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## Advisory Council on Sustainability (ACS)

February 23, 2017

9:00 – 11:00

James Administration, Suite 301

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## Minutes

**Present:** Yves Beauchamp (Co-Chair), Paul Chesser, Robert Couvrette, Jayne Engle, Victor Frankel, Anja Geitmann, Robert Leckey, Bruce Lennox, Christopher Manfredi (Co-Chair), Francois Miller (Steward), Kathleen Ng, Jim Nicell, Lauren Rathmell, Karen Richardson, Nathalie Zinger

**Guest:** Jérôme Conraud

**Regrets:** Alan DeSousa, Ben Ger, Rachel Léger

### 1. Welcome

The co-chairs welcome the participants. Prof. Beauchamp states his pleasure to be co-chairing the Council given his past experience in sustainability at ETS. Prof. Manfredi advises that an Indigenous representative would be added to the ACS as an outcome of the Provost's Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education; this person should be expected to be in place by the next meeting of May 24<sup>th</sup>.

### 2. Roundtable

Prof. Manfredi invites participants to share their names and affiliation.

### 3. Summary of the last meeting (November 7) & Meeting Agenda

Prof. Beauchamp confirms that participants have no changes to make to the minutes of the last meeting nor additions to the agenda.

- The list of existing plans and policies relating to sustainability requested at the last meeting had been distributed.
- Participants were reminded to submit the signed conflict of interest form to Mr. Miller as soon as possible.

### 4. Report on the Open Forums on Sustainability

Prof. Manfredi shares his response to the *Report on Open Forum on the Recommendations of the 2016 CAMSR Report on Divestment*. The key elements of his response are:

- Establish and provide budgetary support for a University Climate Officer (an initiative developed in collaboration with PGSS);

- To the extent possible given the nature of McGill’s physical infrastructure, set a target date and implementation plan for McGill to become carbon neutral;
- Implement additional institution-level programs to facilitate individual and collective actions that will reduce the University’s carbon footprint;
- Develop a comprehensive plan to reduce and/or offset the effects of carbon-intensive university travel;
- Explore development of a sustainability-focused curriculum;
- Improve two-way communication on the University’s sustainability commitments and actions;
- Continue to develop vehicles for broad community participation, engagement, and commitment with respect to sustainability.

Mr. Miller outlines the proposed approach to respond to the community’s expectations for McGill to demonstrate sustainability leadership, through two high-level targets: carbon neutrality and achieving a platinum sustainability rating under the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Ratings System (STARS) by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).

#### **5. Proposed target #1 for the 2017-2020 Climate and Sustainability Action Plan: McGill to achieve carbon neutrality**

Mr. Conraud and Mr. Miller provide a presentation about McGill’s current greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory and possible approaches to carbon neutrality.

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

- A debate about whether the estimated cost of carbon was too high. A participant argued that a ton of carbon on the voluntary market is \$12-\$15, as opposed to \$25-\$30.
- There is a need for life-cycle analysis of engineering options.
- There is increasing interest in building with wood instead of concrete, for carbon sequestration purpose. A participant brings the example of UBC, which had recently built an 18-story student residence using harvest wood.
- There are some discussions around the actual ability of mature trees to sequester carbon as per available research.
- Questions are raised about McGill’s desire to include embedded emissions (ex. from food, food waste and purchased goods) in our Scope 3 emissions. Mr. Conraud clarifies that:
  - While food data was hard to access, an applied student research study on McGill’s nitrogen footprint showed that food had a much greater impact compared to utilities;
  - Despite the complexity of our procurement practices (half a billion dollars and 1,000 suppliers), Procurement Services was doing work on supply chain analysis and it could be possible in the near future to include specific goods (ex. smartphones) in the McGill footprint.
- Electrification of the fleet and e-vehicle infrastructure issues are also raised.
- Ms. Ng confirms that carbon onsetting is being considered as part of the pool of carbon neutrality options when a participant recommends that McGill should be recognized for its positive work.

Prof. Manfredi invites participants to discuss the relevance of creating a committee of academic experts on carbon neutrality. This committee would be tasked with answering three questions:

- Where should McGill draw its boundaries (GHG emissions sources)?
- Considering the current context (and our desired scope), what should be our target date to achieve carbon neutrality?
- How could the research community actively contribute to the carbon neutrality target?

Participants suggested that:

- the committee be called a “task force” since it will have a short lifespan with clear deliverables.
- a diversity of academics across disciplines be included (ex. urban planning). Two candidates are proposed: Prof. Chris Ragan (federal Ecofiscal Commission) and Prof. Catherine Potvin (Dialogues for a Sustainable Canada).
- The task force should provide options towards carbon neutrality to be considered by the administration.

Mr. Miller confirms that in addition to the task force of academic experts on carbon neutrality, community conversations are planned to make sure there is a broader forum to discuss about carbon-neutrality.

Two additional questions are asked to participants:

- What are your recommendations on voluntary vs. mandatory actions/programs to reach carbon neutrality?
- How could a carbon neutrality target align with your current priorities?

Participants answer that:

- The mandatory approach sometimes doesn't work well when funds are under direct control of individuals (ex. research funds);
- Energy conservation and use of renewables should be mandatory, especially for new construction;
  - Mr. Couvrette reiterated that McGill already has green building standards. Mr. Conraud added that McGill's 5-Year Energy Plan would result in GHG reductions of 68% compared to 1990. A status report could be presented by Mr. Couvrette at the next meeting.
- A few years ago, McGill has raised its parking fees by 30% to be more competitive with downtown prices. A portion of these additional revenues are still directed to the Sustainability Projects Fund;
- A university wide carbon neutrality challenge could be a selling point to donors, but the focus of the fundraising efforts are mainly on teaching and research in sustainability science.

#### **6. Proposed target #2 for the 2017-2020 Climate and Sustainability Action Plan: McGill to attain a Platinum sustainability rating**

Ms. Ng and Mr. Miller present an overview of the Sustainability Tracking and Rating System and highlights about McGill's performance in 2016. Many participants emphasized that McGill's Gold rating should be marketed more aggressively internally and externally.

Two questions are then asked to participants:

- Are these targets in line with the Council's mandate to position McGill as a leading institution on sustainability in North America?
- Will these targets meet the McGill community's expectations?

Overall consensus was that McGill should aim for a Platinum rating. A participant underlines that there was a strong call from the community through the Open Forums on sustainability that McGill should be as ambitious as possible.

## **7. Consultation process leading to the 2017-2020 Climate & Sustainability Action Plan**

Mr. Miller proposed additions to the timeline of activities presented at the previous meetings, the new additions being the task force on academic experts on carbon neutrality and the community conversations on carbon neutrality. The intended objectives of the community conversations would be to generate interest and raise awareness about the next action plan and its aim for carbon neutrality / Platinum Sustainability Rating, and obtain some consensus around the solutions that could be embedded in the next sustainability plan.

Participants make the following comments:

- Some members emphasized that the focus should be on climate (including adaptation and resilience) instead of carbon neutrality alone. Various suggestions are made regarding the format of the events;
- It is important to have in-person meetings and social events, especially going to people to where they are to seek their input.
- Champions from each unit should be found to help communicate about the consultation.
- The alumni group should be included in the consultation process.

## **8. Next steps**

Prof. Beauchamp summarized the consultation events leading to our climate and sustainability action plan:

- Committee of Academic Experts on Carbon Neutrality (Mid-March)
- Action Team Meeting (round #3) (March 13 to 16)
- Community Conversation on Climate and Sustainability Targets (March 28-29-30 at Macdonald Campus)
- Catalyst Awards (April 3) – the Office of Sustainability will send an invitation to the Advisory Council members
- Advisory Council Meeting (#3) (May 24)

## **9. Closing remarks**

Prof. Beauchamp invites suggestions to improve the efficiency and relevance of the Advisory Council. There was general consensus that this meeting sets the stage well in anticipation of future sessions. The co-chairs thank the members for their participation.