

Advisory Council on Sustainability
McGill University
February 22, 2023 (3:00 PM – 4:30 PM)

Present: F. Miller, Y. Beauchamp, D. Dutton, J. Nicell, B. Harvey, A. DeSousa, G. MacDonald, C. Aubrac, P. Cigana, K. Houser, B. Zsigovics, N. Volland, B. Lennox, L. Rathmell

Absent with regrets: D. Mondou, A. Porlier, R. Wright, L. Buckley.

Guests: Student-led waste education: R. Joly-Simard, E. Rogan, E. Sales

1. Welcome, approval of minutes from the last meeting (November 30) and today's agenda.

F. Miller welcomes the group to the 3rd meeting of 4 for 2022-2023. F. Miller asks for approval of the minutes from the last meeting. The Council approves. There are no additions to today's agenda.

2. Latest News Related to Sustainability

K. Houser presents recent sustainability news, including:

- The online student sustainability module was officially launched in an event on Jan 26, which included a student panel. It is now available in French and English on the MyCourses platform. A faculty/staff version is also underway.
- Thanks to the Sustainable Labs Working Group an updated sustainable labs guide was launched last month. The guide suggests roughly 75 actions in eight categories that lab users can implement to make their operations more sustainable. This is an action that is part of the ongoing work towards implementing a sustainable labs certification at McGill.
- Launch of first campus wide in-room composting program. Rollout is being done in a phased approach, bins, bin liners, and sorting flyers were delivered to Solin and M.O.R.E. residences at the beginning of the Winter 2023 semester. The program will be implemented in the rest of the downtown and Mac residences in Fall 2023.
- Over 195 countries and thousands of labs have joined the International Laboratory Freezer Challenge. This challenge helps to improve sample accessibility and integrity, reduce maintenance costs, and increase energy efficiency. McGill is encouraging our labs to participate and so far several labs spanning faculties and even the Research Institutes have joined. (MUHC is participating as part of McGill).
- The 2023 edition of the McGill Sustainability Research Symposium (SRS) was held on February 10. The theme was Health, Healthcare and Sustainability. It brought together experts from academia and industry to discuss the challenges of making health research and healthcare more sustainable.
- The PGSS referenda on the continuation of the Sustainability Projects Fund will start next week. It is the last of the three student societies to hold their vote and the results will inform the status of the fund for the next 5 years.

3. Student-led waste education: creating culture change through outreach and engagement.

Rosalie Joly-Simard, Waste Education Intern, Office of Sustainability; Evelyn Rogan, Zero-waste Ambassador and Elena Sales, Zero-waste Ambassador present on the importance of student-led waste education, and the different educational initiatives they have been working on. McGill aims to become zero-waste by 2035 by attaining a diversion rate of 90 percent. To reach zero-waste by 2035, it is

important that McGill makes institutional changes such as standardizing waste sorting stations and by encouraging individual students and staff to do their part to reduce and divert waste as well.

The team began by coming up with three waste education learning outcomes for the McGill community:

- 1) Learn what materials go in which waste streams and why we want to divert compostables and recyclables away from the landfill.
- 2) Learn that sorting materials incorrectly can lead to contamination of the recycling and compost streams, resulting in the whole bag being sent to landfill, so we want to caution against “wish-cycling”.
- 3) Gain awareness that less is more and there are resources for reducing waste on campus, such as reusable container programs.

By doing tabling, helping at events and orientation activities, our ambassadors can directly engage with the community to educate and give them tools they need to become more sustainable citizens on campus and in their everyday lives.

The team also focused on improving the digital media outreach. They created Instagram reels, new Instagram graphics and helped improve the Zero Waste Knowledge webpage.

E. Rogan gives the group a look at a few examples of the reels they had contributed to on Instagram. The three reels cover: composting in residences, what goes where for dining hall waste, and how to sort coffee cups. The zero-waste reels have received over 30,000 cumulative views so far and been re-shared by multiple different McGill units and groups. With the help of the Office of Sustainability’s graphics design intern, the team was also able to create helpful Instagram graphics as part of a campaign called zero-waste Wednesdays, which also included a competition where students could post videos of their recycling habits to win a prize.

As for the website, R. Joly-Simard created a new online Zero-Waste Knowledge Base to be a one-stop resource for everything campus users might want to know, from tips on how to sort packaging, to information on how landfills contribute to global warming. She also contributed to McGill’s new online sustainability module for students by creating a waste knowledge test.

Members suggested:

- The videos are fantastic - have you considered using QR codes for everything – make it easy and accessible?
- Is there a way to use some of your outreach ideas to question people about their choices upfront? Have people ask themselves whether or not they need the straw before making the purchase?
- Waste Audits can be unpleasant – do you have more planned for every year to see the impact of your efforts?

Response: Waste Audits for the time being are scheduled for the Fall, around November and in the Spring, in March or April.

- Smart bins may be problematic as they do not encourage not to buy. Also, we have noticed that people respond better when the information is presented at eye level and not through floor decals.
- Might be a good idea to do a reel on reducing waste as well.
- It is really nice to see students engaged and taking the initiative but to what extent are staff and faculty doing the same? Can we gauge how much waste is being created by students vs. staff and faculty?
- Where does the compost go?

Response: The residences compost gets picked up by the city. The rest of McGill gets picked up by a private company, but they do not handle compostable plastics at this time.

4. Biodiversity at McGill: COP15 update and McGill's Biodiversity Plan

F. Miller and K. Houser share with the group an initiative the Office of Sustainability is working on, in partnership with several experts and staff involved in biodiversity.

MOOS has begun the process of developing a biodiversity plan, consulting with experts in the field to accompany us in the planning process, including Andy Gonzales, a world-renowned researcher in biodiversity, that will hopefully guide our future actions to increase biodiversity on campus.

In December 2022, Montreal hosted the 2022 UN Biodiversity Conference. Representatives from 188 governments gathered at COP15 to discuss common goals to guide global action on biodiversity loss and restoring natural ecosystems.

McGill successfully participated in this conference through events, presentations, and activities. McGill's booth provided delegates with information on sustainability and biodiversity at the University, we also held two biodiversity tours on the downtown campus and had over 90K+ views on McGill's COP15 social media posts. At the start of COP 15, we joined hundreds of universities in signing the Nature Positive Pledge to demonstrate our commitment to biodiversity. In doing so, we committed to assess McGill's biodiversity baseline, set smart targets for biodiversity, implement actions, and report annually on McGill's progress.

Moving forward, a shared vision for biodiversity can help unite the many stakeholders, initiatives, and natural resources that we have here at the University. This vision will guide the many areas of work at the University, as well as bring awareness and engagement opportunities around this important topic. Our hope is that we'll be not only able to better track biodiversity initiatives, but to protect and enhance our ecosystems, as well.

Members suggested/asked:

- It will be crucial to create a baseline – but keep the areas separate as they will have different needs. Reach out to the people who manage our lands – for example the corridor from the mountain, we need to identify the key people active in those areas and consult with them as well.
- Make the links clear between biodiversity itself and what the university is doing for climate change – and focus on adaptation.
- Will there be an educational component? There are already quite a few courses working on these topics, there may be some excellent opportunities to collaborate together.
- To increase engagement and possibly make it fun, could we have programs, guides and/or workshops that would guide people to make the right decisions even at home on their own properties?

5. Next steps & closing remarks

F. Miller thanks the guest presenters for their contributions and reminds everyone that the next Advisory Council meeting will take place May 17, 2023, virtually on ZOOM.