
Advisory Council on Sustainability

September 19, 2017, 9:00 – 11:00
McGill University, James Building, room 301

Minutes

Present: Yves Beauchamp (Co-Chair), Kakwiranó:ron Cook, Robert Couvrette, Alan DeSousa, Jayne Engle, Anja Geitmann, Robert Leckey, Bruce Lennox, Christopher Manfredi (Co-Chair), Francois Miller (Steward), Amir Nosrat (NEW), Kathleen Ng, Lauren Rathmell, Muna Tojiboeva, Nathalie Zinger

Guest: Jérôme Conraud, Joyce Donohue

Regrets: Paul Chesser, Jade Corriveau (NEW), Rachel Léger, Jim Nicell, Karen Richardson

1. Welcome & Roundtable

The co-chairs welcome the participants, including new member Amir Nosrat (PGSS Environment Commissioner).

2. Summary of the last meeting (May 24), results from the feedback form & meeting agenda

Prof. Beauchamp confirms that participants have no changes to make, neither for the minutes of the previous meeting May 24 nor for the day's agenda.

He thanks everyone for their comments on the feedback survey, and presents the results: namely, that participants enjoy attending the Advisory Council, feel that they can have a meaningful contribution, and generally want to meet more frequently. In response to this feedback, one more meeting has been added to the 2017-2018 calendar (from 3 to 4 meetings per year).

Prof. Beauchamp encourages participants to bring topics forward for discussion at upcoming meetings and share with Francois any suggestions for improvement.

3. Update on the Provost's commitments in response to the Report on the Open Forum on Sustainability

Prof. Manfredi provides highlights of the report that he would be making to Senate in the afternoon about the series of commitments he had made in January 2018, in response to the Report on the Open Forum on Sustainability.

- After extensive discussions with PGSS students last year, he funded the creation of a two-year Climate Officer position under the Office of Sustainability. He is pleased to announce that a person has been recruited, Ali Rivers, and she began work last month. She will be meeting with campus stakeholders and experts on climate education, mitigation, adaptation and resilience.

- Programmes for a Sustainable Workplace Certification and a Sustainable Events Certification were developed in 2017, in order to mitigate the footprint of work-related activities, including their carbon footprint. The 2017-2020 Climate and Sustainability Action Plan will contain additional initiatives to reduce our carbon footprint.
- McGill has set up a process to offset a portion of our emissions through a BMO Airfare Virtual card.
- He highlighted the importance of a sustainability-focused curriculum in McGill's Strategic Academic Plan 2017-2022, and he remains committed to "promote (...) the development of sustainability-focused research and teaching."
- The Advisory Council on Sustainability has demonstrated its usefulness in improving the two-way communication on the University's sustainability commitments and actions, especially true regarding our discussions around carbon-neutrality. He thanks participants for investing their time and commitment.

4. Update on the 2017-2020 Climate and Sustainability Action Plan

Mr. Miller provides an update on the progress on the development of the 2017-2010 Climate and Sustainability Action Plan.

Much discussion ensues about the initiatives that could be undertaken at McGill beyond its own operations, but from the view of the collective in influencing broader societal change. Some actionable takeaways were discussed, including the suggestion from one participant that there could be collaboration with the McConnell Foundation and the City on an upcoming international conference of cities aiming for self-sufficiency (scheduled to be held in Montreal in 2020). This could be explored at a future meeting.

Mr. Miller reminds members that they now receive the newsletter from the Office of Sustainability so that they can stay apprised of McGill sustainability news between meetings. He will also circulate a document summarizing McGill's sustainability achievements.

5. Roadmap for energy transition towards carbon-neutrality

After reviewing with participants the sources of quantified emissions at McGill (presented at the previous meeting), Mr. Conraud presents a roadmap for McGill to transition to carbon-neutral energy systems.

Some context and considerations used in development of the roadmap included:

- The impact of deferred maintenance and the real estate master plan;
- External factors which could impact energy transition (positive or negative);
- Use of natural gas to allow a certain flexibility for operations, especially from the perspectives of risk mitigation and cost effectiveness; and
- Assessment based on existing technologies applicable to campus, from a risk-management approach.

After the presentation, the following comments/suggestions were made by participants:

- A committee with the Ministry of Culture and the City of Montreal could be established to address heritage and economic maintenance solutions, where legislative issues could be discussed. McGill could potentially seek for dispensation to facilitate long-term planning instead of a piecemeal approach.
- There are opportunities to collaborate with University Advancement to fundraise for the transition, and/or *Transition énergétique Québec* on projects.

6. Potential carbon reduction from air travel

Messieurs Conraud and Miller review the possible ways to reduce carbon emissions from air travel.

- Emissions from air travel could be reduced through a voluntary offset programme: based on the experience of Université Laval, this could reduce emissions by approximately 20%.
- Some emissions reductions could also be achieved by converting short-haul air travel (distance of under 500 km) to rail.

Prof. Beauchamp mentions that, while technology is currently unable to replace the air travel currently necessary for professors, there is a promising initiative that could be implemented over the next two to three years to reduce the associated carbon emissions. The idea is to use a BMO Virtual Airfare card to pay for the travel centrally, and use the rebate money generated (a benefit provided by the bank for using the card) to purchase carbon offsets.

Comments/suggestions from participants included:

- grant funds apparently cannot be used to purchase carbon offsets for travel.
- financial systems could be leveraged to facilitate carbon offsetting;
- compensation could be made mandatory progressively;
- importance of staying updated on new initiatives/technologies on a broader scale, such as the new train network (*Réseau électrique métropolitain, REM*) and the hyperloop for intercity travel (Montreal-Toronto).

7. Group discussion

The first question asked of participants is:

Considering what you have heard, would you advise to set 2040 as the target to reach carbon neutrality? In other words, is it ambitious yet realistic? Does it position McGill in a leadership role?

After much discussion, the group suggests that 2040 would be acceptable as the firm target, but with the caveat that:

- planning for revisions should take place every 3 years, where the date for carbon neutrality could be moved closer; and
- visible short- and medium-term goals could be established to prioritize frontloading of the implementation, instead of waiting for the 2040 target date to approach prior to taking action.

This would enhance credibility and accountability, but participants underlined that communications around carbon neutrality would be key.

The second question asked of participants is:

What could be a concrete visual manifestation of McGill's commitment to carbon neutrality on campus?

Some ideas put forth by participants include:

- Installation of a physical thermometer, dial or something similar, in a highly visible place on campus;
- A virtual gauge on the McGill website with a needle moving towards our target;
- Programs with visual reminders of (incentivized) behavior change; and/or
- Using animals for maintenance of the campus green (similar to the programme by the Rosemont-Petite Patrie borough these past two summers).

8. Unit level climate and sustainability action plans

Mr. Miller presents examples of unit level climate and sustainability action plans from two other universities (Yale and Pennsylvania State). This is also a practice at the City of Montreal: due to the decentralized nature of the City, each borough is requested to develop their own local sustainability action plan under the umbrella of the broader Montreal-wide goals in the central sustainability plan.

In response to Mr. Miller's query to the group to ascertain whether this practice would make sense for McGill, participants indicated that:

- This could be integrated into existing strategic planning processes, but with the need to think about how this could be done without overloading.
- There may be already related projects ongoing in the faculties that could be embedded in a unit level action plan.

The Office of Sustainability will explore the possibility of designating a staff member who could support development of unit level action plans.

9. Next steps & closing remarks

Prof Manfredi provides an overview of activities anticipated this fall. The next steps in finalizing the 2017-2020 Climate and Sustainability Action Plan are:

- Presentation to the Principal/Vice-Principals group ("P7") for approval (November 3);
- Informing Senate and the Board of Governors (November 23 and December 12, respectively); and
- Presentation to the Academic Leadership Forum (January 16)

The next meeting of the Advisory Council on Sustainability is scheduled on November 29.

The co-chairs thank members for their participation.