

POLICY PAPER

***Student Rental Housing and Near-Campus Neighbourhoods***

*Prepared by:*

*Tereza Zetko, Advocacy & Policy Research Assistant, 2018-19*

*Jess Anderson, SRA Social Sciences, University Affairs Committee Member, 2018-19 Joshua Arbess, SRA Engineering, Municipal Affairs Committee Member, 2018-19 Shemar Hackett, AVP Municipal Affairs, SRA Social Sciences, 2018-19*

*Joshua Yachouh, Municipal Affairs Committee Member 2018-19 February 2019*



This General Policy of the McMaster Students Union is licensed under a *Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License*.

**Table of Contents**

[Introduction 4](#_TOC_250004)

[Visibility and Utility of Renting Resources 6](#_TOC_250003)

Landlord Accountabiliy 8

Off-campus Resource Centre 8

Rental Listing Service 9

[Housing Supply. 12](#_TOC_250002)

[Near-Campus Neighbourhoods 14](#_TOC_250001)

Lighting 14

[By-Law Enforcement 16](#_TOC_250000)

# Introduction

Student rental housing is a big part of the investment that a student makes into their own education. This is especially true for the large number of McMaster students who must move away from home to pursue their post-secondary education at the university. Generally speaking, student rental housing can give students the opportunity to more fully engage in academia, student life, and a new community. For students seeking rental housing in earlier stages of their post-secondary education, it can also represent an exercise in autonomy and self-care. However, all too often, it can instead turn out to be an unmanageable and demoralizing experience compromising students’ sense of agency. Anecdotes of terrible student rental housing experiences are not uncommon, and many students, knowingly or unknowingly, continue to put up with below par standards of living as a result of feeling powerless in their rental housing situation.

The issues presented in this policy paper represent many of students’ most regular and pressing concerns regarding the rental housing experience, from identifying possible places to live to the ongoing injustices faced by those already renting. Students already face a lot of stress working toward their post-secondary degree. As such, recognizing the large number of obstacles faced by many students in the quest for safe and liveable rental housing and neighbourhoods, it becomes clear that there remains a great deal of room for improvement in this area.

To begin, existing resources available to students to help them navigate the rental housing process could benefit from improvement, updates, and more promotion. As it stands, students are underusing the McMaster Off-Campus Resource Centre’s resources due to a lack of awareness that they even exist or because they do not find the existing resources nor their organization to be practical or user-friendly.

Next, students have also raised issues about the dependability of the Off-Campus Resource Centre’s rental listing service which does not review the landlords placing advertisements. To ensure the safety of student renters, it believed that the service should take the precautions necessary to confirm that the landlords using the service are responsible and dependable.

Along this vein, the MSU also maintains its support for landlord licensing in the City of Hamilton which has the capacity to greatly improve the unsafe living conditions currently being endured by some students. The benefits of this project for the safety and wellbeing of those renting in Hamilton are undeniable, with the positives for both students and many reliable landlords outweighing the costs associated with annual inspections.

Another topical issue within Hamilton has to do with the ever-worsening student rental housing crunch, the result of demand beginning to overtake supply in near-campus

neighbourhoods. This issue has been fueled in large part by McMaster as a result of the university’s fast-increasing annual student enrollment figures. Nevertheless, McMaster has done little thus far to address this issue. Additionally, more recent attempts have disproportionality catered to certain student demographics over others. While some new residences are being built to attract first years, not much has been done to support upper-year undergraduate students who are having an increasingly difficulty time securing a place to live. Concessions by McMaster should be made to students on this issue—all things considered, a burgeoning student body should necessarily be met with a greater supply of student rental housing units.

Finally, students should also feel at home in their neighbourhoods. Efforts to improve safety by enhancing street lighting and adopting an alternative approach to student discipline on by-law infractions represent two workable reforms that could help achieve this goal to give students a greater sense of trust and belonging within near-campus neighbourhoods and in the City of Hamilton as a whole.

# Visibility and Utility of Renting Resources

**Principle:** Housing resources should be easy to find and use as well as accessible through multiple platforms.

**Principle:** Students should be provided with up-to-date information on the safety and liabilities of their student house prior to renting from a landlord.

**Concern:** Students with little to no experience in the rental housing market continue to face the difficult task of making housing arrangements without appropriate knowledge of the resources available to them.

**Concern:** Students are often left ill-informed as to the signs of a dangerous living situation or unsatisfactory landlord.

**Concern:** Events and services of the McMaster Off-Campus Resource Centre are often not well promoted.

**Recommendation:** The Off-Campus Resource Centre should put a greater emphasis on promotion of their events and services, specifically by developing a strong social media presence.

**Recommendation:** Information on the provincial government’s *Residential Tenancies Act, 2006*, other tenant rights legislation, and general renting resources should be made more accessible to students through the Off- Campus Resource Centre and the City of Hamilton.

Many undergraduate students at McMaster stay in residence in their first year. In subsequent years, students typically live off campus in houses or apartments. The transition from residence or living at home to off-campus student housing is daunting for many students and requires foresight that they have not yet had the opportunity to develop. Nevertheless, the current system of researching and securing rental housing in near-campus neighbourhoods continues to be complicated and unintuitive. What’s more, this complexity does not end with house hunting—upon settling in, students must continue to navigate a number of unfamiliar processes, such as paying utility bills, communication with landlords, and understanding tenant rights.

Students should be able to access information about properties, landlords, the rental

housing process, and by-laws within the City of Hamilton in order to learn from this information and apply it to their own experiences. Without such information, students may find it more difficult to secure suitable rental housing to support them throughout their post-secondary education. Furthermore, these resources should be easy to access and promoted across multiple platforms. A wide range of information media on rental housing would undoubtedly help students make informed decisions on such matters, allowing them to more effectively assess their options.

Currently, multiple services do exist through the McMaster Off-Campus Resource Centre (OCRC) to make the transition from residence or, in some cases, high school to off-campus housing easier.1 Unfortunately, these services are not being promoted and therefore utilized to their full potential. Events and services of the OCRC do not have adequate presence on campus nor online, causing some students to be unaware that these support services even exist. For instance, the McMaster Off-Campus Resource Centre’s Facebook page has not posted anything since April 2017, and only has about 650 likes (as of February 2019).2 The MSU recommends that a greater emphasis be put on advertising of events and services, especially via online and in-person campaigns. If realized, the OCRC’s reach to students would greatly improve, with more students being prepared to tackle the many challenges of student rental housing as a result.

Unfortunately, even with access to resources such as those offered by the OCRC, students may still find themselves in poor living situations or dealing with unsatisfactory landlords. The *Residential Tenancies Act, 2006*, the Residential Tenancies Agreement (2018), and other legal documents outline the rights and responsibilities that tenants and landlords have toward one another while the the Landlord and Tenant Board represents another potential resource for students experiencing difficulty in their rental housing situation. However, many students remain unaware of the details and functions of this legislation and the Landlord and Tenant Board, respectively. Limited clear-cut information with regard to these supports can be gathered from the OCRC website and the information that does exist could benefit from being modified to make it easier for students to understand (especially as far as legislation is concerned). Lastly, the OCRC should also consider updating their resource list to include more supports for students. Arming students with knowledge of their rights will empower them to improve their living situation and will encourage a safer and more enjoyable rental housing experience overall.

1 “Off-Campus Resource Centre,” Off-Campus Resource Centre, [http://macoffcampus.mcmaster.ca/.](http://macoffcampus.mcmaster.ca/)

2 McMaster Off-Campus Resource Centre’s Facebook page, 2019, [https://www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com/McMaster-)/[McMaster-](http://www.facebook.com/McMaster-) Off-Campus-Resource-Centre-126974210654274/.

# Landlord Accountability

Off-Campus Resource Centre Rental Listing Service

**Principle:** The Off-Campus Resource Centre’s rental listing service should support students’ rights to safety and respect.

**Concern:** Landlords advertising on the Off-Campus Resource Centre website are not required to provide any information prior to promoting their rental listing.

**Concern:** The landlords promoting through the Off-Campus Resource Centre have not been vetted, allowing unsafe rentals to be listed on the site.

**Recommendation**: The Off-Campus Resource Centre should develop an application to screen all landlords and property managers prior to allowing them to advertise their listings on the Off-Campus Resource Centre website.

**Recommendation:** The Off-Campus Resource Centre should develop a feedback form to give students the opportunity to report inadequate landlords and unsafe student rentals.

One of the McMaster Off-Campus Resource Centre’s (OCRC) main roles to is to offer a rental listing service for students to find off-campus housing.3 The OCRC’s rental listing service allows students to filter through a large variety of rental listings based on price, number of bedrooms, and location. That being said, the OCRC does not currently screen or filter through the landlords who wish to advertise on their site. Any landlord, regardless of their history in terms of renting out units, is allowed to place an advertisement to be featured on the rental listing service. As a result, the lack of accountability measures in place leaves students vulnerable when searching for rental housing in Hamilton.

In 2017, CBC Hamilton collected reviews of various students living in the community surrounding McMaster, highlighting their concerns over the lack of safe housing and predatory landlords.4 Despite the numerous testimonies from students, the OCRC declined to make any formal statements and referred the journalist to the clause on their

3 "Home," Off-Campus Resource Centre, 2019, [http://macoffcampus.mcmaster.ca.](http://macoffcampus.mcmaster.ca/)

4 Kelly Bennett, "Tales From Houses With Many Bedrooms: What Tenants Say It's Like Inside," CBC News, 2017, [https://www.cbc.ca/news/](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/tales-from-houses-with-many-bedrooms-what-)c[anada/hamilton/tales-fr](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/tales-from-houses-with-many-bedrooms-what-)om[-houses-with-many-bedrooms-what-](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/tales-from-houses-with-many-bedrooms-what-) tenants-say-it-s-like-inside-1.4045862.

site that states “landlords posting on the site are responsible for ensuring their listing is accurate and that their unit is a legal rental property.”5 The OCRC is an attachment of McMaster, which leads many students to use this service over alternative sites. Though the service is convenient for students, the current structure allows landlords to post illegal rental listings on the site. Given the significant number of students relying on the OCRC to find housing, safeguards need to be put in place to hold landlords accountable and prevent students from repeatedly renting from unreliable landlords.

As such, the MSU recommends that the OCRC develop a feedback form for students and a screening process for landlords looking to place an advertisement. Likewise, the OCRC should also retain a database of those landlords posting on the site based on this received information. Given the amount of rental units that repeatedly get posted on the site each year, the OCRC should give students the opportunity to report issues that they may have experienced to ensure that certain landlords are not given the opportunity to take advantage of students in the future. In addition, the OCRC should create a screening process for all landlords who post on the site. Included in this screening process should be verification of when the house was last inspected and up- to-date pictures of what the house looks like prior to it being posted on the site. This will guarantee the quality of housing being presented to students and ensure that the landlords students are renting from are up to date with building, safety and fire regulations.

Rental Licensing

**Principle:** Students have the right to live in safe rental housing.

**Principle:** Students deserve to be treated with respect when renting off campus.

**Principle:** Landlord licensing should not unfairly limit the amount of rental units available to students or cause drastic increases in rental units.

**Principle:** All students should have access to safe rental housing no matter what part of the city they live in.

**Concern:** Many students live in homes rented out and managed by landlords who do not meet basic housing and health standards.

5 Ibid.

**Recommendation:** The City of Hamilton should move forward with the proposed two- year rental licensing pilot project in Wards 1 and 8.

**Recommendation:** The City of Hamilton should consult students in the development, execution, and evaluation of the rental licensing pilot project to ensure it is addressing student concerns.

**Recommendation:** The City of Hamilton should prioritize the enforcement of by-laws that impact that safety of tenants through the rental licensing pilot project.

**Recommendation:** The City of Hamilton should monitor Wards 1 and 8 during the pilot project to ensure there is not a decrease in rental units or an increase in rental prices.

**Recommendation:** If the pilot project is considered successful, the City of Hamilton should expand it to all rental units in the City of Hamilton.

Students currently renting in Hamilton deserve to have access to clean, safe, and sanitary housing. However, the quality and accessibility of housing continues to be an issue among students in the Hamilton community. Students have voiced many concerns regarding their rental properties over issues such as overcrowding, unsafe zoning, lack of fire and safety inspections, inadequate renovations, and absentee landlords.6 Recently, a group of girls renting in Ainslie-Wood took their landlord to court over mould and leaking pipes.7 After an investigation had been conducted, City staff realized that the house was not properly zoned and that it was still registered as a single-family dwelling, despite being rented out to students for several years.8 This is just one example of the unsafe living conditions that many student renters living in Ward 1 have to endure, which highlights the need for more measures to hold landlords accountable. As such, the MSU recommends that the City of Hamilton move forward with an investment of $347,463 to hire three full-time employees for its two-year rental licensing pilot project beginning in 2019.

6 Kelly Bennett,“‘Overcrowded’ Hamilton House Near McMaster Has 12 Bedrooms,” CBC News*,* March 23, 2017, [https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/overcrowded-12-bedroom-hamilton-house-](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/overcrowded-12-bedroom-hamilton-house-)

1.4035008.

7 Teviah Moro, "Mcmaster Renters Chase Compensation," The Hamilton Spectator, 2018, [https://www.thespec.com/](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/9094300-mcmaster-renters-chase-compensation/)new[s-story/9094300-mcm](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/9094300-mcmaster-renters-chase-compensation/)a[ster-renters-chase-compensation/.](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/9094300-mcmaster-renters-chase-compensation/)

8 Ibid.

The current system for reporting issues with rental properties is complaint-based and involves reaching out to the Landlord and Tenant Board in the case of a dispute.9 Students who have pursued this avenue are often frustrated with the length of the litigation process and the costs of filing forms to receive fair compensation for their landlord’s shortcomings.10 Students may choose to avoid this process entirely for reasons such as fear of eviction, or being unable to sacrifice time and energy for what may not always be a favourable result.11 This system is reactive rather than proactive in dealing with tenant-landlord issues. A more proactive approach would involve creating a rental licensing system that requires annual inspections of buildings in Hamilton, with the landlord paying a fee.12 A licensing system would also benefit landlords who would be able to advertise clean, healthy accommodations, as vetted by the City. As well, tenants would be assured of the health and safety of their residence. A rental licensing system, in conjunction with tenant outreach efforts, would ensure that student renters are protected.

The City’s Rental Housing Sub-Committee is currently drafting a by-law for a two-year rental licensing pilot project in the densely student-populated areas of Wards 1 and 8, which will be brought back to the City in March. The pilot project is anticipated to commence in 2019 and run for a two-year period.13 The projected cost is $347,463 which will be funded from the Tax Stabilization Reserve and annual landlord fees.14 This cost accounts for the three additional administrative staff required to make amendments to Licensing By-Law 07-170, as well as other resources such as equipment and vehicles. As a part of this program, landlords would be required to pay a $200 annual fee, consent to inspections, be in compliance with zoning regulations, and show proof of insurance.15 This will address substandard housing, identify illegal dwellings, and enhance enforcement of regulations to protect the health and safety of residents. As a result, the MSU recommends that the City of Hamilton continue to make the necessary investments in a rental licensing system that would ensure student and tenant safety as a priority.

9 “Our Tenant Rights Legal Services,” Hamilton Community Legal Clinic, May 31, 2013, [https://www.hamiltonjustice.ca/tenant](http://www.hamiltonjustice.ca/tenant-rights)-rights

10 Teviah Moro, “McMaster Renters Chase Compensation,” The Hamilton Spectator*,* December 21, 2018, [https://www.thespec.com/](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/9094300-mcmaster-renters-chase-compensation/)new[s-story/9094300-mcm](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/9094300-mcmaster-renters-chase-compensation/)a[ster-renters-chase-compensation/.](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/9094300-mcmaster-renters-chase-compensation/)

11 Ibid.

12 “A State of Disrepair: Hamilton ACORN Tenant Survey,” Hamilton ACORN, September 2018, https://acorncanada.org/resource/state-disrepair-hamilton-acorn-tenant-survey.

13 “Rental Housing Sub-Committee Agenda Package,” The City of Hamilton, September 27, 2018, https://pub-hamilton.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=168285.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

At all stages of the pilot project, the City of Hamilton should consult students to ensure that it is adequately addressing their concerns about rental licensing. A concern brought up by both students and community members is that rental licensing may potentially result in reductions in the number of units for rent due to enforcement of arbitrary by- laws that do not impact safety (such as number of parking spots available) and landlords not wanting to rent units as a result of licensing. While the latter is not as big of a concern to students since such landlords are likely those to be breaking safety by- laws, the former concern should be addressed by the City of Hamilton by enforcing by- laws that impact the health and safety of tenants. For instance, the proactive by-law inspections should favour enforcing fire code, inspecting for mold, and ensuring all doors and windows can be locked.

If after the pilot project, students and the City of Hamilton believe it was successful, then the pilot project should become permeant and expanding to all other areas of Hamilton. This will ensure that no matter where a student chooses to live while attending McMaster, they will have a safe rental unit inspected by the City of Hamilton.

# Housing Supply

**Principle**: All students attending McMaster should have access to adequate and reasonably-priced rental housing within an acceptable walking and/or bussing distance from campus.

**Concern:** There is an increasing lack of student housing on and around McMaster’s campus which has resulted in overcrowded student dwellings as well as students compromising their safety in order to find nearby accommodation.

**Recommendation:** McMaster should provide on-campus housing options for upper- year students as it continues to build more residence buildings.

**Recommendation:** McMaster should seek out more public-private partnerships to improve the supply of nearby student housing.

**Recommendation:** The City of Hamilton should encourage development of multi-unit rental buildings near campus or along easily accessible bus routes.

The MSU believes that all McMaster students should have access to rental housing that is adequate in terms of health and safety, reasonably-priced, and within an acceptable walking and/or bussing distance from campus. McMaster should necessarily prioritize

students and support their needs, which include housing. The impact that student housing has on student success and wellbeing is significant and should be taken into consideration at the very least.

Due to the rapid expansion of McMaster, many students now looking for housing are becoming conflicted with the option of taking up residence in more distant communities requiring a substantial commute or with paying high rent on properties closer to campus. However, students should not have to forfeit reasonable proximity to McMaster and living in student-friendly neighbourhoods in order to access affordable, decent- quality rental housing. To be more concrete, over the past six years—from the 2011- 2012 academic year to that of 2017-2018—the total undergraduate student population at McMaster has increased by 9.61 percent.16 This increase in the student population has already proven to be a major factor contributing to the lack of student housing on and around campus, and is expected to become an even bigger problem with time, as McMaster’s existing and planned housing infrastructure will not be able to accommodate such a large future student body population.

The MSU further believes that in no way should students attending McMaster ever have to sacrifice or compromise their rights to live in a safe and accessible dwelling in order to find student accommodation. Rights are non-negotiable and should apply to all students looking for housing in near-campus neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, reports have come out by CBC News on off-campus houses failing to meet local zoning laws, with an instance of a single-family house with 12 bedrooms, demonstrating the possible avenues for exploitation of students that can come as a result of the increasing, student- driven demand.17

In spite of these issues, McMaster has barely assisted with the development of off- campus student housing projects to support its increasing population. This is important when considering the fact that there is currently only enough room in residence for about 40 percent of first years.18 The situation, however, has been even more difficult for upper-year students and has only been made worse since, as of late, they are no longer guaranteed any spots in residence.19 Continuing with its current trend of accepting significantly greater numbers of students year to year without ensuring an

16 “McMaster University Fact Book 2017 | 2018,” McMaster University, https://ira.mcmaster.ca/fact-book/. 17 Kelly Bennett,“‘Overcrowded’ Hamilton House Near McMaster Has 12 Bedrooms,” CBC News*,* March 23, 2017, [https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/overcrowded-12-bedroom-hamilton-house-](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/overcrowded-12-bedroom-hamilton-house-) 1.4035008

18 Hannah Walters-Vida, "Where Do All the Students Go?," The Silhouette, January 31, 2019, [https://www.thesil.ca/where-](http://www.thesil.ca/where-do-all-the-students-go)do-all[-the-students-go.](http://www.thesil.ca/where-do-all-the-students-go)

19 "Upper Year, Returning and Transfer Students," McMaster University, https://housing.mcmaster.ca/future-residents/how-to-apply/upper-year-returning-and-transfer-students/.

adequate supply of rental housing units, this issue could very well escalate into a student housing crisis within the McMaster community.

Responding to these issues, one of the most feasible recommendations to reduce the increasing shortage of student accommodations would be to build more on- campus/near-campus accommodations and in doing so, also reserve spots for upper- year students. Other comparable universities such as the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario and Brock University in St. Catherines, Ontario continue to offer options for upper-year students on residence and even have buildings dedicated to them.20,21 Similarly, McMaster should also continue to also seek out more public-private partnerships to improve the supply of student housing.22 More on-campus/near-campus housing providing accommodation for students would also help McMaster maintain its connected community, promote a successful studying environment, and give students more flexibility with regard to their lifestyle and other specific needs. In addition, McMaster-run accommodations would be able to ensure safe dwellings for students, effectively meet their living standards which may have previously been infringed upon through their experiences in overcrowded and/or deteriorating rental houses.

To allow for more private units, especially outside of single family homes being converted into rental units, the City of Hamilton should encourage development of multi- unit rental buildings, such as apartments near Hamilton or easily accessible bus lines.

This can be done by seeking out developers, reducing development charges, or ensuring that these projects are passed by council if they are deemed safe and beneficial for students attending McMaster.

# Near-Campus Neighbourhoods

Lighting

**Principle:** Trails, bus stops, and sidewalks in near-campus neighbourhoods should be well-lit, taking student safety into consideration.

**Principle:** All bus stops should have adequate lighting in order to improve passenger safety and ensure visibility.

20 “Live on After First Year,” University of Western Ontario, https://residence.uwo.ca/about/live\_on\_in\_your\_upperyear/. 21 “Living at Brock,” Brock University, https://discover.brocku.ca/living/#gateway-suites.

22 Mark Cardwell, “Private-public partnerships are the new face of student housing,” University Affairs, September 4, 2018, [https://www.unive](http://www.universityaffairs.ca/news/news-article/private-public-partnerships-are-)rsit[yaffairs.ca/news/news-article/private-public-partnerships-are-](http://www.universityaffairs.ca/news/news-article/private-public-partnerships-are-) the-new-face-of-student-housing/.

**Concern:** Students and community groups have repeatedly voiced that trails and streets in near-campus neighbourhoods are inadequately lit and that they impair the safety and accessibility of such areas.

**Concern:** Trails in near-campus neighbourhoods (e.g. the Rail Trail and Cootes Drive trail) are failing to meet the needs of community members travelling late at night.

**Concern:** Bus stops in the neighbourhoods surrounding McMaster are not adequately lit, compromising the safety and visibility of students accessing transit.

**Recommendation:** The City of Hamilton should continue to approve capital budget requests seeking to enhance street lighting.

**Recommendation:** The City of Hamilton should commission a street light audit in Ward 1 in order to improve safety in near-campus neighbourhoods.

In 2014, the City of Hamilton approved $5.5 million toward the replacement and further addition of LED-powered street lights across the City with a projected finish in 2019.23 The project has generally been considered a citywide success, though concerns continue to be widespread among students who often feel unsafe as a result of poor visibility in their neighbourhoods in the evening and at night. In the most recent *Your City Survey* distributed by the MSU, respondents identified lighting as being one of the major safety concerns related to living in near-campus neighbourhoods.24 There are several areas within the Westdale and Ainslie-Wood communities that have been considered to be the sources of such concern, varying from sidewalks and bus shelters to walking and cycling trails.

At the same time, current lighting improvements being undertaken by the City of Hamilton have failed to include any projects in the Westdale and Ainslie-Wood neighbourhoods, ignoring the concerns of the large student population living within these communities.25 Responding to lighting concerns will not only improve the safety

23 “Hamilton Opts for LED Street Lights,” Flamborough Review, 2014, [https://www.flamboroughreview.com/news-story/5402936-hamilton-](http://www.flamboroughreview.com/news-story/5402936-hamilton-opts-for-led-street-lights/)opt[s-for-led-street-lights/.](http://www.flamboroughreview.com/news-story/5402936-hamilton-opts-for-led-street-lights/) 24 Your City Survey 2018, McMaster Students Union (unpublished).

25 “LED Street Lighting Upgrades Begin on Residential Streets Today,” City of Hamilton, 2017, https[://www.hamilton.c](http://www.hamilton.ca/government-information/news-centre/news-releases/led-street-lighting-upgrades-)a[/government-information/news-centre/news](http://www.hamilton.ca/government-information/news-centre/news-releases/led-street-lighting-upgrades-)-r[eleases/led-street-lighting-upgrades-](http://www.hamilton.ca/government-information/news-centre/news-releases/led-street-lighting-upgrades-) begin-residential.

and livability of these communities for residents, but will also help with motor vehicle traffic calming. In order to further “[Shape] Hamilton with Complete Streets” as per the the 2015 report by the McMaster Institute for Transportation & Logistics, the City of Hamilton should dedicate efforts toward creating more vibrant roadsides; oftentimes, road improvement projects focus exclusively on upgrading road infrastructure, though studies show that improving lighting can also reduce speeding in drivers to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety as well.26

As evident in ongoing MSU advocacy efforts and the *Your City Survey*, City of Hamilton trails such as the Escarpment Rail Trail and Cootes Drive Trail also continue to be poorly lit and make students feel unsafe.27 Both of these trails have long stretches of unlit passages that present several safety concerns for the students that use them and which are especially hazardous during winter months or during high-traffic hours.

Overall, trail and roadside lighting improvements in the residential areas of Westdale and Ainslie-Wood, which would improve students’ safety at night as well as help avoid them accidents, would present numerous, long-term benefits within these communities. Furthermore, with the spike in crimes in Westdale and Ainslie-Wood, fear swelling among community members, and other ongoing issues, it is not a question of whether or not to improve infrastructure toward the safety of neighbourhoods, but rather when such improvements will take place.28,29,30,31 As soon as possible, the City of Hamilton should commission a lighting audit in Ward 1 in efforts to uphold the safety and livability of the Westdale and Ainslie-Wood neighbourhoods.

# By-Law Enforcement

**Principle:** Student renters deserve to be treated as any other demographic of renters in Hamilton.

26 Shaping Hamilton with Complete Streets,” McMaster Institute for Transportation & Logistics, 2015, [http://mitl.mcmaster.ca/portfolio/shaping-hamilton-complete-streets.](http://mitl.mcmaster.ca/portfolio/shaping-hamilton-complete-streets)

27 Your City Survey 2018, McMaster Students Union (unpublished).

28 Nicole O’Reilly, “UPDATE: Man Charged in West Hamilton Break Ins,” The Hamilton Spectator, October 24, 2018, sec. News-Crime, http[s://www.thespec.com/news-story/8985143-update-man-charged-](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/8985143-update-man-charged-) in-west-hamilton-break-ins/.

29 “Hamilton Man Arrested in Westdale Stabbing - Hamilton | Globalnews.Ca,” January 8, 2019, https://globalnews.ca/news/4825592/hamilton-man-arrested-in-westdale-stabbing/.

30 Matthew Van Dongen, “Police Probing 12 Westdale Prowler Incidents,” The Hamilton Spectator, September 10, 2018, sec. News-Crime, [https://www.thespec.](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/8886206-police-probing-12-)com/[news-story/8886206-poli](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/8886206-police-probing-12-)c[e-probing-12-](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/8886206-police-probing-12-) westdale-prowler-incidents/.

31 “‘Distraught’ Man Subdued after Allegedly Chasing Woman, Stabbing Man in West Hamilton,” The Hamilton Spectator, October 15, 2018, sec. News-Crime, [https://www.the](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/8966507--)spec.[com/news-sto](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/8966507--)r[y/8966507--](http://www.thespec.com/news-story/8966507--) distraught-man-subdued-after-allegedly-chasing-woman-stabbing-man-in-west-hamilton/.

**Principle:** Students should be given information regarding by-laws when they move into a rental house.

**Concern:** Students are first-time renters and are being unfairly targeted by the City of Hamilton for not complying with by-laws.

**Concern:** The City of Hamilton’s newly adopted solution for by-law enforcement, which involves adding Environmental By-Law Officers in Ward 1 to fine students for by-law infractions, compromises students’ relationship to both the municipality and their respective communities.

**Concern:** Fines distributed to students are often expensive and increase the financial stress of students.

**Concern:** The costs associated with by-law infractions incurred by landlords are often passed along to student renters.

**Recommendation:** The City of Hamilton should discontinue the use of Environmental By-Law Officers in McMaster neighbourhoods and divert funding from this action program to support by-law education and mediation initiatives.

In December of 2016, Hamilton City Council increased the number of by-law officers stationed in the McMaster communities of Ward 1.32,33 This constituted a large expense for the City of Hamilton that furthermore damaged the sense of community experienced by students living in the area. This program was also expanded in 2017, once again being met with resistance from students.34 Today, the annual $113,000 expense that comes with each additional officer assigned to the program continues to place a financial burden on the City as it addresses an issue that could be mediated through several other means. Unfortunately, the cost recovery system of this program relies on levying fines wherever possible on students; and as a result of this effort, students face

32 Kelly Barnett, “By-law Enforcement Service Levels in the McMaster University Neighbourhoods (Ward 1) (PED16260),” report, December 2016, https://pub- hamilton.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=123135.

33 “More By-Law Officers Coming to Westdale/Ainslie Wood Area,” The Silhouette, 2016, https[://www.thes](http://www.thesil.ca/more-by-law-officers-coming-to-westdaleainslie-wood-area)il.[ca/more-by-law-officers-coming-to-westdaleainslie-wood-area.](http://www.thesil.ca/more-by-law-officers-coming-to-westdaleainslie-wood-area)

34 “Hamilton Hires Mohawk Students to Patrol McMaster University Neighbourhoods,” Hamilton News, 2017, [https://www.hamiltonnews.](http://www.hamiltonnews.com/news-story/7636178-hamilton-hires-mohawk-students-to-patrol-)com[/news-story/7636178-hamilton-hires-mohawk-students-to-patrol](http://www.hamiltonnews.com/news-story/7636178-hamilton-hires-mohawk-students-to-patrol-)- mcmaster-university-neighbourhoods/.

an uphill battle to maintain positive relationships with neighbours and the Hamilton community at large. Importantly, increased police efforts may also threaten Hamilton’s ability to attract and retain skilled students following their post-secondary education.

Considering that the objective of additional Environmental By-Law Enforcement Officers has been to improve voluntary compliance rates of by-laws, it is concerning that while other, more favourable options do exist, they still have yet to be adopted. As it stands, by-law enforcement in all communities within the City of Hamilton should seek to be informative as a primary action, and punitive secondarily, instead of having it vigorously collect fines as a mean to recover costs. Otherwise, funding for the additional Environmental By-Law Enforcement Officers in McMaster neighbourhoods should be redirected to implement by-law education initiatives.

An avenue to model this effort can be found in the Peer-to-Peer program developed by McMaster’s student-run Student Community Support Network. The volunteer-based Peer-to-Peer program engages student Community Assistants who canvas McMaster neighbourhoods to provide knowledge of by-law infractions to residents that are likely unknowingly violating City environmental by-laws.35 By modelling a system off of this program, the City of Hamilton can achieve better results than it would with a punitive system while also reducing the financial burden and community tensions associated with the existing program. Alternatively, better promotion of information regarding by- laws in the Westdale and Ainslie-Wood communities could also encourage adherence to by-laws and minimize infraction rates without the increased patrolling of Environmental By-Law Enforcement Officers.

35 “About | MSU McMaster Students Union,” McMaster Student Union, [https://www.msum](http://www.msumcmaster.ca/services-directory/17-student-community-support-network-scsn/peer-to-)c[master.ca/](http://www.msumcmaster.ca/services-directory/17-student-community-support-network-scsn/peer-to-)servic[es-directory/17-student-community-support-network-scsn/peer-to-](http://www.msumcmaster.ca/services-directory/17-student-community-support-network-scsn/peer-to-) peer-program/about.