



SSMU BOARD OF DIRECTORS PUBLIC MINUTES

November 12, 2020

The Board of Directors meeting of the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) will be held by teleconference on Thursday, November 12, 2020 at 18:30.

Present: Lauren Hill (Chair, non-voting), Jemark Earle (Officer), Brooklyn Frizzle (Officer), Maheen Akter (Officer), Gifford Marpole (Officer), Ayo Ogunremi (Officer, non-voting), André Lametti (Legislative Councillor), Rohan Bhutkar (Legislative Councillor), Jonah Levitt (Member-at-Large), Ana Paula Sanchez (Member-at-Large), Paige Collins (Member-at-Large), Adin Chan (Legislative Councillor), Mustafa Fakhri (Legislative Councillor), Jack Kline (Member-at-Large), Daniel Dufour (General Manager, non-voting), Iris He (International Student Representative, non-voting), Michal Chernov (Governance Manager, non-voting), Sam Haward (Recording Secretary, non-voting), Sebastien Duckett (Finance Commissioner, non-voting, left at 19:14), Wing Wong (Parliamentarian, non-voting), Laurent Levesque (UTILE, non-voting, left at 18:53), Sandrine Dufault (UTILE, non-voting, left at 18:53)

1. Call to Order: **18:37**

The Chair calls the meeting to order at 18:37.

2. Land Acknowledgement

The Chair presents the Land Acknowledgement.

The SSMU acknowledges that McGill University is situated on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe nations, a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples. The SSMU recognizes and respects these nations as the traditional custodians of the land and water on which it is located.

3. Adoption of the Agenda — **ADOPTED UNANIMOUSLY**

There are no changes to the agenda. The agenda is approved unanimously.

4. Executive Committee Report

Director Earle presents the report of the Executive Committee. They highlight signing on to an open letter to the Quebec Government submitted on behalf of the Faculty of Law. There were hirings for



SACOMSS and a new club website designer, a statement released regarding Hong Kong, and some internal policy amendments. There are no questions on the report.

5. Email Approvals

There are no email approvals.

6. Affordable Student Housing Fee Transfers

Laurent Levesque and Sandrine Dufour (UTILE) present to the Board of Directors. UTILE is the affordable housing partner of the SSMU. Levesque describes the research conducted by UTILE, the PHARE survey, and how UTILE provides information on affordability and tenants' rights. They introduce the Woodnote project, a 144 bedroom building built with support from the Concordia Students' Union. UTILE is working with the SSMU on a new housing project with a minimum of 200 rooms, and the SSMU has signed a contract that the distance will be less than 25 minutes from campus.

SSMU will be investing around \$1,500,000 in the project through the Affordable Student Housing Fee. The next step in the project is authorizing the amount of the fee levy to be transferred to UTILE, looking for land for this project and confirming funding from the City of Montreal. The SSMU will have a final say on where the construction will take place. A feasibility study was conducted last year, and last year's referendum provided the initial investment to get the project going. UTILE is also looking into funding from Montreal, the Government of Quebec and pension funds. The business for today is to authorize the first transfer from the SSMU to the PUSH fund (the investment fund that will finance this project).

VP External asks about the transfer of funds and the current status of the search for land. Levesque states that they are confident that funding from the city will be confirmed, and that UTILE are trying to confirm this before the municipal elections next year. For this reason, they are looking for land to be confirmed as soon as possible. With regards to the logistics of the financing, there has been discussion of accelerating SSMU's contributions before the funds from the Winter semester arrive. VP External further asks for clarification on the situation of finding suitable land. Levesque responds that there has not been a specific plot confirmed, and that they are looking at land on the west side of the island that is easily accessible by Metro.

There are no further questions. The Board of Directors thank Laurent Levesque and Sandrine Dufour for the presentation.

7. Presentation from Finance Commissioner

The Finance Commissioner presents to the Board of Directors. A month ago, the Finance Committee began an investigation into the processes into the practices of the SSMU when it moves and passes



fees. They are consulting many individuals and groups at the SSMU and wanted to consult outgoing Directors before their term ends. They state that they would like to finalize consultations by the end of the month, with a policy approved in mid-January so that student groups whose fees are up for renewal in the Winter semester have time to abide by the recommendations.

So far, the Finance Commissioner has spoken to the Legislative Council, Executive Committee, Funding Committee and Comptroller, Governance Manager and other SSMU Staff. They have yet to talk to the General Manager. A survey will be sent via listserv, and the McGill administration will be contacted to provide input. The Finance Commissioner explains that most fees originate from the University Administration, and describes the different types of fees that show up on McGill e-bills. They state that these fees add up to around \$40 million each year. They continue that this investigation came about because they have noted a fair amount of student dissatisfaction with the way that fees are instituted, and that these fees are all approved by the SSMU. In addition, there are a number of pain points that need to be addressed, and this year COVID-19 testing policies and practices has unveiled some problems that the SSMU does not have the mechanisms to solve. For example, organizations that receive fees don't always fully spend those fees. MSERT does not always spend its entire budget, and this money cannot be reallocated to another cause, and there is no option other than allowing this to continue to roll over. In addition, they are looking for a fee increase in the winter semester. This investigation is to provide oversight and accountability for how student fees are spent, and to create mechanisms to rectify situations that arise such as redistributing surpluses, reducing fees without going to referendum or refunding fees.

The Recording Secretary notes that two years ago SACOMSS was running a surplus and the reaction was to reduce their fee while increasing MSERT's fee - shifting the problem onto MSERT. They continue that when fees are brought to referendum they are usually conceived with an amount in mind, and a budget created to match that amount. A better solution would be that a budget is created and then translated to a fee to put to referendum. Director Lametti states that they think that having separate fees for Services when their independence is important - such as the BSN or Indigenous Affairs. They continue that anything essential to the SSMU's mission should be consolidated into the base fee, that way you avoid having to go to referendum when a department runs a surplus.

Director Frizzle states that this report should also contain an advocacy strategy for the University. They continue that the SSMU's growth is not sustainable through student fees alone. While growth is positive for the SSMU, a lot of this is making up for the shortcomings of the university and Director Frizzle believes that the university is aware that the SSMU will step in if they are unwilling to step in. They conclude that there is a limit to what the SSMU can do, and that an advocacy strategy should be started as soon as possible. The Finance Commissioner agrees, and adds that the fees paid to the university by students should be a reason that students have a larger say in how they are used. For example, the Director of Student Services should be accountable to students. While there is some dissatisfaction with SSMU Services, their fees are a fraction of what is charged by the university.



Director Fakhri agrees with the above points. They ask why some SSMU funds aren't fully utilized while others run surpluses. The Finance Commissioner responds that this is likely due to the arbitrary nature of deciding fee amounts. Budgeting what is needed before passing a fee would alleviate this. They also explain that some fees receive a low number of funding applications while others like the Ambassador fee receive an incredibly high amount of applications - leading to it being utilized more fully. Despite these funds, the Funding Committee always runs a surplus. This could be alleviated by creating a single fee that can be adjusted as necessary, or finding a way to reallocate money at the end of each academic year. They continue that zero base budgeting (creating a budget from scratch and justifying every expense each year) would be another way to rectify these problems.

Director Earle notes that they have prepared a Five-Year Plan for the Legislative Council that includes fee consolidations. Director Marpole states that student groups applying for funding seem to be held to a higher standard than groups levying fees on the student body.

The Board of Directors thank the Finance Commissioner for the presentation.

[The Finance Commissioner departs at 19:14.]

8. Legislative Council Motions for Ratification

- a. [Motion Regarding the Amendment of the Standing Rules for the 2020-2021 Legislative Council 2020-11-05](#) — **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY**
- b. [Motion Regarding Amendments to the Equity Policy and the Implementation of an Equity Triage 2020-11-05](#) — **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY**

Director Lametti states that the SSMU must ensure that the Equity triage motion is not abused. There is no further debate on these items.

The Board resolves to approve both motions by unanimous consent.

9. Minutes for Approval

- a. Board of Directors Public Minutes 2020-10-01 — **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY**
- b. Board of Directors Public Minutes 2020-10-29 — **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY**

There are no changes to the minutes.

Both sets of minutes are approved unanimously.

10. Motions for Approval



There are no motions for approval.

11. For Discussion

a. Statements

Director Bhutkar asks the Executive Committee what the process is to create and sign onto statements. Given the backlash from recent statements and posts, they feel as if this process needs to be revised. Director Frizzle responds that once statements are drafted, they are copyedited by the SSMU Communications department, they are sent to the Executive Committee for approval. They are then sent to be translated and reviewed once more by the Executive Committee before publication. This has been followed for every statement.

Director Lametti states that the Artsakh statement should have been reviewed to the Legislative Council as there was no clear position on the issue in previous SSMU policies. In regards to the most recent statement, they state that it can be argued that positions and policies already held by the SSMU would give the Executive grounds to publish this statement alone. They do not think it is the Board's jurisdiction to dictate how the Executive Committee should proceed in these cases.

Director Chan states that they have suggested amending the Internal Regulations of Governance such that these kinds of statements must be approved by the Legislative Council. This is a balance between the SSMU's role in calling out injustice while mitigating students who may not feel represented - as the main concern from students was that they were not consulted. Director Fakih states that in the future, the Executive Committee should begin looking closely at where statements are being initiated and providing this information and context when they are posted. They continue that constituents may be more supportive of statements when it can be seen which groups are initiating them. They also agree with Director Chan's proposed solution.

VP External Ogunremi states that they feel the last few comments have been very reasonable and that the Executive Committee will take them into account. Director Frizzle states that if the Legislative Council wants to have an input on the SSMU's statements they have the mechanisms to do so - and that they believe that the Executive Committee has acted to the best of their ability in accordance with the regulations of the Society. Director Lametti agrees with Director Frizzle, and states that the Board and Legislative Council should keep to their own spheres. If the Legislative Council wants to act, it is their choice.

[The Board enters a confidential session to discuss 19:29.]

[The Board returns from confidential session at 20:03.]

b. Extended Winter Break



Director Bhutkar states that they have seen that some other Universities have been delaying the start date of the Winter Semester to give students additional time to rest after the Fall Semester. They ask if this is possible at McGill and if the SSMU has been doing any advocacy work to this end.

Director Frizzle replies that they have been in contact with the student who initially shared this information and co-authored a petition with them that now has over 2,000 signatures. They continue that at a joint Board-Senate meeting, it was apparent that the University's administration was opposed to this idea. They state that they plan to continue advocating for this in conjunction with the SSMU Senators in the coming weeks.

c. Generative Discussion: Representatives' Fee

The Governance Manager states that this was added to the agenda as there are consultations ongoing with regards to renumbering members of the Legislative Council. Director Frizzle states that the current plan is to create a fund for this purpose as either a standalone fee or increase to the SSMU base fee. The amount would be around \$1.25 per student per semester. This was done by creating a job description to evaluate pay rate with SSMU HR, estimating hours, and dividing this total by the number of SSMU members.

Director Frizzle continues that there was an issue with finding a member of staff to supervise councillors. One potential solution would be to create a Commissioner who would act as a resource for councillors and senators. They ask the Board of Directors for their input.

Director Fakh asks if this will be a base fee increase or a separate fee. Director Frizzle replies that it would be simpler to pass a base fee increase, however in the past base fee increases have failed when planned for similar purposes. There is an ongoing discussion on this front, and it is more likely to be a standalone fee. Director Fakh states that legal counsel has informed the Board that Directors are typically not compensated. They continue that Director Frizzle should seek advice from legal counsel regarding Directors who are also council members. Director Frizzle states that it may be the case that these councillors are not compensated for their time spent on the Board of Directors. They state that it may be possible to compensate Directors but for the time being there is no good way that they have found to do so.

Director Bhutkar asks if this would make all Representatives and Senators employees of the SSMU and if Director Frizzle has heard any concerns from HR regarding this - and if it may impact their decision making. Director Frizzle responds that they would be employees, however they would include in the job description that the role of a Governance Commissioner would be simply to approve their hours and be a contact for HR. They would like to make it clear that councillors and senators report to their constituencies. They state that as an Executive who is paid by the Society their first concern is for their constituents and expect that this would translate to other positions.

Director Lametti states that the biggest hurdle is political, and if it is the will of the membership they are sure that there is a way to build a setup that preserves the freedom of representatives to represent



their constituents. They state that this should be a base fee increase, as it becomes unwieldy with no good way to avoid surpluses should a councillor resign. Director Frizzle states that they haven't discounted a base fee increase and agree that it is logistically more manageable. VP External Ogunremi states that the last failed base fee increase was due to the amount more than what was included. They ask if Mac Campus representatives would be paid by this process too. Director Lametti states that they don't think it is wise to choose a referendum question based on what will pass, and it would be better to pick the best option and campaign to explain why that is the best option. They state that MCSS students do not pay SSMU fees and the SSMU should not pay MCSS representatives.

d. Funding Committee Terms of Reference amendments

Director Marpole states that they are working on amending the Funding Committee terms of reference and wanted to bring this to the attention of the Board. They state that student groups have raised concerns that the funding process takes too long - and they would like to remove the step in which the Legislative Council approves all applications. This would be with the exception of applications that are more than 20% of a funds total amount, or ones that the Funding Commissioner sees necessary to be reviewed by the Legislative Council. They state that this can bring the process down from 3-4 weeks to 1-2 weeks. To compensate for this, they would like to add a Director position to the Funding Committee. Director Fakih states that this is a good idea. Director Marpole says that they will begin preparing this for the Legislative Council to approve.

e. Recommendations for Future Incoming Directors

Director Fakih presents to the Board. They have prepared a document containing some feedback regarding what they think should be provided in training for future Directors. They state that as the highest governing body of the SSMU, it is important that Directors have all of the necessary relevant knowledge, but not everyone has all of those things coming into the role.

They would like to make the recruitment process more transparent and make sure that the hiring process opens earlier with more outreach. Full-time staff oversight of the Nominating Committee would also help this given that the composition of the Nominating Committee changes every year. They state that a training period would be helpful, and would like to give new Directors an opportunity to sit in on meetings and ask questions of current members. This is not a novel idea as it is already done with full-time Executives and would not be a large time commitment. A short guidebook for Directors would help training efforts. A legal training should occur before Directors' terms starts as it is unlikely that new Directors have this knowledge otherwise. Director Fakih was unaware that Directors could ask for legal advice until late in their term.

Regarding finances, new Directors should be taught the budget, cash-flow and financial situation of the SSMU, and how to read these documents. A diverse Board of Directors means that not all incoming Directors will be able to read these documents, so training should be provided. Directors should also be aware of past decisions, and how to keep Executives accountable, in particular the VP Finance. This



training should also cover the legal and financial situations regarding the SSMU's properties - the University Centre leased from McGill and 3501 Peel that the SSMU has taken a mortgage to purchase.

Regarding Human Resources, the Board should be introduced to all of the full time staff and given an introduction to the HR department's structure and complaints process (including Equity and Sexual Violence complaints). This affects people's lives and so it is important that the Board is well prepared and informed to make these decisions.

Finally, they state that the Board should be informed of the SSMU's contacts and relationship with other organizations, notably McGill, PGSS, SSMU Daycare Inc., the SSMU and Studentcare. Director Fakih concludes that these are the kind of things that Directors cannot be expected to know when they begin their terms, and there are possibly decisions that they made themselves as a new Director that they would not have made had they been fully trained. They state that they hope these suggestions can be implemented to help Directors in 2021 be fully prepared for their role.

Director Earle thanks Director Fakih for putting this information together, and that there are a lot of good ideas included in this presentation. They state that Directors don't necessarily have a blank cheque to make enquiries with legal counsel, and that is typically centralized through the General Manager and President.

12. Confidential Session: **20:44**

The Board enters confidential sessions at 20:44.

13. Adjournment: **21:39**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Earle', is positioned above a horizontal line.

Jemark Earle, President