



# REPORT: STEERING COMMITTEE 2019-04-04

Submitted for: April 4, 2019

The Steering Committee convened at 5:00PM, 31st of March 2019 in the SSMU Boardroom.

## Attendance

**Present:** President Mansdoerfer, Parliamentarian Haward, Senator Buraga (Senate Caucus)

**Regrets:** Speaker Dolmat, Councillor Cossette (PT/OT), Speaker Jamal, Councillor Frenette (Engineering)

## Guest Speakers

- There were no guest speakers at this committee's session.

## New Business

- Motions reviewed by the committee are listed below. The committee undertook the formatting, stylistic, spelling, and grammatical changes it deemed necessary to all motions and notice of motions submitted by the deadline.
  - Motion Regarding Interim Provisions for Internal Regulations of Elections and Referenda 2019-04-04
  - Motion Regarding a Special Referendum Period 2019-04-04
  - Motion Regarding Policy and Plan Standardization 2019-04-04
  - Motion Regarding Amendments to the Committee Terms of Reference 2019-04-04
  - Motion Regarding the Increase of the SSMU Membership Fee 2019-04-04
  - Motion Regarding Fall Reading Break for Winter 2019 Referendum 2019-04-04
  - Motion Regarding the Science Representative Seat 2019-04-04



## Old Business

- Motions postponed at the previous meeting of Legislative Council were approved to carry forward and inscribed on this meeting's agenda.
  - Motion Regarding Changes to the Internal Regulations of Elections and Referenda 2019-03-28
  - Motion Regarding Policy on Clubs and Services as SSMU's Highest Priority 2019-03-28
  - Motion Regarding Plan on Clubs and Services as SSMU's Highest Priority 2019-03-28

## Steering Committee Innovations

The Steering Committee has been contemplating ways to help make meeting of the Legislative Council more efficient while also building in greater mechanisms for consensus-based decision making.

With these changes, debate will be constrained and all motions on the agenda will be subject to a consent vote before question period, debate, and a formally recorded vote are held. We believe these changes will help to increase the efficiency of the Legislative Council by providing an expedited approval pathway for items not deemed contentious while also preserving the right of Councillors to debate motions should they wish to do so.

To prepare for this change, all Councillors should come to the Legislative Council having read and reviewed the motions in advance as motions adopted by consent will not have a reading during the Legislative Council, undergo question period or debate, or a formal vote.

We hope that Councillors will appreciate the efforts the Steering Committee is making to ensure that the Legislative Council adjourns at a reasonable hour. We welcome any comments or feedback in this regard.

## Speaker Ruling, re: Abstentions on Main Motions

At the previous meeting of the Legislative Council, Senate Caucus Representative Andre Lametti raised a point of order concerning abstentions, raising the concern that they are not provided for under Robert's Rules of Order and are not elaborated elsewhere in the Standing Rules or Internal Regulations.



The Senator is correct in all of the above points in that abstentions when voting should not formally be cast as a vote and those individuals wanting to abstain would simply not vote on main motions. Historical precedent at the Students' Society of McGill University ("the Society") has been however, to allow abstentions to be formally recorded as part of the voting record. When this precedent originated or from whom is unclear but it should clearly be stated that the Society is not bound by precedent. Rather, it should be taken as an artifact of the rules that were deemed, at one point in time, to be required but were never formalised. It would not be appropriate for the Speaker or Parliamentarian to comment on the potential rationale for these changes, but rather, simply to comment on how abstentions were handled at the 2019-03-28 Legislative Council.

The issue at hand is whether to count abstentions as votes cast in determining whether a majority has been achieved. Within the default definition prescribed in Robert's Rules of Order, the side receiving the majority of votes cast by all those "present and voting" shall prevail. Since an abstention is not considered a valid vote cast, as one cannot be "present and voting" while also abstaining, the issue of how to handle abstentions in the context of the Society is quite clear: the number of abstentions are simply subtracted from the total number of votes cast the the side reaching the required majority threshold prevails.

Abstentions would only affect the vote result if the Society's governing documents define majority differently, either as the number of individuals present or the number of total members. "Under either of these definitions, even though an abstention is still not counted as a vote cast, it effectively acts as a "no" vote because the basis for a majority is a fixed number".

In the writing of this ruling, the work and analysis of Sarah E. Merkle (Professional Registered Parliamentarian) and Pat Mason (Municipal Research and Services Center) were relied upon. The Office of the Speaker and Office of the Parliamentarian are grateful for their writings.

## Confidential Session

Councillors should be aware that there will be confidential session this evening.

Respectfully submitted,  
Samuel Haward, Parliamentarian