

Budget travelers drive hostel To find new digs

By **Donna Goodison**

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Hub hotels are hard up for guests, but occupancy for Hostelling International-Boston is running 3 percent ahead of last year and near capacity. And the Hub nonprofit is continuing its building search as part of a \$29 million expansion, even as the credit markets have tightened.

HI-Boston plans to sell its 208-bed Hemenway Street facility of 25 years, run a capital campaign and finance the remainder of the new 375-bed hostel. At 50,000 square feet, it would be more than double the size of the current one.

"We are looking to expand both in size and the level of service we provide," said Deborah Ruhe, executive director of Hostelling International USA's Eastern New England Regional Council.

The plans call for handicap accessibility, more meeting and classroom space for educational groups, more common space for guests and room for hostel-hosted events, such as workshops now held off-site.

HI-Boston has a \$30.69 average daily bed rate. It caters mostly to 20-somethings, and has 32,000-plus guests a year, 65 percent of whom are international visitors.

The hostel hopes to stop renting space from Boston University each summer to house fair-weather budget travelers, which last year jumped 12.3 percent.

"We are proceeding with this project, but we, like other folks, have concerns about whether the lenders are going to be on board," Ruhe said.



Photo by **Nancy Lane**

MOVING: Hostelling International-Boston, enjoying high occupancy rates in tough economic times, plans to expand in a new building.