

TO: Senate

QUESTION FROM: Senators Dow, Cleveland, and Sobat

RESPONSE FROM: Senator Yalovsky, Interim Vice-Principal (Administration and Finance)

SUBJECT: Question Regarding Campus Accessibility During Construction Periods

MEETING DATE: November 23, 2016

PREAMBLE: Whereas, significant accessibility barriers already exist across McGill's campuses;¹

Whereas, current City of Montreal construction work has further reduced physical accessibility to University buildings and services, particularly along McTavish, Sherbrooke, and Doctor Penfield Streets;²

Whereas, this includes uneven surfaces and thoroughfares; steep ramps and stairs; and insufficient clearance for both individuals and vehicles;

Whereas, this has posed particular problems for wheelchair users and other community members with reduced mobility;³

Whereas, the City of Montreal stated that it has received no formal complaints regarding this construction work;

Whereas, the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD), the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU), and other campus groups have all received numerous complaints;

Whereas, the preferred feedback process through municipal channels is unclear;

Whereas, the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) has indicated that the hours of the Brown Building will be extended in order to facilitate access to Doctor Penfield via the University Centre.

¹ https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/files/osd/accessibilityguide_downtowncampusupdate.pdf

² <https://www.mcgill.ca/construction/city-montreal-projects/promenade-urbaine-fleuve-montagne>

³ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/blocked-from-medical-appointment-mcgill-student-with-disabilities-speaks-out-against-construction-1.3818240>

QUESTION:

1. How can community members raise concerns regarding ongoing construction projects to the University? To the City of Montreal?
2. What steps has the administration taken to ensure that the City prioritizes accessibility considerations during construction work?
3. Is the University willing to lobby for improvements to current municipal practices, such as stricter accessibility standards or sensitivity training for construction workers?

RESPONSE:

I would like to thank the Senators for their questions on a subject I am sure has inconvenienced many members of our community this fall and, unfortunately, will continue to affect us all until sometime next Spring and perhaps beyond. In answer to the three questions:

1. The McGill community can best raise concerns by sending an email to construction.feedback@mcgill.ca. We generally receive several emails a week. Where relevant, the concerns raised are relayed rapidly to the City of Montreal. In addition, the Office for Students with Disabilities website (<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/construction-accessibility>) contains a form which allows the community to raise concerns. These concerns are immediately forwarded to Campus Public Safety and relayed to the City of Montreal where appropriate. At the bottom of the City of Montreal's Info-Travaux website, there is information on how to communicate with the City by email or via the 311 phone service.
 2. We have been proactively managing this file since early July. Initial meetings between McGill staff and the City of Montreal took place last summer, and we have been in regular contact with the City ever since. The University's concerns about access to our buildings were raised right from the start. The University assigned a project manager from Facilities Management and Ancillary Services to work with the City on this file. That individual has been and continues to be in daily contact with the City, often more than once a day. They discuss the timing of changes to the location and nature of the work, the realignment of pathways around and through the construction site, the need to maintain access for pedestrians, safety concerns, issues about noise and inconvenience and a host of other issues including access for delivery vehicles. Accessibility concerns are high priority issues in these discussions.
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3. McGill has already pressed upon the City the need to improve standards for accessibility and safety and has raised issues about the comportment of some of the workers responsible for dealing with the public. We will continue to make the City aware of shortcomings we observe in any of these areas. Where we have identified unsafe situations, we have communicated these to the City and have also made emergency services like the Montreal Fire Department aware. The McGill community's concerns have been expressed vigorously and frequently, and we will continue to express them until the completion of the construction projects.
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