

**Project Title: Thomson House Community Garden****Budget Requested: 750\$****Applicant/Project Leaders:****Line Bourdages**, Post Graduate Student Society (PGSS) Environment Committee

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**I. Project Overview**

*Thomson House is home to the Post-Graduate Student Society (PGSS) and the Thomson House restaurant, and is an important location for graduate students to interact and engage in graduate student life. Following challenges with developing the Thomson House grounds as an integrated part of graduate student activities, the PGSS Environment Committee is requesting startup funds to setup a community container garden, with the major goals of engaging members, teaching and sharing resources on small scale urban agriculture, linking the PGSS gardening initiatives with the greater McGill gardening community, and institutionalizing garden maintenance and local culinary herb production for the Thomson House restaurant.*

**Background:**

The Thomson House permaculture garden was created in 2011 with the assistance of the Sustainability Projects Fund (SPF project 43), with the building of three raised beds and one rain-garden on Thomson House grounds. The goals were to integrate a permaculture system with a food production unit, as well as to "make Thomson House more sustainable, interest the House's users in urban agriculture, attract pollinators to the associated container garden, and add to the biodiversity of the surroundings around the building" (Wrobel, 2012). While the garden setup went according to plan in this project, the efforts toward local food production for the Thomson House restaurant and the institutionalization of garden maintenance were unsuccessful. Following the initial phase of the project, the garden was put under the responsibility of the PGSS Environment Committee and volunteers have struggled each year to plant and maintain the garden, mostly due to a lack of time and human resources. This was emphasized in a 2013 audit of sustainability at Thomson House (SPF project 27), where it was found that the garden had not yet reached its full potential in terms of providing produce for the Thomson House kitchen. The PGSS recently adopted its new Sustainability Action Plan, which presented a series of objectives for each stake-holder, including the PGSS Environment Committee. Those objectives include an increase in environmental education events, an increase and diversification of native plants around Thomson House, the increase of locally produced food served at the Thomson House restaurant, as well as the long-term development of an ongoing outreach campaign devoted to environmental and sustainability issues surrounding PGSS. It is with the intention of improving sustainability practises at PGSS --through the satisfying of those objectives-- that the PGSS Environment Committee is suggesting the installation of a community container garden on Thomson House grounds.

## Objectives and Approach

We propose a community garden composed of two parts, the first including 7 sets of 4 self-watering containers (1 set per participant) and the second including three raised beds and 6 bins reserved for culinary herb production for the restaurant. Containers are chosen instead of in-ground plots because of the elevated levels of lead found in parts of the grounds (Rodrigues 2013) and because containers are cheaper and require less start-up efforts than raised beds. In the project, reusing, recycling and upcycling will be prioritized to put an emphasis on the accessibility, affordability, and environmentally friendly aspects of small scale urban agriculture. This will include the use of discarded corrugated plastic (electoral signs) and yogurt containers for the bin construction, using discarded pallets to make platforms to stabilize the bins, getting free compost from the St-Michel Environmental Complex, and encouraging participants to use resources such as [plantcatching.com](http://plantcatching.com), which provides a network for sharing and trading gardening items (e.g. seeds, materials, compost, etc.)

The 7 participants will be responsible for planning, planting and harvesting their respective containers. As a group, they will also be responsible for the collaborative care (watering and slight maintenance) of the whole garden, thereby contributing to the sustainability of the kitchen garden. This improved sustainable food production and community participation would contribute directly toward the Environment Committee's outreach campaign. The garden will be designed as a community endeavour, with monthly meetings for follow-up and skill improvement workshops. The maintenance will be organized in collaboration, with watering schedules and a mailing list for easy communication, and the organization will be spearheaded by the Environment Committee. The commitment is slightly greater than of a traditional community garden, and we plan on maintaining interest with the monthly workshops, frequent and interactive communication, as well as by letting the participants bring home their harvest and one watering planter at the end of the season. We will ensure that participants are aware and on board with the necessary commitment by having an info session in April prior to registration.

The series of workshops will aim to share resources and teach new skills related to small scale urban agriculture (see tentative schedule below), with an emphasis on accessible, low-cost and community-oriented options. When possible, we will participate in the workshop series organized by Campus Crops and share their resources with our participants (as well as resources from other initiatives on- and off-campus.) This will link the PGSS garden to McGill's other gardening initiatives, engage our participants with other sustainability initiatives on campus, and also contribute to the medium term action of increasing educational opportunities.

### Timeframe and tentative workshop schedule:

April	Advertisement, info session and registration, purchasing of bin materials. Workshop on bin construction, garden space planning and companion planting.
May	Purchasing of materials, garden set up, watering schedule. Workshop on soil and compost, edible flowers.
June	Workshop on pest management
July	Workshop on herb harvest and transformation/preservation
August	Workshop on canning and preserves
September	Workshop on seed harvesting and preservation
October	Workshop on winterizing, Review and garden clean-up and winterizing

**Project eligibility:**

- How does the project integrate with V2020?

Our project encourages community engagement and collaboration, as well as skill sharing and education by peers. Our project also contains an aspect of advocacy for reduction of consumption and waste, as well as for local food production and healthy living.

- How will the project contribute to building a culture of sustainability on campus?

The community garden will be in display and signage will be installed to communicate about the project's features and goals. This will contribute to the image of the PGSS in terms of environment and sustainability. Also, links will be made between the PGSS garden community and other gardening initiatives on campus (e.g. campus crops, edible campus) so to share resources and integrate our members in the greater McGill community.

- Provide any supporting information that demonstrates a need for the project on campus.

A 2013 survey of sent to all PGSS members (completed by 20) by the PGSS Environment Committee suggested that many members are unaware of Environment Committee initiatives, and of the purpose of the Thomson House garden, and would be interested in an increased number of workshops relating to sustainability and the environment. They also expressed the importance of the Environment Committee better collaborating with other groups on campus.

- Provide a plan to evaluate the project's success and impact

The success of the project will be measured based on the maintained contribution from our participants. The October meeting, where we will do a review of the season and prepare the garden for the winter, will also include a survey of participants' satisfaction, learning outcomes, concerns, and suggestions for improvement.

- How will the outcomes be shared with the community?

We will communicate stories about the community garden as well as information about how much food is produced for the kitchen, indigenous plants introduced and workshops run through the PGSS Facebook page as well as through the Environment Committee listserv and website. Information will also be relayed to Councillors at PGSS Council for dissemination to their GSAs and constituents. A sign describing the project will also be put on site for visitors.

- Address potential for institutionalization

Possible institutionalization of the project is accounted for, since all recurring fees are already proposed to be provided from sources other than the Sustainability Projects Fund.

**Stakeholders:**

Participants: A group of 7 graduate students will be able to participate in the garden project and learn about small-scale urban agriculture. They will provide partial funding via a participation fee of 25\$ for the season, which will account for the materials to construct one self-watering planter for them to take home at the end of the season and materials needed for the workshops given by the PGSS environment committee.

Thomson House Restaurant: The group will also be responsible for the watering and maintenance of the three raised beds used to grow herbs for the Thomson House kitchen. The kitchen staff will be responsible for the harvest but will still benefit from the community garden group's effort. The project is supported by the Thomson House manager, André Pierzchala, who will provide help with getting the backyard hose fixed and is providing the team with a storage space behind the Thomson House Annex (see correspondence in appendix).

PGSS Environment Committee: The committee will be providing funds for recurring costs, and members will be providing support and facilitating the monthly workshops.

**Other groups affected:**

McGill Graduate Students and PGSS: This project will contribute to satisfy several objectives of the PGSS Sustainability Action Plan and to helping make the Thomson House garden a more integrated part of graduate student life.

**II. Project Implementation / Tasks and Responsibilities:**

Type of Activity – Task	Estimated Time Required	Group Member in Charge
Workshop Facilitating	6 months * 3 hrs = 18 hours	L. Bourdages, J. Templeton
Planning, advertising, setup of communication methods	6 hours	L. Bourdages, A. Winegardner
Support	25 weeks * 1hr = 25 hours	L. Bourdages, J. Templeton

**III. Financials**

Critical Date: Mid-April, for the purchase of materials necessary for the bin construction.

**Detailed expenses:**

Expense Description	Estimated Cost
Explanation sign for the project	\$50.00
Material for bins (28 bins, 6 sets of 4)*	24 x 20\$ = \$480.00
Outdoor storage unit	\$140.00
Workshop facilitator compensation	7 x 25\$ = \$175.00
Garden Tools	\$50.00
Tarps	\$30.00
Soil (1.5 x 30L bag per bin)	36 x 7.50\$ = \$270.00
Total	\$1,195.00

\* the Environment Committee already has 4 bins for the 7th participant.

**Detailed revenues:**

Revenue Source	Amount Requested	Confirmed?
Sustainability Projects Fund	\$750.00	No
Participants	Cost of take home material 7* 25\$ = 175\$	No
Thomson House Management	Cost of hose repair + hose	Yes
PGSS Environment Committee	Soil and compost: 270\$	Yes

**IV. Additional information***Attached information:*

- Project support letter and permission from André Pierzchala, Business Manager for Thomson House (and member of PGSS Board of Directors).
- Project support letter from Shona Watt, PGSS Sustainability Coordinator.

*Qualifications:*

- Line Bourdages has experience in facilitating container gardening workshops (Self watering planter, and seed harvesting and preserving workshops in summer 2013).
- Line Bourdages and Amanda Winegardner have been involved in the permaculture garden setup and maintenance for the 2012 and 2013 growing seasons, and have a good knowledge of Thomson House kitchen needs and garden characteristics and challenges.

## **Appendix A: References**

Rodrigues, S. (2013): Sustainable Thomson House: A 5-year sustainability and action plan, a McGill School of Environment Honours Project.

Watt, S. (2014): PGSS & Thomson House 5 year Sustainability Action Plan. Online at <https://pgss.mcgill.ca/en/sustainable-thomson-house>.

Wrobel, C. (2012): The Thomson House Garden Project Summary Report for 2011.

Letter of Support for the Thomson House Community Garden

Shona Watt, Sustainability Coordinator at PGSS

March 25, 2014

Dear Sustainability Projects Fund Working Group:

I am writing this letter to demonstrate my support for the Thomson House Community Garden Project, led by the PGSS Environment Committee. For the past two years, I have been the Sustainability Coordinator for PGSS, and have overseen many aspects of environmental and social sustainability at Thomson House. In the past, several sustainability projects have been started at Thomson House, but lacked the institutionalization or ongoing support to remain successful, due to the nature of student turnover.

One example of such a project was the Thomson House permaculture garden, set up in 2011-2012. The permaculture garden is a great example of how student research can help solve real problems at McGill, since it was designed by an urban horticulture class. However, a lack of understanding of the needs of the Thomson House restaurant meant that the herb garden was under utilized, and who was coordinating the project was not clear. Since then, the Environment Committee has worked to ameliorate communication with the Thomson House restaurant, and set the garden up in such a way that the long-term coordination is consistent and clear.

I wholly support the Thomson House container garden project. I feel that it would give the participants a hands-on way to share and learn skills, as well as increase production and maintenance of the herb gardens for the Thomson House restaurant.

My position as Sustainability Coordinator was created to design and implement a 5 year Sustainability Action Plan for PGSS and Thomson House. The sustainability actions under the PGSS Environment Committee's portfolio focus on raising awareness and increasing engagement, mainly through events and workshops. Their proposal for a Thomson House Community Garden Project fits in line with the PGSS 5 year Sustainability Action Plan, and would increase meaningful sustainability engagement with graduate students.

Thank you,  
Shona Watt  
PGSS Sustainability Coordinator

From: PGSS Operations Manager  
Sent: Thursday, March 27, 2014 9:53 AM  
To: PGSS Environment Commissioner  
Subject: RE: Important: about garden

Hi Amanda,

1) You have permission to use the back part or the west side of Thomson House property to set-up gardening containers.

2) You can use the area behind the annex to install a storage unit for gardening tools and equipment.

3) The exterior faucet on the south side of Thomson House is functional and is available for watering needs.

The only thing we ask is that it not interfere with the daily operation of Thomson House.

I fully support the new scope of the gardening project, a wonderful idea, gardening in the center of downtown Montreal.

Scincerely

Andre Pierzchala  
Business Manager  
PGSS McGill