



# GENERATIVE DISCUSSION ON THE RELATIONSHIP WITH UTILE AND POTENTIAL FINANCING MODELS 2020-01-16

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## Background: UTILE's model

The Unité de travail pour l'implémentation du logement étudiante (UTILE) is a non-profit formed in the aftermath of the 2012 student movement for affordable tuition. Their rationale for focusing on housing is based on the understanding that the average Canadian student studying in Quebec leaves home when they head to university, and pays more in housing costs than in tuition<sup>1</sup>. Thus, a conversation about accessible education must include one about affordable housing.

As the shepherds of student funds, student associations act as the point of first contact in UTILE's project proposals. Primarily Montreal-based, UTILE has thus far worked to create three (3) affordable housing complexes: one with CADEUL in Quebec City, one with CSU in Montreal, and one on their own in Montreal. As a non-profit, UTILE must legally reinvest the profits of the buildings into their operations. This has two effects: rents are relatively cheap, and it becomes easier to finance each subsequent construction from UTILE's existing funds (the PUSH fund).

## SSMU and UTILE to date

### To Date

The SSMU has a long-standing relationship with UTILE as concerns research into affordable housing. We were one of the four institutions that participated in the 2014 survey on key indicators of student housing (PHARE 2014), and participated [again in 2017](#). Additionally, SSMU and PGSS co-funded a [2018 feasibility study](#) to better understand what McGill students' priorities are when it comes to housing (room size, proximity to campus, the availability of common spaces and commerce, and so on).

In Winter 2019, the Office of the Vice-President (External Affairs) was given a strong mandate by a 77% "yes" vote in an online plebiscite to examine the legitimacy of the organisation and to determine

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<sup>1</sup> [UTILE statement of principles, 2013](#)



whether it was in the best interest of students to pursue a stronger relationship with UTILE, including but not limited to the initiation of a housing project.

## Current Consultation Process

In order to widen the audience assessing this organisation, the Vice-President (External Affairs) brought the group in to do a presentation before the Affordable Student Housing Committee, which later deliberated and found it was satisfied with the group's model as compared to similar institutions. Furthermore, the Vice-President (External Affairs) consulted with members of the CSU executive team to better understand the risk of increased workload or cost overrun in pursuing a project, and was informed that this group has not to date had a negative experience with UTILE.

The Affordable Student Housing Committee also plans to engage in broad-spectrum consultation with the student body through a town hall in late January and an online form. The hope is that the findings of the feasibility study, when compiled into a complete project, will be confirmed or rejected by the present student body.

## Council's Decisions

It is now the role of council to decide how they wish to proceed. As a body designed for broad consultation with the student body, this group is able to determine whether affordable housing is a priority for the student body. As the decision is not only financial in nature, but entails qualitative decisions regarding the allocation of Society finances, it is the belief of the Vice-President (External Affairs) that council is fit to inform the Vice-President of their wishes regarding next steps.

## Conceived possibilities

Thus far, the Vice-President (External Affairs) and the Affordable Student Housing Committee are of the mind that council might:

1. Mandate the cessation of a relationship with UTILE altogether, such that the Committee would focus more heavily on information campaigns and promotion of existing affordable housing where it is available,
2. Mandate the maintenance of the present relationship with UTILE, such that SSMU continues to co-finance broad comprehensive research on affordable housing that aids UTILE in their lobbying efforts, and allows the Committee to hold the January town hall with UTILE as one speaker among many, or
3. Mandate the furtherance of the relationship with UTILE, and effectively mandate the Vice-President (External Affairs) to bring forward a referendum question for an Affordable Student Housing fee to pay for the construction or purchase of a building reserved for inexpensive student housing.



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That said, council may deem it appropriate to pursue something else entirely, or a combination of these.