
Advisory Council on Sustainability

December 10, 2018 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM
McGill University, James Building, room 302

Minutes

Present: Yves Beauchamp (Co-Chair), Kakwiranó:ron Cook, Robert Couvrette, Alan DeSousa, Diana Dutton, Anja Geitmann, Hélène Lauzon, Robert Leckey, Bruce Lennox, Christopher Manfredi (Co-Chair), Francois Miller (Steward), Jim Nicell, Kathleen Ng, Lauren Rathmell, Nathalie Zinger

Guests: Anna Bendix, Cameron Charlebois, Dicki Chhoyang, Johanne Houle, Ross McDonald, Sophie Leblanc

Regrets: Jayne Engle, Matthew McLaughlin, Amy Luers, Helena Zakrzewski

1. Welcome & Roundtable

Prof. Beauchamp welcomes the participants. He thanks Diana Dutton, Associate Vice-Principal, Human Resources, for accepting the invitation to replace Paul Chesser, who has transitioned to another position outside McGill. He invites everyone to introduce themselves in a ‘tour de table’.

2. Approval of minutes from the last meeting (September 10) and today’s agenda

Prof. Manfredi confirms that participants have no changes to make to the minutes of the previous meeting and follows up on business arising:

- At the last meeting, a member had suggested that ad hoc working groups comprised of interested Council members be created on specific topics that relate to Sustainability. To follow up on that request while avoiding redundancy, Council members had been invited to join one of the several committees at McGill that are already tackling issues related to sustainability. One council member responded positively and Francois will make sure to follow up on this.
- Comments from the last meeting on the Advisory Council’s Annual Report were taken into consideration and the Report was submitted to and greatly appreciated by the Principal.

Prof. Manfredi confirms that participants have no further additions to the day’s agenda

3. Latest News Related to Sustainability

Mr. Miller provides a few updates related to sustainability at McGill:

- Sustainability in Performance Dialogue: in partnership with Human Resources, this resource shows examples how sustainability could be embedded in performance objectives of employees.

- Sustainability Policy: changes proposed at the last meeting have been integrated, and the modified version presented to and approved by Senate on December 5. The Policy would subsequently proceed to the Board of Governors for approval on December 13.
- Staff Sustainability Guide: this Guide is divided into sections – Learn, Act and Connect, and lists resources at the Office of Sustainability and other units.
- Vision 2020 Campus and Sustainability Action Plan (CSAP) mid-way progress report: this shows that approximately 70% of the deliverables outlined in the plan have been completed to date.
- Tap water campaign: a water taste test has been held, and an educational video will be posted on social media. Work is ongoing with Design Services to have more visual cues to guide people to campus water fountains.
- Unit Level Action Plans: 3 departments have completed local sustainability action plans. These include actions aligning their specific activities with the broader goals of the Climate and Sustainability Action Plan.
- Sustainable Workplace Certification: To date, 27 workplaces have been certified: 20 Bronze, 5 Silver and 2 Gold.

4. Integrating sustainability in the Campus Master Plan

Prof. Beauchamp invites the team from the Campus Planning and Development Office (Anna Bendix, Cameron Charlebois and Dicki Chhoyang) to present key information about the Campus Master Plan which will influence development of campus over the next 20-30 years. The goal is to seek input on how sustainability can be included therein. Dr. Charlebois explains that once the Master Plan is approved, it would be a living document, with a complementary implementation plan.

- Ms. Chhoyang provides an outline of community engagement activities that have been undertaken to date, from an Open House on the campus green to working groups focused on three themes deemed to be University priorities (sustainability, communal spaces and teaching and learning space).
- Further outreach to the student population would take place early in the New Year through a “road show” across six downtown buildings as well as Macdonald Campus.
- An online platform would be available to those unable to attend.
- Outreach to indigenous communities would be undertaken in collaboration with Mr. Cook.

Ms. Bendix presents the draft timeline for approval and engagement, and a few elements of the master plan being considered (with the caveat that this was still a work in progress). Prof. Beauchamp invites participants to share their feedback, including proposed discussion questions:

- *In your opinion, what are the key sustainability-focused issues that we should factor in the planning process?*
- *How can we plan our campuses so they become a model of sustainability for society?*
- *If there was one planning initiative that you would propose to showcase McGill’s commitment to climate and sustainability, what would it be?*
- *How can we balance the needs for increasing activity on our campuses with the preservation of agricultural land, heritage and open space?*

Participants' feedback is generally positive. The main suggestions are to:

- Collaborate with external partners (local boroughs/municipalities, nonprofits, etc.) to maximize the interface/knowledge-sharing with the communities adjacent to campus borders;
- Allocate funding to implement sustainability initiatives in the Master Plan;
- Ensure accountability by assigning key metrics on implementation based on the Planning and Design Principles (2008), defining success with specific deliverables in the implementation plan;
- Better define land uses (ex. for conservation, green corridors for biodiversity) and consider potential of transforming spaces (ex. parking) to sustainable initiatives (ex. urban agriculture, indigenous spaces, augmenting biomass and tree canopy);
- Preserve heritage but increase intensity (building up vs. out, while taking into account potential impacts on microclimates);
- Aim for self-sufficiency (ex. food, energy, and waste systems);
- Build and promote communal spaces to improve social sustainability of students and staff;

5. Discussion on Impact Investing

Prof. Beauchamp explains that the University is considering the possibility of implementing an impact investing fund separate from the endowment fund. Ms. Leblanc provides some context:

- The University does not invest directly in companies; instead, external investment managers invest on behalf of the University, in various funds.
- The University's fossil-free (FF) equity fund currently stands at \$5M. In order to put in place an impact investing fund that will provide sufficient diversification and be of interest to an external investment manager, it would need to be of at least \$25M.
- In order to establish such a fund, Board of Governors approval would be required. Donors could then dedicate donations to this fund.
- The impact investing fund will include, in addition to the FF equity fund, investments that will generate a measurable, beneficial social or environmental impact alongside a financial return.

In summary, the initiative would actively pursue positive impacts by having the funds working for socially impactful activities.

Advisory Council members were asked whether impact investing would be of interest. In the ensuing discussion:

- In response to a question about whether this could mean, for example, investing in a renewables division of a traditionally fossil fuel-focused company, Ms. Leblanc clarifies that this is not the case: the intent of the impact investment fund is to invest in companies with a main focus on achievement of positive impacts.
- Investments would need to be diversified and well thought out: for example, consideration of a company popular for electric vehicle production would need an assessment of the associated life cycle impacts.
- One member reiterates that there needs to be coherence between the impact fund and McGill's sustainability policies and orientations, and that a prioritization exercise needs to take place with weighting proportional to the University's priorities.

Overall, feedback from Advisory Council members was positive.

6. My Healthy Workplace

Prof. Manfredi invites the team from Human Resources (Johanne Houle and Ross McDonald) to present on the My Healthy Workplace initiative. Ms. Houle and Mr. McDonald provide an overview of the initiative, which is based on one of the Principal's 5 Priorities. They mention that:

- A partnership has been established with Excellence Canada, which also allows McGill to benchmark with peer organizations across Canada.
- My Sustainable Workplace programs are considered as part of the criteria in the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating Systems (STARS) Sustainability Rating.
- There are several initiatives under “My Sustainable Workplace”, some targeting environmental sustainability and others looking at succession planning, knowledge transfer, business continuity, etc.
- Several programs under My Sustainable Workplace are conducted in collaboration with the Office of Sustainability, such as:
 - The sustainable workplace certification
 - Lunch and learn sessions on sustainability
 - The Staff Sustainability Network

Advisory Council members are asked two questions:

- 1) *How can we better transfer or share knowledge to ensure sustainable processes?*
- 2) *What sustainability-related initiatives (at McGill or elsewhere) would you suggest to enhance employee engagement?*

Some recommendations from the discussion:

- Institutionalize sustainability into processes. One member underlines that sustainability needs to be integrated into processes. An example cited is in streamlining conference organization.
- Making everyone understand that they are truly a part of the bigger picture.
 - One member cites the experience in their organization where satisfaction and engagement was found to have increased from having staff from different parts of the organization create and work on projects in a multidisciplinary fashion. This not only breaks down silos and slabs, but working on a successful project that gets much positive attention improves morale, providing a sense that they are contributing to something larger for the organization.
 - At one member's organization, a “boot camp” of all new employees – regardless of level – highlights the founding story and sustainability objectives of the organization. Employees live and breathe company values in their interactions with managers, departmental meetings, etc. This needs to be overarching and embedded everywhere so that everyone sees what role they play in the larger picture.
- Engage upcoming leaders. One member cites the practice of tasking younger staff (instead of always only senior staff) to develop solutions/propose actions focused on priority issues, reporting back directly to executive management. Not only does this result in creative solutions being proposed, but also aids with succession planning, providing visibility to and empowering the younger generation (from upcoming leaders to students).

- Assess work through a holistic sustainability lens. One member reiterates the need to better understand the definition of sustainability beyond the environmental aspects, with a reminder that it encompasses social (ex. beyond succession planning to diversity and equity) and economic elements (daily consumption to long-term planning) as well.
- In addition to the sustainable workplace certification, employees at all levels could be certified (on a volunteer basis), and that this could be posed as a challenge to stimulate engagement.
- Share best practices. Everyone at all levels should share amongst each other successes/lessons learned from previous collaborative projects, to demonstrate how collaboration on projects can be achieved.

7. Next steps & closing remarks

Prof. Manfredi reminds the group that the next meeting will take place on February 20, and invites participants to save the evening of April 1st, 2019 for the Catalyst Awards Gala. The call for submissions for the Awards has been launched, and participants are encouraged to submit persons/groups for consideration. Prof. Beauchamp and Prof. Manfredi thank members for their participation, reiterate the invitation to share any suggestions for the Advisory Council, and extend their holiday wishes to all present.