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| MSU-logo-2001. | REPORT*From the office of the…*AVP: Municipal Affairs |
| TO: | Members of the Student Representative Assembly |
| FROM: | Maanvi Dhillon, AVP: Municipal Affairs |
| SUBJECT: | SRA 20Q Year End Report |
| DATE: | March 16th, 2021 |

Dear Assembly,

I hope you are doing well during this busy time of the year, and congratulations to all of you on reaching the end of your terms!

Below is a summary of my work over the past few months with the Municipal Affairs committee. Some projects still have to be completed by our members over these final few weeks and others will require more attention in future years than I was able to provide. Nonetheless, we achieved a great amount in our time working together. I am so grateful for the patience, hard work and dedication shown by the MA committee members. Together we made significant progress on the municipal portfolio and local advocacy, and I am excited to see how our work is built upon in future years. Thank you to all the SRA members who supported our campaigns and projects this year.

Advocacy is an ongoing process, and even though I was able to complete many of my intended projects for this year, the local issues we aim to address will continue to require further representation and attention. Some topics I focused on included affordable housing, engagement in municipal politics and affairs, and foundational work on new goals like re-allocating police funding. Hamilton’s political environment is a complex one, but the MSU plays an essential role in voicing student interests and advocating for just, sustainable, and equitable policy positions. I hope that our future representatives continue to push for transformative improvements in the city and to provide the critical student voice needed in local conversations in order to see more progress on our municipal goals.

**PROGRESS ON YEAR PLAN**

1. **Objective: Advocate for a sustainable and equitable economic and health City of Hamilton COVID-19 recovery plan**

**Description: Lobby for the city to address systemic problems in their recovery plans regarding the pandemic**

**Status: *Ongoing***

This objective speaks to the values that have consistently guided our municipal advocacy, and while I did not directly delegate on COVID-19 recovery plans at Council, I advocated for sustainable and equitable policy priorities in our pre-budget submission, our regular meetings with Councillor Wilson and the Ward 1 office, and in local groups like the Hamilton Youth Steering Committee. For example, some of our consistent advocacy points this year have has been re-investment into the City’s 10-Year Transit Plan and permanent continuation of SoBi bikeshare, which correlate with these values. I think that COVID-19 recovery is going to be a long process given current conditions, and so this kind of targeted advocacy will still be needed during the next AVP’s term. They may also encounter opportunities to more directly lobby on the basis of COVID-19 recovery. Regardless, I have continued to communicate the MSU’s concern about systemic and structural problems in Hamilton such as climate change, and I believe local stakeholders understand our priorities and policy stances as they relate to COVID-19.

1. **Objective: Promote active and sustainable transportation**

**Description: Advocacy on transportation in Hamilton including the LRT, bike lanes, bike share and public transit**

**Status: *Ongoing***

Active and sustainable transit made up a major part of our pre-budget submission this year, as we included recommendations directly addressing transit funding (re-investment in 10-Year Strategy and eliminate Area Rating) and cycling (SoBi and general cycling infrastructure). I also participated in the Hamilton Transit Alliance and the Multi-Modal Transportation for Healthy Communities committee, and I expect those groups to be strong supports for advancing this advocacy in future years. Furthermore, these issues have been central in our joint municipal advocacy efforts with Redeemer University and Mohawk College.

Funding decisions for the LRT and HSR have been affected by the pandemic and external factors like provincial and federal programs, which somewhat limits the influence of Councillors over these projects and consequently, of our lobbying. Nonetheless, there has been hopeful news about components like the LRT and SoBi, and the City is poised to continue strong investment in improving the HSR system. Moreover, since many of these goals are hefty and long-term, like eliminating area rating, it was a notable achievement this year for us to strengthen relationships and partnerships that will enable us to have a greater, city-wide impact on our transportation goals.

1. **Objective: Build partner relationships with other post-secondary institutions in Hamilton to improve municipal advocacy**

**Description: Municipal advocacy would be strengthened by collaborating with other post-secondary institutions in Hamilton**

**Status: *Completed***

This project has been led by the Vice-President Education (Ryan), so I won’t say too much. We successfully reached out and built relationships with student representatives from Mohawk College and Redeemer University. Much of the work was setting parameters for a sustained group, and that has been achieved. We also began work on a shared campaign for municipal advocacy. I am excited by the prospects of joint student representation and the potential for this group to have more even influence across the City, as it could result in significant progress on some of our ongoing issues of concern like sidewalk snow removal. Next year’s MSU advocates are in a good place to build on joint student advocacy in Hamilton.

1. **Objective: Advocate for active measures to investigate and combat anti-racism across Hamilton, including reduced City of Hamilton funding for the Hamilton Police Service**

**Description: Lobby to municipal stakeholders about police defunding and anti-racism initiatives**

**Status: *Completed***

This objective mentioned the City’s planned Anti-Racism Resource Centre. That point has not required direct advocacy from us, as community members continued to develop the HARRC and hire independent board members this past year (and the MSU amplified that call for members on our social media channels). We successfully communicated the other point about reducing the HPS budget. This recommendation was included in the pre-budget submission, discussed in our individual meetings with City Councillors, and highlighted in our Feb 8th delegation to City Council. Furthermore, we presented this request to the Hamilton Police Services Board and engaged in a public consultation for the City’s Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan. The goal was not achieved, as the HPS are expected to receive an increase in their 2021 budget and Councillor Nrinder Nann’s similar motion to re-allocate surplus police funding was voted down at Council. So, this point should continue to be highlighted in our future municipal advocacy.

1. **Objective: Enhance lighting in Ward 1**

**Description: The MSU recognizes an ongoing need to improve city lighting in student housing areas around McMaster**

**Status: *Ongoing***

This year, we submitted a lighting report developed by last year’s MA committee to the Ward 1 Office, and they helped us schedule a meeting with a team of City staff to discuss the recommendations. City staff were largely receptive of the recommendations and impressed with the specificity of that report. They agreed to review the streets that were identified to have poor lighting and make feasible adjustments where needed. However, we must follow up on their progress on this initiative, especially in future years when funding becomes available to make more significant infrastructure changes like adding light-poles to Sanders Avenue in Ainslie Wood North.

1. **Objective: Implement landlord rating system on Mac Off-Campus Housing website**

**Description: This idea was based on the previous MSU website landlord rating tool, which we believe can be transferred to the University’s housing listing site.**

**Status: *Ongoing***

I met with staff from Housing & Conference Services to discuss the potential for a landlord rating tool, as well as other ideas for improvements on the housing website. Unfortunately, we have not seen implementation of the rating tool yet, as the University is working through the liability and design questions surrounding this plan. It has also been hard to plan more frequent meetings with Housing staff, who had busy schedules during the online year. We have more meetings planned before the end of the year and hope to at least initiate processes for getting this tool in place. The next AVP should continue these conversations, as I expect them to go past the end of this term.

1. **Objective: Work with local and university stakeholders on increasing affordable housing supply for McMaster students**

**Description: Conduct research and consult with stakeholders to understand the conditions of off-campus housing supply and develop recommendations for moving forward**

**Status: *Ongoing***

For this project, we started out doing consultations to understand the scope of the off-campus housing situation: we met with McMaster’s Associate Vice-President (Students and Learning) Sean Van Koughnett, Vice-President (Administration) Roger Couldrey, Ward 1 Councillor Maureen Wilson, Alan Perlis from Knightstone Capital, and staff from the Housing and Conference Services team (Director Kevin Beatty, as well as Laurie Ham). The consultations were very helpful for us to understand the scope of current off-campus housing issues, as well as getting a sense of how involved the University is in off-campus housing. We then researched the issue and committee members wrote a report to capture the findings and some pre-liminary recommendations. Edits and finishing touches are still being made to this report, but I am confident that it will help inform future advocacy, especially as the private housing market around campus changes in the next few years. Our work this year was more exploratory and foundational, so I think next year’s AVP has solid ground to build on in order to improve our housing advocacy. A concrete outcome of this research has been signifying the MSU’s interest in being involved and consulted in private housing development projects to key stakeholders, and we hope that both the City and the University recognize this interest in future years.

1. **Objective: Submit municipal pre-budget submission and lobby city councillors**

**Description: Produce document of policy recommendations regarding Hamilton’s 2021 City Budget and meeting with city councillors to discuss our priorities**

**Status: *Completed***

Our research assistant Kiran, VP Education Ryan, and myself worked together to prepare the municipal pre-budget submission in the fall. Our priorities including ongoing points of advocacy from previous years, like area rating elimination and sidewalk snow clearing, as well as new points on SoBi bikeshare and the police budget. We met with several Councillors in late November and early December to discuss the recommendations in our submission, and all Councillors were emailed a copy of our document. I also delegated to Council on February 8th, where I highlighted some of our recommendations. This was a great experience and the practice clearly contributes to the MSU’s influence as a local stakeholder, so I look forward to seeing it continue in years to come.

1. **Objective: Complete 2021 Your City survey**

**Description: The MSU conducts a survey every few years to gauge student perceptions of the Ciy of Hamilton**

**Status: *Completed***

TheMSU conducted an MSU Your City survey in 2016 and 2018 to gather general student feedback on their experience in Hamilton. We decided to continue the initiative, though we modified the questions significantly to investigate different areas than in previous versions and to adjust to the pandemic conditions. The survey was conducted in January on Microsoft Forms and advertised through MSU channels, as well as class announcements. It received almost 300 responses. We were able to collect valuable information to inform future student advocacy, such as students’ rent prices or perceptions of policing, as well as more general values and perceptions of the city. The MA committee is currently working on graphing and analyzing the data for a report, so next year’s AVP MA will be able to consult this data when selecting their advocacy priorities.

1. **Objective: Monitor the implementation of the landlord licensing pilot project**

**Description: In December 2018, the City of Hamilton discussed a two-year landlord licensing pilot project for Wards 1 and 8**

**Status: *Ongoing***

The approval of the pilot project was delayed at City Council as certain bylaw modifications needed to be made, and City staff were interrupted by new work and redeployments due to the pandemic. We continued to check in about the progress of this pilot through the Ward 1 Office and the next AVP should also monitor this file. Hopefully a report will be presented sometime in Spring and we can see more action on this important initiative.

1. **Objective: Continue MSU representation on local associations/committees**

**Description: The MSU has a seat on various local associations and advocacy groups**

**Status: *Ongoing***

This year, I regularly attended meetings of the Hamilton Transit Alliance (HTA) and the Hamilton Youth Steering Committee (YSC). Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the neighbourhood associations that I would typically participate in (the Ainslie Wood/Westdale Community Association (AWWCA) and the Ainslie Wood Community Association (AWCA)) did not actively meet. Nonetheless, YSC and HTA meetings were incredible opportunities to represent student voices and connect with others in the community. I believe the MSU has built strong relationships with these groups and that they present important opportunities to establish ourselves and advance our advocacy goals, so it is crucial to continue attending meetings and contributing to their work.

1. **Objective: Host Municipal Engagement Week**

**Description: Host campaign to increase student engagement with municipal affairs by spreading awareness of methods for engagement, supporting community organizations and advocates, and providing opportunities for students to communicate with political representatives and City Staff**

**Status: *Completed***

We ran this week-long campaign during the second week of March. It was entirely online, with three days of infographic posts and one synchronous event, which was a Q&A with Councillor Maureen Wilson. Our committee researched and wrote text for infographics on three topics: Local Journalism and Advocacy, Municipal Politics, and Community Involvement. For any local partners referenced in the infographics (Ex: journalists, advocates and organizations on our lists), I reached out and confirmed their permission to be included in the campaign. Infographics were posted in a Facebook event and on Instagram. The Q&A with Councillor Wilson was streamed live on Facebook: we released a form for students to submit questions ahead of time and took live questions through Facebook comments. I am proud of the committee’s work on this campaign and I think we created valuable resources to help students get involved at the municipal level in Hamilton, as well as provided an important opportunity to directly engage with our Ward Councillor.

1. **Objective: Develop research resources to provide a foundation for future municipal advocacy work in the MSU**

**Description: Prepare research packages based on municipal issues such as affordable housing and storm water management**

**Status: *Ongoing***

Unfortunately, we had less committee time this year than was needed to make significant progress on these research packs. We did write a report about our findings from research on housing and affordability, and we also produced thorough, research-based documents on police funding in both the municipal pre-budget submission and the police board delegation, so those resources all contribute to the goal underlying this objective. I would encourage future AVPs to consider conducting focussed research projects like these, perhaps on storm water management given its pertinence in Hamilton.

**CLOSING REMARKS**

It has been rewarding and meaningful to reflect on the accomplishments of this past year. I had doubts about the feasibility of my goals when I wrote them out last fall, but I am proud of the number of objectives that I was able to make substantive progress on. There is a team of people that deserve credit for our achievements, including the MA research assistant Kiran, VP Ed Ryan, Advocacy Coordinator Tabitha, and several others that supported our objectives. The MA committee’s contributions were absolutely essential to these projects, so thank you to all of our members: Siobhan Teel, Saif Alam, Saad Baig, Riana Bagtasos, Gail Del Castillo, Zia Mawani, Simranjeet Singh, and Bethel Samson. It was also a pleasure to connect with and learn from people across Hamilton who invest so much into improving this city for all of its residents.

I am grateful to have had the special opportunity to represent students and learn about Hamilton in this role. At every step along the way, I saw just how important municipal politics is in shaping student experiences, and how deeply involved our students are in supporting and contributing to the local community. It was a privilege to advocate for students and voice our interests on important city issues, and I have gained immense trust in the potential of advocacy to increase the quality of student life. I am excited to stay involved with these topics (will be looking out for news about the Hamilton LRT!), and I cannot wait to see how the MSU continues to advocate for an equitable, sustainable, and just Hamilton.

Best,

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