committee shall include:

- Dean of Residence & Director of Student Life or designate
- Director of Residence Operations or designate
- Other residence life staff (maximum: 3)
- Other residence operations staff (maximum: 2)
- Residence Council members (maximum: 3)
- Residents (maximum: 2)
- Residence Don
- Other student-staff

ADMISSIONS REPORT

Alicia Whitfield presented an overview of the occupancy statistics, as well as the demographic composition of the building for the current academic year:

- The standard bed capacity in the residence is 1132 with a goal of 98% occupancy

- Chestnut Residence currently has a 97% occupancy this Fall term; with a projected 96% occupancy for Winter term
- The most common program of study is Engineering at 49%, followed by Arts & Science (39%), Architecture (6.03%), and Kinesiology (5.22%).
- 54% of the student population are domestic students and 46% are international students

Alicia highlighted that the mix of first year (77%) and upper-year (23%) students provides opportunities for mentorship.

The composition of our student population creates a vibrant environment and helps to guide us in programming and planning floor themes.

Discussion

A resident explained that many students do not know which residence to live in, and that there is an opportunity for Chestnut to highlight what makes the student experience special. The Dining Commons represents a place for students to connect and make new friends. It also offers excellent culinary options. Other benefits include building-wide events, and amenities such as housekeeping and security.

Staff replied that there may be more opportunities to expand our reach during the application cycle, particularly on our website. The number one concern for incoming students is the distance, however, many residents experience this distance as a positive, as it provides a break and time to think.

FINANCE REPORT

Sangeeta Jeyakumar outlined the primary sources of revenue for the building, which include:

- Fees from residents for the Fall/Winter session (75%)
- Fees from visitors/Conference (15%)
- Parking (4%)
- Value of Dean's and Don's rooms (2% each).

Sangeeta highlighted that this building was initially a hotel, which is why we do this summer business every year. Benefits of this model include:

- We offer guests a bed and breakfast
- We provide the option for students to stay on separate floors, at a discounted rate

As Chestnut is a 50+ year old building, it requires a great deal of maintenance. The summer months represent an opportunity to upgrade and complete maintenance on student rooms. Each year we replace the vinyl coverings on three of the floors. This coming summer we will be replacing small appliances.

We focus on large infrastructure projects that will improve the quality of life for residents. High value projects must go through a procurement process, which typically takes four or five months to complete. Upcoming projects include:

- Introducing electronic parcel lockers for residents
- Securing a new Laundry Room contract
- improving the air quality in the building

Last year's rate increases of 7% was an anomaly driven by significant inflation. We hope for more predictable rate increases moving forward.

For the 2025-26 academic year, there is a proposed 5% increase, subject to approval by the University Affairs Board. This adjustment reflects a return to steady and consistent increases in the 4-5% range.

Discussion

A resident suggested that the breakdown, with respect to costs, should be clear. We should demonstrate how the benefits justify the cost. Staff replied by emphasizing the importance of showcasing the unique value our housing offers beyond standard amenities. Housing insecurity is a pressing issue, and the University is committed to providing access and opportunities for financial aid.

We aim to develop a long-term, sustainable plan that is in-line with our foreseeable revenues. We look for opportunities for improvements to elements in the building such as lighting and ventilation, that will also lead to savings in terms of utility costs. We prioritize what will have the highest impact for students. We consider what is most necessary and will add value.

RESIDENCE COUNCIL REPORT

A member of the Chestnut Residence Council highlighted there was high attendance at their first meeting of the year. The Council is happy about the Halloween events that took place this October.

The Council is focused on developing the Committee system, which could help preserve the history of the Council for new students. Other areas of focus for the Council include advocating for students, developing a structure to support this, and listening to what residents would like.

With respect to events and programming, the Council is focused on plans for students who will stay in residence over Winter Break, as well as securing a venue for the dance that will take place next semester.

There is an identified need for structure, support, and a genuine connection with the RLO staff.

Discussion

A resident commented that the Council could work towards finding a way to bridge their programming with student goals. They appreciate the efforts of the Council thus far, especially the Wellness events. The most recent event, held in collaboration with the Community Wellness Coordinators, with animals, was very impactful.

OTHER BUSINESS

A member of the Urban Crew highlighted that there is a need for an equipment upgrade, as well as more games. Staff replied that we have the budget and can look into purchasing these items.

A resident commented that the Dining Commons should focus on healthy food options that are environmentally friendly and cost effective.

Eliza closed the meeting, thanked all participants, and noted that the Committee will meet two more times this year, in January and March.