



**POST GRADUATE  
STUDENTS' SOCIETY**

**CLIMATE AND  
SUSTAINABILITY  
ACTION PLAN**

# 1. About PGSS and Thomson House

The Post Graduate Students' Society (PGSS) of McGill University represents the 8,000+ graduate students and post-doctoral fellows at the institution. It is the Society's mandate to support and advocate for its membership throughout the time of their graduate or post-doctoral studies. Moreover, PGSS works to create a strong sense of community amongst its membership by organizing numerous activities such as social events, trips, and professional development opportunities.

The PGSS Council is the elected body responsible for the governance of the Society. It is mandated with providing the overall direction of PGSS. PGSS is also supported by a Board of Directors, which is comprised of both internal student representation as well as external volunteers.

## **Thomson House** *History and brief overview*

The history of graduate student use of Thomson House is longstanding. In 1949, in collaboration with the University, a trust fund by the PGSS for a graduate student-specific space was established. This vision for a graduate student-specific space was realized in 1968, with the graduate student Council unanimously approving an agreement to use *Le Maison Charles-Édouard Gravel* as a graduate student-specific space. Having been built in 1936, *Le Maison Charles-Édouard* is the last mansion built within the limits of Montreal's Golden Square Mile.

*Le Maison Charles-Édouard* opened its doors to graduate students in 1969. Nonetheless, contrary to the initial agreement, graduate student use of the building was limited to only its bottom two floors. The Management Development Institute and the German Department continued to utilize the space. With this success arose challenges. Crowds of 325 to 400 graduate students during peak hours soon overwhelmed the original space. As such, discussions arose in the months following to claim the remaining floors.

In 1971, *Le Maison Charles-Édouard* was renamed Thomson House in honor of David L. Thomson (1901-1964) as part of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of McGill University. The two remaining floors were allocated to the PGSS in 1974 after the move of the McGill Management Institute to the Bronfman Institute. Major renovations were performed in 1974-1975, mainly to create larger open areas and for the ballroom.

Today, Thomson House continues to serve as a community gathering space for the use of graduate students. A full serve bar and restaurant is available to its membership in addition to conference and meeting facilities, which remain enjoyed by the wider campus community.

## **Sustainability Mission – *What we offer to sustainability at McGill***

As the bridge between the university and graduate students, we advocate for the sustainability concerns of our members, and ensure we are represented on environmental committees and groups on campus. Within PGSS, our Environment Committee takes an active role in promoting sustainability through our environment policy, planning educational events, and fostering interaction on environmental issues with the greater Montreal community. We want to educate PGSS members on environmental issues and to ensure that sustainability and accessibility are taken into account in aspects of graduate education at McGill University.

## **Current Initiatives**

The **Thomson House Community Garden** provides graduate students and post-doctoral fellows the opportunity to rent gardening plots for the season (Tip: our Environment Committee plants fruits and herbs in their plots which can be picked by any graduate student!). This garden also includes two bee hives at the back of the building to promote urban pollinators.

Moreover, PGSS works to plan and host **events** throughout the year that are environmentally friendly and accessible, with the goal of making these events as “**zero-waste**” as possible. Thomson House itself also strives to be sustainable through “**zero waste**” initiatives, ensuring that all coffees and teas are **sustainably sourced and Fairtrade**, and that food served comes from local sources, including the Macdonald Campus farm, as much as possible.

## 2. University Context

McGill adopted a Climate and Sustainability Action Plan that covers the 2017-2020 period. It outlines the University's commitment to reach two ambitious long-term targets:

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

To start closing the gap towards these targets, the Action Plan also includes 22 actions to be implemented by 2020, separated among 5 categories:

Research

Education

Connectivity

Operations

Governance & Administration

Beyond the actions laid out in the Climate and Sustainability Action Plan, a widespread effort from specific units is essential to advance the climate and sustainability agenda at McGill and to reach our long-term targets. Consequently, we are writing our own Climate & Sustainability Action Plan that is relevant to our own needs and challenges as a student society and organization.

## 3. Action Plan

Continuing with the previous [Sustainable Thomson House](#) strategy, spanning from 2013-2018, this strategy was written to guide PGSS and Thomson House's sustainability priorities for the 2019-2021 period. The plan was written in collaboration with the McGill Office of Sustainability, in consultation with PGSS students.

The following ten actions are divided into the 5 sustainability categories defined by the campus-wide Vision 2020 strategy: **Research**, **Education**, **Connectivity**, **Operations**, and **Governance & Administration**. Each action includes a series of tangible associated deliverables, defined as **short term** (by December 2019), **medium term** (by December 2020), or **long term** (by December 2021).

### Research

1. Raise awareness of sustainable lab practices:
  - **Short-term:** Collaborate with the Sustainable Labs Working Group to develop information packets about sustainable practices in various types of laboratories;
  - **Medium-term:** Communicate with lab managers on an ongoing basis about how they can integrate sustainable practices into their labs;
  - **Long-term:** In partnership with the Sustainable Labs Working Group, create a Sustainable Lab engagement program to incentivize more environmentally friendly lab practices.
2. Highlight sustainability research done by PGSS members
  - **Short-term:** Create slides for screens in the Thomson House, to be updated annually;
  - **Medium-term:** Highlight sustainability research done by PGSS members on the PGSS social media accounts.

### Education

3. Provide educational opportunities to PGSS members on various sustainability topics of interest:
  - **Short term:** Offer one workshop and/or talk bi-monthly;
  - **Medium term:** Host opportunities to participate in environmental certification courses (ex: LEED AP, Environmental Professional, etc.).
4. Increase communication between the Environment Committee and PGSAs:
  - **Medium term:** Ensure at least one member of each PGSA has received training on hosting sustainable events;
  - **Medium term:** Create a video about sustainable practices to be shared during the orientation of incoming graduate students and post-doctoral fellows.

## Connectivity

5. Create new partnerships with sustainability focused groups:
  - **Medium term:** Host 2 events annually in collaboration with sustainability groups on campus;
  - **Long term:** Create a network of sustainability committees from other universities in Montreal.
6. Make PGSS and the Thomson House more accessible for students with disabilities:
  - **Short term:** Add braille to menu and room markers;
  - **Short term:** Undertake building renovations to the space to ensure it is wheelchair accessible.
  - **Medium term:** Update the PGSS website to follow web-accessibility standards;

## Operations

7. Quantify and address waste produced by the Thomson House:
  - **Medium term:** Perform a waste audit to quantify the current waste diversion rate, and identify major sources of waste;
  - **Long term:** Ensure all food packaging served at the Thomson House is reusable, compostable, or recyclable;
  - **Long term:** Eliminate the distribution of single-use plastics in food service (both recyclable, and non-recyclable).
8. Further promote sustainable event hosting:
  - **Short term:** Incentivize sustainable event certification by charging higher rental prices for non-certified events, if approved by Council;
  - **Short term:** Add sustainable event information and links to existing event information on the PGSS webpage;
  - **Medium term:** Have all major orientation events be sustainable event certified.

## Governance and Administration

9. Update governance documents to reflect sustainability priorities:
  - **Short term:** Review all four governing documents for sustainable practices, as part of the PGSS governance audit;
  - **Medium term:** Create a new sustainability policy, in line with the rest of the governing documents;
  - **Medium term:** Update the PGSS positions manual to reflect current environmental and social positions;
  - **Long term:** Incorporate sustainable practices into the PGSS Corporate Manual;
  - **Long term:** Mandate updating of policies every 3-5 years by the governance committee, to ensure best practices of sustainability are upheld.
10. Integrate sustainability into event funding processes:
  - **Short term:** Mandate list of sustainability criteria that must be met for PGSAs to receive event funding from PGSS in collaboration with the Committee on Monetary Affairs.

## 4. Monitoring & Implementation

### Monitoring

The PGSS Environment Commissioner will give a report on the progress of the goals outlined in this Action Plan. These reports will be presented to the PGSS council at the end of each term period:

1<sup>st</sup> Report – December 2019 (short-term goals)

2<sup>nd</sup> Report – December 2020 (medium-term goals)

3<sup>rd</sup> Report – December 2021 (long-term goals)

After each report, the PGSS Environment Commissioner will suggest revisions if necessary to the action plan and update the council on whether the goals outlined in the action plan will be feasible based on the deadline. These suggested revisions will be left to council for approval.

### Implementation

It is the responsibility of the PGSS Environment Commissioner in consultation with the PGSS Executives to ensure that the deadlines for these goals are met and action is frequently being taken to implement the actions required to reach these goals by 2021. Roles will be assigned to members of the Environment Committee in order to assist with the implementation of the plan at the beginning of each new financial year (i.e. June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 annually).

As there is generally a commissioner turnover period at the end of each financial year, the outgoing commissioner will be responsible for providing an update to the incoming commissioner on the progress and next steps of the action plan in the form of a formal, written transition report.

### Communications

In addition to presenting regular updates to Council with regards to which goals have been accomplished and which are in the process of being attained, the PGSS Environment Committee will make the progress reports publicly available through PGSS website. Social media channels may also be used to communicate new achievements and initiatives as they occur.

## References

[1] Thomson House and PGSS History Report. Bruno Belzile. *Version 1*, updated 1 (June 6, 2018). Pages 1-16.