
Advisory Council on Sustainability

February 27, 2018 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM

McGill University, James Building, room 302

Minutes

Present: Paul Chesser, Jade Corriveau, Robert Couvrette (acting Co-Chair), Alan DeSousa, Anja Geitmann, H  l  ne Lauzon, Robert Leckey, Bruce Lennox, Amy Luers, Christopher Manfredi (Co-Chair), Francois Miller (Steward), Jim Nicell, Amir Nosrat, Kathleen Ng, Lauren Rathmell, Muna Tojiboeva, Nathalie Zinger

Regrets: Yves Beauchamp (Co-Chair), Kakwiran  ron Cook, Jayne Engle

1. Welcome & Roundtable

Mr. Couvrette expresses Prof. Beauchamp's regrets to the group, and will be acting in his place as Co-Chair for the meeting. The co-chairs welcome the participants, including new members Jade Corriveau (President of the MacDonald Campus Student Society), Amy Luers (Executive Director of Future Earth), and H  l  ne Lauzon (Pr  sidente du Conseil patronal de l'environnement du Qu  bec).

2. Approval of minutes from the last meeting (September 19) and today's agenda

Mr. Couvrette confirms that participants have no changes to make, neither for the minutes of the previous meeting (September 19, 2017) nor for the day's agenda.

3. Latest News Related to Sustainability

Mr. Miller provides a few updates related to sustainability at McGill:

- The Sustainability Projects Fund, which is subject to student referenda every five years, successfully passed at SSMU and MCSS. The PGSS referendum would take place in the coming weeks.
- The Climate and Sustainability Action Plan was launched on December 1st, 2017.
- Funding was confirmed for the construction of a new bike center – one of the largest of its kind in North America - to be located in University Center (the SSMU building).
- Corporate Knights rated McGill as the 2nd greenest campus in Canada (with University of Calgary being the first).

4. Provost's Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education

Prof. Manfredi reports that in September 2016, he convened a Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education that was animated by two core themes:

- recognition of Indigenous history, contemporary presence, and ways of knowing and learning; and

- reconciliation by heeding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action, specifically through educational and institutional efforts aimed at redressing historical legacies of injustice and restoring relationships with Indigenous peoples.

The Final Report was submitted within a relatively short timeline (June 21, 2017), and launched next to the newly relocated Hochelaga Rock. The Report identifies 52 calls to action organized around the following five themes:

- Student recruitment and retention
- Physical representation and symbolic recognition
- Academic programs and curriculum
- Research and the academic complement
- Building capacity and human resources

In response to a question by an Advisory Council member, Prof. Manfredi clarified that the Task Force Report’s Calls to Action were different from those in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These had originally been called “Recommendations” but the term “Calls to Action” was felt by the co-chairs to be a stronger expression thereof.

The interlinkages with sustainability were clearly highlighted in the Task Force report: its Co-chairs met with the Office of Sustainability to identify potential areas for support and collaboration. For example, one of the actions in McGill’s Climate and Sustainability Action Plan (CSAP) is to “Recruit an indigenous scholar or artist-in-residence to raise awareness of Indigenous issues & climate change”. Francois Miller adds that the summary version of the CSAP will be translated into Innu, Mohawk and Cree.

To uphold McGill’s commitment to the calls for action, Prof. Manfredi embedded a new position of Special Advisor, Indigenous Initiatives, as part of his office: the incumbent appointed in this important new role is Kakwiranó:ron Cook, who is also a member of the Advisory Council on Sustainability.

Prof. Manfredi highlights some contributions led by a few Deans (including the three present) who had independently recruited indigenous faculty, including in Law, Nutrition and Dietetics, and Biology.

5. Overview of the Climate and Sustainability Action Plan (2017-2020)

Mr. Miller provided an overview of the Climate and Sustainability Action Plan (CSAP) which was launched in December 2017. In the CSAP, McGill outlined its commitment to two long-term targets:

- Achieve carbon neutrality by 2040; and
- Attain a Platinum sustainability rating by 2030.

After the presentation, the following comments are made by participants:

- Mr Couvrette explains that different renewable energy alternatives had been studied to support McGill’s carbon neutrality target. He also confirms that energy intensity was taken into account in the models presented.
- Regarding McGill’s sustainability rating, Mr. Miller mentions McGill’s Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS) rating was Silver in 2012, Gold in 2016, and aiming for Platinum by 2030. Only three universities (University of New Hampshire, Stanford and Colorado)

had been rated Platinum so far. In response to members' questions, Ms. Ng clarifies that the STARS rating was valid for three years after submission.

- In terms of accountability, Sustainability Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were added for the Board of Governors.
- Finally, the Office of Sustainability will work with individual units to develop unit-level action plans to integrate sustainability into departmental strategies and internal operations.

In summary,

- The CSAP was generally well-received, albeit many questions arose as to what could be done to reduce unavoidable Scope 3 emissions from research travel.
- Carbon offsets were discussed as an option. One member recommends that the expense reports could include information on distances travelled and associated greenhouse gas emissions. This information could be used to raise awareness on the impacts of air travel. Eventually, the offset cost could be integrated into the overall cost of travel.
- While this could be possible for administrative travel (30%), discussion would be necessary with granting agencies and academic units to address the 70% portion of research-related travel.

6. Potential ways to communicate McGill's commitment to sustainability

Since McGill adopted these ambitious targets and commitments related to climate and sustainability, Prof. Manfredi facilitates a discussion on how these commitments could be communicated to the community. Members are asked:

- What information would they want to see about McGill's commitment to sustainability? and
- How this information should be communicated to the McGill community?

A discussion unfolds. Participants suggest:

- Ensuring that McGill is communicating about sustainability at large instead of climate alone
- Leveraging McGill's impending bicentennial celebrations;
- Consistently following up with students about progress on the vision to build trust;
- Holding sustainability booths at orientation to sensitize students about their own environmental footprint in addition to that of campus;
- Reaching out to the alumni network who could in turn become advocates and influence decisions in their own communities;
- Holding a "sustainability day/week";
- Leveraging the McGill brand to demonstrate universities' critical role as agents of change in the global sustainability movement;
- Holding a multidisciplinary student competition on sustainability at Macdonald Campus;
- Ensuring reporting is dynamic (e.g. Provide real-time data from the Pulse energy dashboard on the McGill main page);
- Developing community initiatives with visible signs of said commitment, similar to diversity ambassadors.

Some of these ideas were in line with those that had been proposed earlier by the Office of Sustainability team, such as:

- Displaying annual GHG data on McGill's main page.
- Crafting a video about McGill's commitment to carbon neutrality.

- Organizing an event like a summer climate concert by the School of Music, or speaker series, etc.
- Providing sustainability information on interactive terminal that would be installed close to Roddick Gates.
- Identifying a one-tonne tree (a tree that has, based on its age and species, sequestered a ton of carbon).

Prof Manfredi thanks the participants for their input, which would inform prioritization of measures that would highlight McGill's commitment to sustainability.

7. McGill's Waste Reduction and Diversion Strategy

Mr. Miller reports that a multi-stakeholder Waste Reduction and Diversion Task Force was currently working on a Waste Reduction and Diversion Strategy. Main issues identified by the Task Force to address include:

- Improving University's overall diversion rate
- Intensifying communications activities on waste reduction
- Improving the waste tracking and monitoring system; and
- Increasing the coherence and uniformity of signage on waste bins.

Centralized waste sorting stations (instead of individual office pickup) is becoming more widespread and increases the diversion rate. The centralized sorting stations had been implemented at other campuses such as Emory University and Université Laval, with improved quality of sorting and diversion, and custodians being able to use their time for services occupants found more valuable.

Advisory Council members are asked:

- From your perspective, does pursuing this option make sense?
- What are the main challenges and how can these be overcome?
- Could there be research and educational opportunities related to such an initiative?
- Are there other tactics you have seen that could be effective?

The key takeaways from the discussions are as follows:

- This would be a worthwhile initiative, but a change in the management process would be key to making this successful;
- The University has to make sure it provides tools that could facilitate the desired change in behavior, such as standardized (small) desk bins;
- The signage should emphasize the circular economy concept
- An educational campaigns should focus on reuse first and provide ongoing feedback linked with the requested behavior change.

Mr. Couvrette summarizes that, in response to the question of whether pursuing this option makes sense, the group was not in opposition to the idea but the project needs to be further developed.

8. Next steps and closing remarks

The McGill Catalyst awards are coming on April 3rd. It is an opportunity to celebrate our University's most inspiring sustainability projects and people. Ms. Ng describes the various categories and the independent selection process.

Mr. Miller will send an official invitation to the Advisory Council members to attend the Catalyst awards.

The next meeting of the Advisory Council is already scheduled May 17, from 9:00 to 11:00am. Proposed agenda items include:

- A presentation of McGill's 2016 GHG emissions inventory; and
- A discussion on climate risk and adaptation.

A member suggests to connect with the City of Montreal on this topic, and that the contact information of the Advisory Council members be shared.

Mr. Couvrette thanks members for their participation and encourages participants to bring topics forward for discussion at upcoming meetings.