

Information on Bowdoin College – Off campus housing and other real estate

Response to comments at the 1/2/2025 Comprehensive Plan Update Committee

Enrollment: While annual enrollment varies with population/class size demographics and other factors, the average Fall enrollment at Bowdoin over the last ten years has hovered at around 1,850 students. There was some significant variation in recent years due to the Covid-19 pandemic which resulted in a low of 1,776 students in 2020, followed by a high of 1,948 in Fall 2021 reflecting deferments due to Covid. Most recently, the Fall 2024 enrollment was 1,873 and will drop to an estimated 1,825 for the Spring semester as more students traditionally choose to study abroad in the spring.

Off-campus housing: While Bowdoin is primarily a residential college, there has historically been some number of upper class students who choose to live off campus, generally between 110 – 150 students. During the first part of the last decade, the number of students living off campus increased, and in the fall of 2016, there was a high of 217 students living off campus. This led to an effort by the administration to reassess the state of, and options for upper class housing on campus, and to revise the Off Campus housing policy. The result of this initiative was the construction of two new upper class residence halls that featured apartment style living, reconfiguration of other upper class dormitory spaces to offer more single rooms, and establishment of new limits on the number of students who would be granted permission to live off campus. For AY 2017-18, the limit was set at 200. That limit decreased over the next two academic years to 185, and then to 150 where it has remained since 2019. The new residence halls came online in 2019 and 2020 and in the past 3 years, the number of students living off campus has hovered around 100. We have 1809 assignable beds in our residence halls, which includes some reasonable cushion for swing space, thus requiring only 67 students to live off campus this fall, which is comfortably below the average number of off-campus living requests received each year.

Real estate: The college owns a number of properties within close proximity to the campus that are rented to new/visiting faculty. The college pays property tax on these properties, and they are subject to the same valuation process as any single-family home. Property used for academic purposes, including residence halls for students, is exempt from local property taxes. If the College purchases a property for faculty housing, that property remains on the tax rolls. For the example of the Boody Street property purchased by the College, not only did the property remain on the tax rolls, but the sale triggered a revaluation of the property, increasing the Town's tax revenue as a result of the sale.

The College is not buying single family houses and converting them to residence halls. There has been the rare occasion when the College has purchased a property that was on the tax rolls and converted it to a college use, making the property eligible for tax exemption. This occurred in 2023 with the office building at 240 Maine Street. Consistent with College policy, Bowdoin increased its voluntary contribution to the Town by the amount of the real estate tax assessment, offsetting any impact of the acquisition to the Town's revenue.