

What'SUP? Summer 2011

News of the School of Urban Planning at McGill University

Chers amis et amies / Dear friends,

Half a year has elapsed since we sent you the Winter 2010 issue, and it seems like a whole year has gone by. The winter was especially busy because the School underwent a full evaluation by the University.

You see, the schools of Architecture, Environment and Urban Planning were used as pilot projects for the new system of seven-year cyclical reviews at McGill. Our own evaluation committee was chaired by former Vice-Principal (Research) Nicholas de Takacsy and included Chris Silver (University of Florida) and Marie Lessard (Université de Montréal) as external members. The review process started with the School producing a self-evaluation document that presented, in both qualitative and quantitative ways, what we have been up to in the past few years and where we think we are going. (In case you suffer from insomnia and wish to read our self-evaluation report, let me know; it is not confidential.)

The evaluation committee visited the School on March 16 and 17 and met with professors, adjunct professors and lecturers, administrative staff, students and alumni, as well as with the Dean of Engineering and members of his administration. Of course, we were not found to be perfect (sorry, information about our defects *is* confidential), just pretty darn good. As the review committee concluded, we are a very active group: "For its size and on a per faculty basis, the School must be ranked among the most highly performing in North America." In case you did not get that, let me say it in French: *notre niveau de performance nous place, à taille égale, parmi les meilleures écoles d'urbanisme en Amérique du Nord* (free translation). Both informally, during the visit, and formally, in their report, committee members noted how impressed they were with the quality of our students. "I have rarely seen such a group of smart young people together in one room," one of them told me. OK, enough bragging for now. We do have many things to fix or improve.

The main recommendation of the review committee, in light of our level of activity and of our ambitions, is that the School be given two new faculty positions (in the short term, more in the medium-to-long term). It remains to be seen whether or how fast this recommendation will be implemented, but we are reasonably hopeful of adding to our faculty soon.

FÉLICITATIONS

Although everyone in the School is busy as a bee, one person who has distinguished himself in terms of academic performance is **Ahmed El-Geneidy**. Ahmed earned this year's Early Career Research Excellence Award of the Faculty of Engineering. (Yes, a planner earned a research excellence award from engineers.) The award came in recognition of Ahmed's stellar track record in terms of research funding, publication and supervision. Also noteworthy is his rapid and successful *intégration dans le monde de la planification des transports au Québec*, where he has established very productive links with government agencies and academic units.

Emeritus Professors and Adjunct Professors

The School is fortunate to benefit from the expertise and wisdom of a number of seasoned professors and professionals. Here's some recent news about them:

David Farley, School founder and painter extraordinaire, has been named Professor Emeritus this year, a title that he could parlay into a claim on our scarce office space or even, heavens forbid, our dear DF Room. It seems, though, that David is happier in his painting studio than in a university office. Sadly, David broke his hip recently; but he is recovering now.

Jane Glenn, Professor Emeritus (or is it Emerita?) in Law and in Urban Planning, has been spotted on countless Dutch bike-paths in the past year. Using the excuse of a year of legal research in the Netherlands, she has in fact been collecting data for our ongoing research on bicycle use in cities.

Cameron Charlebois, Vice-President (Québec) of the Canada Lands Corporation, is well known not only for his work in the real-estate development industry but also for his contribution to the not-for-profit sector. This past winter, he co-taught a site-development studio in Ville St-Laurent.

Mario Polèse, Professor at INRS—Urbanisation, culture et société, has been associated with the School for many years and was a travelling companion of Jeanne (and others) on many trips to the South. In the past few years, he authored or co-authored important books on regional economic development, sustainable development and the future of Québec. Part of this work was done with **Richard Shearmur**, who is a graduate of the School and a (most prolific) Professor at INRS—UCS as well. Richard's nomination as Adjunct Professor should be approved soon. His contribution to the School is in the area of economic geography and planning.

Ray Tomalty, whose name is familiar to all those who study sustainable development planning in Canada, taught a short course on Smart Growth and related planning techniques this past winter term. The course ended with a lively symposium of student presentations.

Alain Trudeau, Senior Planner with the Ville de Montréal, has co-taught Planning Project III (the third studio) with David Brown for many years now. He was recently in the news for his public presentation of the new plan for the Turcot interchange (where highways 20 and 15 meet), a hotly debated project in Montréal these days.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Tuesday, August 30, 2011, noon *Orientation Day Picnic*

We will meet our new Master's students in the morning. If you're interested in meeting them as well and want to enjoy a picnic on the lower campus, meet us on the lawn in front of Macdonald-Harrington Building. Sorry: bring your own food and drink.

Friday, October 14, 2011, noon *SUP Planners Tell Their Stories*

For McGill Homecoming 2011, we will not attend the Leacock Luncheon but will be holding our own event. We may not be able to match Derek Drummond's stand-up comedy, but we should have a few good chuckles as alumni recall some of the most interesting, weird or funny moments in their careers. If you would like to participate, please write to anand.sood@mcgill.ca.

Friday, December 2, 2011, noon *Jeanne Wolfe Day*

December 3, the real Jeanne Wolfe Day, falls on a Saturday, so we will celebrate dear Jeanne on the preceding Friday, with a mix of presentations and memories. Please note the compulsory dress code.

Tuesday, December 6, 2011 (TBC) *Studio I Presentations*

Every year, our entering class ends its first studio with a public presentation of its plans for a neighbourhood in Montreal. (Does this bring up good memories?). Alumni and friends are welcome to attend this milestone event.

Thursdays at 12 noon, Fall & Winter *TRAM Seminar and urban.studies@mcgill seminar*

The seminars of the Transportation Research group and those of Urban Planning and Geography will now be held at the same time, on Thursday at noon, with about eight transportation seminars and four urban-studies seminars per term. The schedule of talks will be announced shortly before the semester.

Thursday, March 8, 2012, 6 PM (TBC) *Gewurz Lecture in Urban Design*

The second Thursday of March is now our target date for the annual Brenda and Samuel Gewurz Lecture in Urban Design. This year, the lecture will be organised in partnership with the Institut de développement urbain du Québec.

2012: 65th anniversary of urban planning at McGill and 40th of the MUP program. Stay tuned.

VISIONS AND VALUES: RECENT PRESENTATIONS AND DEBATES

We cannot claim any role in this, but our two speakers for the **Gewurz Lectures in Urban Design** received Awards of Excellence from the Canadian Institute of Planners soon after visiting us. On March 1st, **Gordon Harris**, President and CEO of the SFU Community Trust and general manager of the UniverCity project, told the story of UniverCity, a mixed-income neighbourhood that is being built next to Simon Fraser University, and explained how he and his team slowly climbed the "slippery slope toward sustainably." On March 10, **Douglas Olson**, founding president of O2 Planning + Design, presented an impressive array of projects and showed that planners can help to shape the human environment at various scales, from the design of plazas to the management of watersheds. Harris and the SFU Community Trust earned the CIP's recognition for excellence in neighbourhood planning. Olson received kudos for the River Valley & Tributaries Park Concept Plan that he developed with the City of Red Deer and Red Deer County. Their work exemplifies the happy marriage of design and planning and the necessary alliance of analysis and vision.

Together with the Centre d'écologie urbaine de Montréal (CEUM) and the School of Architecture, the School participated in a **Forum on the Petite Rivière Project**. Put forward by the owner of the Meadowbrook golf course, the project represents the state of the art in sustainable development, with 50% of the site set aside as a public park with restored natural habitats. It is also a controversial project, as it would place a new community in what is currently a privately owned green space. The forum was paid by the developer and was organised by the not-for-profit consulting firm Convercité; the CEUM and the schools of Architecture and Urban Planning were represented on an advisory committee. On February 14, over 100 people gathered to see presentations by the developer's team, lead by architect **Danny Pearl**, by the **Friends of Meadowbrook**, who are the most vocal opponents of the project and want to make the golf course part of a green-space network, and by **Cornelia Oberlander**, the noted landscape architect. After these presentations, groups were formed to discuss specific issues and reported their conclusions at a plenary session. After that, a panel of experts discussed the issues from their points of view. These experts were all in favour of development, as opposed to preservation per se, and argued that Montréal should not let pass the opportunity to welcome an innovative project such the one presented. This of course angered the Friends of Meadowbrook, who made their displeasure heard in a most vocal way, both then and there and in subsequent letters to the University. Obviously, more debate is needed. The planners and designers are passionate about their project and its contribution to sustainable development; their opponents are passionate about the preservation of green space. Is compromise possible?

OUR MAN IN OTTAWA

You may have heard of the McGill Five, the five McGill students who became NDP representatives in the last federal election. Well, one of the individuals brought to Parliament on the orange wave that swept through Québec is PhD candidate **Jamie Nicholls** (a student of Nik Luka). "Our" MP has been named deputy critic of the opposition on urban affairs. Best wishes, Jamie!

À tous et à toutes, un très bon été. En espérant vous revoir bientôt.
A wonderful summer to all. Hope to see you soon.

Raphaël Fischler