

Project Title: Kickstarting the McGill Spaces Project

Requested Budget: \$7,380

Applicant/Project Leader: Danielle DeMarsh - Master's of Urban Planning (MUP) student (danielle.demarsh@mail.mcgill.ca);

Project Theme/s: Community and Land

Project Group Members:

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I. Project Overview

A drab hallway, an empty lawn, an awkward nook – every university campus has them. But what if these were reimagined as a colorful study space with bench seating, a pop-up outdoor classroom, and a busking area for student musicians?

A critical piece of the sustainability puzzle in any community – including at McGill – is the use of physical spaces. We should ask ourselves – how do the spaces in which we work, live, and play influence our quality of life, the resilience of the social-ecological system within which we are embedded, and contribute to sustainability overall? Moreover, how can we **take action** to revitalize the spaces around us such that they better meet community needs and foster sustainability?

The McGill Spaces Project (MSP) was founded on the premise that although space on McGill's downtown campus is limited, its potential is limitless. We seek to engage students, faculty, staff, and members of the Montreal community in a collaborative process to transform underused spaces on McGill's downtown campus. Building off of the successes of existing applied student research projects at McGill (e.g. McGill Energy, Food Systems, and Waste Projects), the MSP brings student energy, faculty expertise, and staff experience together to use McGill's campus as a living laboratory. Our slogan is "Creating Spaces. Connecting People."

Since forming in October 2013, the McGill Spaces Project - a dedicated group of undergraduate and graduate students working in collaboration with staff from Vision 2020 – has taken important steps to identify the MSP's mission and objectives, develop a common brand, and engage with the McGill community (at events including *Lift-Off: The Sustainability Soirée*; *McGill Pays it Forward*; and *Sustainability Fridays*). **We are now seeking funding from the SPF in order to help us: 1) build the MSP's organizational foundations, 2) develop a baseline understanding of underutilized spaces at McGill, 3) and transform – through experimentation - some of McGill's informal spaces.** The funding will help us to hire a part-time project coordinator through Summer 2014 and to implement design ideas in pilot spaces.

Project eligibility: The links between social spaces and sustainability are not always obvious. However, research shows that vibrant community spaces - especially those that foster community connections - are key building blocks of social sustainability¹. Placemaking² - *which seeks to improve the quality of a public space and the lives of its community in tandem*³ - is about more than a given physical space; it is about building community and empowering people to take action in their daily environments.

¹ Woodcraft, S., et al. 2012. Design for social sustainability: A framework for creating thriving new communities. Social Life.

² According to the Project for Public Spaces, placemaking is "the process through which we collectively shape our public realm to maximize shared value. Rooted in community-based participation, placemaking involves the design, management and programming of public spaces. [...] Placemaking is how people are more collectively and intentionally shaping our world, and the future on this planet."

³ Silberberg, S., et al. 2013. Places in the making: How placemaking builds places and communities. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In discussing opportunities to foster a culture of sustainability at McGill through Vision 2020, community members repeatedly identified a desire for more informal places to relax, connect and explore ideas together. The results of the 2011 National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE), a respected survey for benchmarking student engagement in higher education, also suggests that McGill lags behind peer universities in terms of providing a “supportive campus environment” conducive to building community⁴. This is perhaps linked to a short supply of multi-purpose, informal meeting spaces for community members on campus. Indeed, McGill is nearing, or has reached, physical capacity in terms of space and there is little room to expand.

The McGill Spaces Project directly supports McGill’s sustainability vision as set out through Vision 2020, particularly for the goals contained in the categories of Connectivity, Education, and Operations. We will work toward a future where “McGill’s natural and built environment supports resilient ecosystems, strong communities, and individual well-being” (Operations, Goal 4), while actively seeking to increase opportunities for applied student research around issues of space, campus development, and community engagement.

General Objectives of the McGill Spaces Project

The MSP will contribute to the growing culture of sustainability at McGill using a multi-pronged approach. Our work is divided into three streams, each relating to a primary objective (see below). Underlying all of our objectives are principles of collaboration and learning.

- **Place-making:** Implement temporary “place-making projects” to support the use of campus space⁵ as a living laboratory, connect people, and encourage new thinking. See Appendix A for examples of placemaking and Appendix C for how we intend to evaluate placemaking projects.
- **Learning and research:** Partner with faculty and staff to integrate MSP projects into curricula, conduct applied student research, and build understanding of McGill’s spaces.
- **Permanent space transformations:** Design and install permanent space interventions, creating places that support the McGill community.

Specific Objectives for 2014

With the support of the Sustainability Projects Fund, we propose to focus on three specific objectives in 2014. Deliverables associated with each objective are listed below, alongside the timeframe for each. Start: March 1st, 2014; End: October 31st, 2014.

⁴ National Survey of Student Engagement.2011. Last accessed February 6th, 2014 at: (http://www.mcgill.ca/pia/sites/mcgill.ca/pia/files/nsse11_institutional_report_mcgill_0.pdf)

⁵ McGill Spaces Project will work to transform so-called “third spaces” - places that are not our homes, nor our workplaces, but function as places of informal social gathering and hotspots for community building.

1. Build the MSP's organizational foundations and grow the MSP network.

DELIVERABLES	Stakeholder meet & greet (March 2014)	Jane's Walk ⁶ on downtown campus (April 2014)	Project coordinator hired (May 2014)	MSP Website (October 2014)
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2. Develop a baseline understanding of underused spaces on McGill's downtown campus.

DELIVERABLES	Begin collecting data on space use on downtown campus using mixed methods (e.g., poster campaign; observation) (March 2014)	Construction and installation of a mobile chalkboard (September 2014)	Situational Analysis on the state of informal spaces on downtown campus (October 2014)
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3. Transform - through experimentation with placemaking methods - a set of pilot informal spaces across McGill's downtown campus.

DELIVERABLES	Winter living-room pop-up space (March 2014)	Outdoor musical busking space with chairs (April 2014)	Installation at Roddick Gates Security Hut (or alternative space pending approval) (September 2014)
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Storage space for project materials (e.g., chalkboards, chairs) has been secured in the MacDonald-Harrington building. We will seek approvals for outdoor installations (winter living room pop-up space; musical busking space; Roddick Gates or alternative) from Campus & Space Planning (Outdoor Events), in consultation with the Gardens and Grounds committee where necessary. Chuck Adler, Director of Campus & Space Planning, has offered to help the MSP seek approval for projects.

Stakeholders

- McGill Spaces Project Core team - undergraduate and graduate students
- Campus & Space Planning - *Chuck Adler*, Director
- McGill Office of Sustainability - *Josée Méthot*, Vision 2020 Coordinator, *Jessica Marais*, Vision 2020 Coordinator; *Julia Solomon*, Senior Communications Specialist
- School of Urban Planning - *Dr. Raphael Fischler*, Director
- School of Architecture - *Dr. David Covo*, Professor

Additional: While the McGill Spaces Project is still fairly nascent, growing our network is a core priority. To this end, we intend to reach out to various groups, including but not limited to:

- McGill Waste Project; McGill Energy Project
- Libraries - Julie Jones, Librarian for Urban Planning and Human Geography
- Buildings & Grounds - Eric Champagne, Horticultural Supervisor
- TLS (Teaching and Learning Spaces Working Group) - Adam Finkelstein et al.

⁶ Jane's walks are organized across North America to get people out exploring their neighbourhoods together through free walking tours led by members of the community. We will invite key stakeholders to share their perspectives on McGill's spaces during McGill's Jane's Walk.

- Student Housing & Hospitality Services - Mathieu Laperle, Lou-Anne D-F, et al.
- Students Society of McGill University & Music Undergraduate Students Association
- Redpath Museum
- University Services - Virginie St-Pierre, *Furniture Coordinator*, Eric Champagne, *Horticultural Supervisor*, Gardens & Grounds Committee

II. Project Implementation

Tasks and Responsibilities: Since September 2013, the MSP has been coordinated by a core group of McGill students and staff. However, to support this project going forward, we propose to hire a part-time student coordinator, at a pay rate of \$12/hour for 20 hours/week for the period May 1st to August 31st, 2014. This short-term paid position comes at a critical time for the MSP, as we seek to develop many of the building blocks (e.g., website, baseline of underutilized spaces) necessary to support the MSP going forward. See Appendix B for a draft job description with a breakdown of the time required for relevant tasks.

Financials: *Critical Date: Ideally by the end of February to fund projects in spring.*

<u>Expenditures</u>	Timeline	Amount Requested
Project coordinator: Stipend (\$12/hr * 20 hours/week * 16 weeks).	May - Aug 2014	\$3840
Materials for <u>poster campaign</u> to support data collection (e.g., printing, lamination, duct tape)	March 2014	\$350
Materials for one mobile <u>chalkboard</u>	May 2014 (construction)	\$390
Materials to construct 10 chairs for <u>musical busking area</u> out of donated pallets (varnish, nails, rented tools, etc.) ⁷	April 2014 (construction)	\$500
Materials for Roddick Gates Security Hut facade makeover (plywood, paint, signage, lights, stools)	September 2014	\$1800
General “placemaking” fund: materials for temporary projects like outdoor pianos, etc.		\$500
TOTAL		\$7380

Revenues: While we have no alternative sources of revenue at this point in time, we will seek funding from others sources, including from McGill’s Development and Alumni Relations (DAR) crowd-sourced funding platform for McGill projects.

⁷ Rather than buying chairs for the outdoor busking space, we will upcycle used pallets provided by Buildings & Grounds by turning them into chairs. We will collaborate with the McGill Waste Project to host a ‘build-a-thon’ where community members can gain skills in construction by building chairs. Approvals will be sought to place these chairs outside, and then host acoustic buskers nearby.

Appendix A - Examples of space interventions brought about through placemaking

Here are some examples of placemaking projects in the United States:



Here are some photos of the McGill Spaces Project in action (while soliciting ideas for how to improve McGill's spaces at a recent event):



Appendix B - Draft job description for the project coordinator

Position type: Part time (20 hours per week)

Remunerations: \$12.00/hour

Start Date: May 1, 2014

End Date: August 31st, 2014

The Project Coordinator will report to the McGill Spaces Project core team in accordance with the timeline and objectives (above). The Coordinator will:

- *Research*: Develop, in collaboration with key McGill stakeholders, a report on underutilized informal spaces at McGill, including a list of those spaces.
- *Facilitate*: Organize logistics for meetings and facilitate internal communication.
- *Network*: Grow the MSP network by connecting individuals and organizations with similar interests and complementary skills and recruiting new members.
- *Structure the MSP*: Formalize the organizational structure of the MSP (e.g., develop role descriptions), develop and grow the MSP brand (e.g., social media, website).
- *Take Action*: help implement placemaking projects.

Activity	Hours per week	Total hours over 16 weeks
<i>Research</i> : develop report on informal spaces at McGill	5	80
<i>Facilitate</i> : Bottomline communications	2	32
<i>Network</i> : meet with contacts to elicit support, recruit, plan initiatives - This will involve reaching out to Faculty to plan ASR projects.	5	80
<i>Structure</i> : website development; social media management	3	48
<i>Take Action</i> : Plan details of Fall placemaking projects	5	80
TOTAL	20	320

Appendix C - Researching the question: “How does placemaking contribute to social sustainability?”

Our understanding of how spaces contribute to social sustainability is still growing. To accelerate this process, the MSP is committed to:

1. Tracking impact metrics that reflect progress toward our three objectives in 2014 (see below)
2. Investigating ways to evaluate the success of placemaking projects, likely focusing on before vs. after statistics and opinion surveys. This methodology will be developed over the coming months and will be documented in an ‘evaluation rubric’ for placemaking projects.

1. Build the MSP’s organizational foundations and grow the MSP network.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of articles written about 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of interviews conducted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of promotional videos produced
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2. Develop a baseline understanding of underused spaces on McGill’s downtown campus.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of studies conducted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of space audits conducted 	
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3. Transform - through experimentation with placemaking methods - a set of pilot informal spaces across McGill’s downtown campus.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ‘Bang for your buck’ (for every \$ spent, m2 of space transformed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of participants ● # of participants who visited somewhere they hadn’t been before.
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January 31, 2014

Sustainability Project Fund Working Group
McGill Office of Sustainability
McGill University
1010 Sherbrooke Street West, Suite 1200
Montreal, QC H3A 2R7

Dear Members of the Sustainability Project Fund Working Group,

I am writing this letter in support of the McGill Spaces Project (MSP) application to the Sustainability Project Fund (SPF). This exciting new initiative will contribute to the vitality of the McGill community and to the university's overall mission.

McGill is nearing physical capacity in terms of new construction on campus and must therefore be creative in how it uses existing space. I am pleased that the MSP will collaborate with students and faculty to transform underused campus locations into useful, interactive spaces. This is in line with the mandate of the McGill School of Urban Planning, where students learn to improve communities by shaping their living environment. Personally, I am ready to offer advice to the people involved, should it be desired.

I strongly support this proposal and believe that the school of Urban Planning has a definite role to play in the process of improving McGill University as a collective space. I look forward to being involved with the MSP as it progresses and I wish it every success.

Sincerely,

Raphaël Fischler
Director
School of Urban Planning



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February 4, 2014

Sustainability Projects Fund
1010 Sherbrooke St. West
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On behalf of Campus & Space Planning, I am pleased to write this letter in support of the McGill Spaces Project's application to the Sustainability Projects Fund.

Over the past couple of years, there have been many successful student-led sustainability-related projects, like the McGill Food Systems Project and the McGill Energy Project collaborate, which have included McGill staff and faculty. To date, however, there has been limited collaboration among students and staff on issues related to spaces – particularly informal spaces – here on the McGill campuses. In partnership with the McGill Spaces Project, we would like to begin filling this gap.

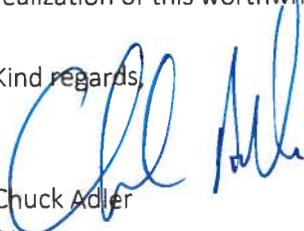
We see significant value in pursuing small scale, “place-making” projects aimed at revitalizing the campus's many informal spaces. These projects will help to improve spaces at moderate cost while also learning as a community and fostering social sustainability along the way.

To support the MSP moving forward, CSP can commit to:

- Working with the MSP to co-convene a meeting on informal spaces with key stakeholders from across McGill (*Spring 2014*).
- Exploring opportunities within CSP to support applied student research opportunities (*Summer/Fall 2014*).
- Providing guidance to the MSP (e.g., navigating approval processes, logistics) (*ongoing*).

We appreciate the work of those behind the MSP, and look forward to acting as partners in the realization of this worthwhile sustainability project.

Kind regards,



Chuck Adler
Director

Campus & Space Planning