

Student 2014 Municipal Election Platform

About the Alma Mater Society (AMS): The Alma Mater Society of Queen's University is Canada's oldest undergraduate student government. With over 16 000 members, the AMS represents Queen's students at the municipal governance level through its Municipal Affairs Commission. Additionally, the Society provides volunteer opportunities for Queen's students in the Kingston community and offers housing resources and support for housing related issues.

Executive Summary

With the upcoming Kingston municipal election, students believe it is critical for City Council candidates to engage on issues that affect the quality of life for many Kingston residents. Post-secondary students represent a key population that contribute immensely to the economic, social and cultural vitality of the City of Kingston, and also poses unique challenges and opportunities to benefit the future development of the City.

The Alma Mater Society's student platform will address the issues that affect its members every year as residents of the University District and the City of Kingston as a whole. The following recommendations will not only address long standing town-gown challenges, but will in turn support the City's standing priorities, as identified in the current City of Kingston strategic plan.

Addressing quality student housing

Ensuring safe and quality housing has long been an issue in the University District. As first time tenants, students are often reluctant to file a complaint with the Kingston Property Standards office in order to have their home inspected. This is due in part to fear of landlord retaliation or disturbing an absentee landlord. The 'reactive' nature of bylaw enforcement has been the subject of various City reports such as the joint Queen's University and City of Kingston Housing Working Group. Voluntary proactive programs such as the Streetscape program have been developed as a result. Currently, the policy of landlord licensing is being considered by City staff, yet case studies across Ontario, especially London and Waterloo, suggest this policy to be ineffective and expensive. **With this in mind, the AMS recommends the creation of a pilot program for the City of Kingston to train and employ student officers of the AMS-run Housing Grievance Centre to canvas the University District throughout the months of October and March in a proactive property standards blitz.**

Improving recycling for Kingston residents

With City staff having recently commissioned an external contractor to assess the business case of a regional Material Recycling Facility (MRF), **the AMS recommends City Council candidates consider the benefits to a single stream (blue box only) system versus a dual stream (blue box and grey box) system.** These include lower greenhouse gas emissions, greater ease of use, and less neighbourhood litter. Additionally, a single stream system would help the City of Kingston accomplish its waste diversion goal of 65% and become more sustainable.

Promoting pedestrian friendly streets

As part of the goal to become Canada's most sustainable city, the City of Kingston has identified promoting active transportation as a key strategy. Students living in the University District already live in one of the most walkable neighbourhoods in the City, and generally exemplify sustainable transportation choices that are advocated by Sustainable Kingston, such as walking or cycling to and from campus. This is no less true than in the winter, when many students continue their studies at Queen's and frequently walk to campus. In order to encourage pedestrians and promote a sustainable lifestyle, **the AMS recommends that the City of Kingston augment its arterial sidewalk clearing routes in the University District to facilitate a network of clear pedestrian routes towards and away from Queen's University.**

Welcoming students to Kingston

Orientation Week is an opportune time for strengthening and maintaining strong town-gown relations. For almost every first year student, Orientation Week will be the first interaction they will have with the local businesses, community organizations and government services that make up their new home of Kingston. During this week, first year students and their upper year leaders also give back to their new community through annual charitable events, such as the Arts and Science Undergraduate Society's Shinearama campaign which donates up to \$60 000 per year towards cystic fibrosis research. In recognizing the importance of Orientation Week for town-gown relations, **the AMS recommends that City Council candidates continue to support Queen's Orientation Week by granting the necessary bylaw exemptions after careful consideration, as well as providing a welcoming atmosphere for incoming Queen's students.**

Introduction:

Comprising approximately 20% of Kingston's population, post-secondary education students represent a significant demographic for the City of Kingston. Moreover, with the continuing rise in popularity of "creative" or "smart" cities, students are a substantial influx of young, intellectual talent who also contribute to the social and cultural viability of Kingston.

Queen's students, compose the largest student body in Kingston, and together contribute invaluable services to Kingston. Through AMS committees and student clubs, Queen's students devote thousands of hours towards social causes in Kingston. The Municipal Affairs Commission alone has over 300 volunteers each year who dedicate their time to Kingston schools, senior residences, and shelters each week. One such committee, the Queen's United Way, donates over \$20 000 annually towards the local branch of the United Way, and devotes hundreds of hours promoting student volunteerism in Kingston. Similarly, the Queen's Project on International Development's "5 Days for the Homeless" has contributed over \$21 000 over the last two years to the Kingston Youth Shelter, preventing it from closing their day services and resuming full operations, or the Queen's Soul Food club which donates unused food from university cafeterias to shelters in need.

Student's discretionary income also supports a viable downtown core, including a variety of retail and professional services. As of 2009, it has been estimated that student spending contributes over \$200 million annually to the local Kingston economy.²

Arriving from every province in Canada and over 70 countries internationally, Queen's students are contributing an increasing portion to Kingston's diversity and initiate valuable community events such as the Reelout Film Festival, the African and Caribbean Students Association's Mosaiculture, and performances by Queen's Musical Theatre.

Furthermore, if the City of Kingston is to achieve its goal of becoming Canada's most sustainable city, as stated in Sustainable Kingston's inaugural report, students will have played a large role. The AMS' Bus-It program draws in approximately \$1 million in annual revenue for Kingston Transit, which then supports all Kingston Transit riders. The overwhelming majority of students also live in one of the City's most walkable neighbourhood.³ For students in the University District, using active transportation of the kind promoted by Sustainable Kingston, such as walking and cycling, is a regular occurrence.

² Healey, R., & Akerblom, K. (September 2003). *Queen's university and the kingston area: An economic partnership*.

³ With a Walkscore of 98, the University District comes only second to Downtown Kingston's score of 100. The Walkscore for Kingston as a whole is 49.

All this is not to say that students do not pose other challenges for the City. Indeed the impact of a growing student population has had adverse effects on the affordability of rental housing, as well as caused family flight from some neighbourhood streets surrounding Queen's campus. Student behaviour with regards to litter and noise has also had an impact on neighbourhood vitality, especially when the diversity of mixed residential neighbourhoods is lost and a particular street becomes predominantly student occupied.

Yet following in the example of other similar cities, a student population has the potential to be a catalyst for innovative economic development and neighbourhood revitalization. A pertinent example is Waterloo, Ontario, where the economic impact of spin-off companies from the University of Waterloo has been estimated to be over one billion dollars, and the City of Waterloo and the universities of Waterloo and Wilfred Laurier have completed a community plan for their student neighbourhood of Northdale.⁴ The recommendations that follow reflect the AMS' belief that student contributions are a vital element to the City of Kingston. They are based on careful consideration of the City's current priorities and fiscal situation.⁵ Should the incoming City Council implement our recommendations, the quality of life for students will increase substantially and the City of Kingston will be closer to fully realizing the potential of economic development and neighbourhood revitalization afforded by a large student population.

Addressing quality student housing:

The topic of property standards has surfaced frequently through several iterations of student accommodation reviews undertaken by the City, such as through Queen's University and City of Kingston Housing Working Group in 2009.

Over this time, important programs were developed jointly between the City, the AMS, and Queen's which may be considered innovative including the establishment of the Streetscape program, the Voluntary Inspection program, the Queen's Landlord Contract program, and the formation of the Student Property Assessment Team (SPAT). Engaging with local stakeholders, the AMS has found the impact of these programs, coupled with public education, to have been

⁴ Warkentin, J. (2012). *Moving forward together: Strategies for Waterloo's town and gown committee.*

⁵ As reflected in the City of Kingston's Strategic Plan 2011-2014

successful in upholding property standards in a proactive manner in the University District and other neighbourhoods.⁶

Currently, as part of the Central Accommodation Review, City staff are also reviewing the policy of landlord licensing, among others, as a proactive property standards tool for implementation. In essence, a landlord or rental unit licensing policy would require owners of rental units to obtain a license from the municipality, on the condition that the unit satisfies some combination of building code, public health and fire code regulations and be subject to a nominal fee.

Landlord licensing policies have previously been under review or legal challenge by the Ontario Human Rights Commission in various Ontario municipalities such as London, Oshawa, and North Bay for their potentially discriminating nature against certain tenant minorities, such as students.^{7,8} However the policy itself remains problematic for other crucial reasons.

Unlike other business licences which municipalities issue, landlord licensing is unique in that the cost of the license falls on each individual unit which, unlike other businesses that serve hundreds or thousands of customers, can at most only hold a handful of tenants. The resulting fee, which varies from \$200 to over \$700 across municipalities in Ontario, can be lawfully passed down onto tenants in the form of higher rent under s. 126 of the Residence Tenancy Act. Often times these fees can result in rent increases higher than the Province's annual guideline increase, and with increased compliance costs have an adverse effect on affordable housing.^{9,10}

Moreover, in the case of Waterloo and London, lack of compliance with licensing has led to large government expenditures. Three years since implementing the program, the City of London's licensing operation faced a shortfall of just over a million dollars and found only 15 violations according to a municipal freedom of information and protection of privacy act response from the office responsible.¹¹ Similarly a low compliance rate of only 37% in Waterloo and high fixed-costs has resulted in increased fees to reduce the budgetary burden of the new licensing policy.¹² In a review of landlord licensing programs in the United States, researchers at

⁶ Stakeholders include Queen's administrators, local landlords and residents, as well as City staff

⁷ City of Kingston Planning Department. (2013). *Central accommodation review: Regulating the number of bedrooms per residential dwelling unit-status update on other ontario municipalities*

⁸ Fenn, M. (September 2013). *A review of the effectiveness and implications of municipal licensing of residential apartments*

⁹ In 2014, the Provincial annual guideline increase for rent was 0.4%

¹⁰ Fenn, M. (September 2013). *A review of the effectiveness and implications of municipal licensing of residential apartments*

¹¹ London property management association submission: Planning Committee, City of London, (September 2012).

¹² Hoffer, J., & City of Guelph Planning, Building, Engineering and Environment Committee. (July 2013). *Submissions in response to Cost/Benefit analysis: Residential rental licensing*

the University of Wisconsin surveyed 15 licensing regimes across the country and found only two to be self-sufficient.¹³ Thus, it is likely that any landlord licensing policy implemented in Kingston would come at large expense to taxpayers barring a large levy placed on tenants.

The effectiveness of landlord licensing regimes are in great doubt. In Waterloo, after two years of implementing its landlord licensing program, half of approximately 6000 units have been licensed with only one unit successfully rejected for non-compliance with health and safety standards.¹⁴ Furthermore, in a city-wide survey, almost sixty percent of respondents did not know if their rental unit was licensed or not, despite a legal obligation for landlords to display their licence in clear view.¹⁵ Recently, the cities of Guelph and Hamilton have rejected landlord licensing proposals based on their potentially high cost, effect on affordable housing, and inability to govern the behaviour of tenants.^{16,17}

In both Guelph and Hamilton, other proactive enforcement tools were favored in rejecting landlord licensing including public education, and door to door inspections. One such program, Project Compliance in Hamilton, generated great success by inspecting over 700 properties, issuing a total of 928 orders to correct 3 231 by-law deficiencies in the period of July 2010 to July 2011. Project Compliance swept eight wards in the City of Hamilton at a net cost of approximately \$370 000. However, the Planning and Economic Development Department of Hamilton did note the difficulty of gaining access to single or semi-detached homes in the project area due to tenants unwillingness to allow entry to a property standards officer. In their update to Hamilton's Planning Committee, the department notes that officers were only able to access "just over 40 of the 700 single/semi-detached houses."¹⁸ Interestingly, a similar door to door program in Kingston achieved a similar response rate of 5% from tenants in student homes, who were similarly hesitant to allow property standards officers into their homes.¹⁹

The previous success of innovative programs in Hamilton and Kingston property standards offices demonstrates the importance of proactive enforcement methods to ensure the safety of rental housing. Currently, the AMS and the City of Kingston work in tandem to address the

¹³ Crichton, I., Rosenberg, M., & Thompson, J. (2003). *Rental unit licensing: Applicability to milwaukee*.

¹⁴ Hoffer, J., & City of Guelph Planning, Building, Engineering and Environment Committee. (July 2013). *Submissions in response to Cost/Benefit analysis: Residential rental licensing*

¹⁵ Desmond, P. (February 2014) Waterloo urges tenants to learn if rental unit is licensed. *The Record*,

¹⁶ Craggs, S. (September 2013), City votes down controversial law to license apartments. *CBC News*,

¹⁷ Shuttleworth, J. (April 2014) City staff rejects licensing program for rental housing in guelph. *Guelph Mercury*,

¹⁸ City of Hamilton Planning and Economic Development Department. (July 2011). *Project compliance update (wards 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8)*

¹⁹ Willing, T. (August 2014). Aguilar Gonzalez A. (Ed.), *Interview with terry willing, director of building and licensing for the city of kingston*.

shortfalls of property standards enforcement by utilizing student volunteers to disseminate information on property standards and conduct preliminary inspections of student homes. It has been found that student volunteers are able to achieve higher response rates from student tenants, given that the peer to peer relationship can appear to be less intimidating. This same peer to peer relationship can also promote a stronger public education piece on property standards, tenant rights and other housing related issues. Moreover students, unlike property standards officers, do not have a legal obligation to report property standards infractions allowing for more flexibility to resolve an issue. However it has been challenging for the AMS to motivate student volunteers to be trained in property standards, and canvas the University District neighbourhood given the large time commitment required of volunteers.

With this in mind, the AMS recommends the creation of a pilot program for the City of Kingston to train and employ student officers of the AMS-run Housing Grievance Centre to canvas the University District throughout the months of October and March in a proactive property standards blitz. This will help resolve the challenges faced by property standards officers in acquiring tenant consent and compensate AMS volunteers for their hard work and time. October and March have been selected as the most ideal times when weather permits neighbourhood canvassing. With limited funding of \$8000 to \$9000 annually, it is estimated that student officers could canvass 1000 properties per year and reach the great majority of rental properties within and beyond the University District.

Improving recycling for Kingston residents:

As part of its study into the feasibility of a regional Material Recovery Facility (MRF) the City of Kingston's Solid Waste Division will also be assessing the potential for a single stream recycling system versus the present dual stream system.

According to the City's own private consultant, HDR Corporation, previous comparisons or reporting of the benefits of dual or single stream systems in various Ontario municipalities have reflected "local circumstances that differ substantially from one area to the next."²⁰ Key variables which can dictate the business case for a regional MRF or a single stream recycling system include level of tonnage diverted as well as the status of the existing municipal waste

²⁰ HDR Inc. (March 2013). *An assessment of single and dual stream recycling, including current program performance in large Ontario municipalities.*

management system.²¹ In the case of single stream systems, these variables have the potential to require a large investment in order to switch from an existing dual stream system. While HDR will assess the financial feasibility of a regional MRF with single stream capabilities, there are other intangible benefits to single stream recycling which may not be reflected in a business case.

Recognizing that students are also City taxpayers, on whom the investment of a single stream system would bear, the AMS recommends that City Council candidates consider the following benefits to a single stream system in addition to the business case for a regional MRF with single stream or dual stream capabilities.

Environmental

As mentioned previously, the City of Kingston has an ambitious goal to become Canada's Most Sustainable City. To achieve this, waste diversion will have to play a large role in helping citizens to make sustainable, everyday choices. The City has set a waste diversion goal of 65%²², and the AMS believes a single stream system will have the highest impact towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions and diverting waste. A single stream recycling system would help to reduce the City's greenhouse gas emissions both directly and indirectly. Since single stream programs do not require separation of materials curbside, these programs can benefit from the efficiency gains from automated collection. As a result single stream systems require the smallest fleets thereby reducing direct air emissions.²³ Single stream system in tandem with other variables such as larger bins and increased education, also tend to have higher diversion rates leading to further decreases in greenhouse gas emissions and thereby helping the City to accomplish its goal for greater sustainability and waste diversion.²⁴

Ease of Use

From a user perspective, a single stream system would also be much more convenient to use and in a sense 'reward' recycling by facilitating a simple method for waste diversion. This aspect becomes much more significant when multi-family residential units are taken into consideration. As the City of Kingston continues to fill the provincial mandate of residential

²¹ *ibid*

²² Solid Waste Division, City of Kingston. (December 2010). *Waste recycling strategy 2010-2013*.

²³ HDR Inc. (March 2013). *An assesment of single and dual stream recycling. including current program performance in large ontario municipalities*.

²⁴ *ibid*

intensification, single stream systems by occupying less space and convenient to use, have been found to improve diversion rates in high density buildings as well as in older downtown buildings²⁵

Litter

The possibility of using lidded carts in a single stream system also has the benefit of preserving the integrity of recyclable fibres and reducing litter. Paper products that may have otherwise been found to be unrecoverable due to rain or snow would be protected. Additionally, lidded carts protect materials from other climatic elements such as the wind or animals, and help reduce litter in residential neighbourhoods.

Promoting pedestrian friendly streets

The benefit of living in the University District neighbourhood is its central location and proximity to amenities such as Downtown Kingston, Queen's University, Kingston Collegiate Vocational Institute, Kingston General Hospital, City Park, and many other local businesses and services. This proximity enables an active lifestyle led by many of the students in the University District, and exemplifies a key goal of Sustainable Kingston and the City of Kingston to encourage active transportation such as walking, cycling or using public transit.²⁶ This lifestyle is no less evident in the winter when students continue to undertake their studies in Kingston.

Currently, City staff are updating the City's Winter Control Plan, which prioritizes snow removal on roads and sidewalks through the City of Kingston into three main categories: arterial, residential and walkway. In general, arterial sidewalks are cleared within 24 hours of snowfall and accumulate no more than 2.5 cm of snow, while both residential and walkway sidewalks accumulate 5 cm of snow, and are cleared within 48 hours and 72 hours respectively. The updates are to align the Winter Control Plan with the growth of the City as well as to increase Public Work's resources for snow removal. The most recent map for snow clearing routes in the area encompassing the University District is shown below in Figure 1.

²⁵ HDR Inc. (March 2013). *An assesment of single and dual stream recycling, including current program performance in large ontario municipalities.*

²⁶ City of Kingston. (2010). *Sustainable kingston: Designing our community's future together.*

The AMS recognizes the enormity of the task faced by Kingston Public Works each winter as they consistently endeavour to maintain clear sidewalks and roads for all residents. Students believe in a balanced approach towards snow removal, recognizing the need to promote active transportation year round by ensuring cleared streets, while addressing the needs for snow removal throughout the whole of Kingston. **Therefore, the AMS recommends that City of Kingston augments its arterial sidewalk clearing routes in the University District to facilitate clear pedestrian routes towards and away from Queen's University.** This network (illustrated in Figure 2) will further the City's goal for sustainability, as well as benefitting not only students in the University District, but also other residents and colleagues who work in the various institutions surrounding Queen's campus. The designation of arterial sidewalks is necessary in order to recognize the frequency of use of these sidewalks. Students and other residents rely on these routes daily, and snow can quickly compact to form dangerous icy conditions. The accessibility of these sidewalks for residents and commuters will also greatly increase, and lead to a higher quality of living for all residents.

Moreover, these suggestions are based on the City's own criteria for arterial sidewalks, with Brock and Johnson streets being arterial streets as defined in the Official Plan, and Division Street being a bus route. University Avenue should also be cleared on both sides given its status as an emergency route towards Kingston General Hospital. These additional arterial routes would also be accomplished through minimal application of City resources, since crews are clearing portions of these streets already and would simply need to extend their routes by five blocks at the most.

Figure



Figure



Welcoming students to Kingston

A key part of the Town Gown Strategic Plan has been engaging students by welcoming them to their new home of Kingston during Orientation Week, held for all incoming first year students. Orientation Week events such as Tour of the Town, Sidewalk Sale, and Queen's in the Park are the first interactions many Queen's students have with the community organizations, local businesses, and government services that make up their new city.

Students also contribute during Orientation Week as well. Each faculty society at Queen's includes a charitable component into their Orientation Week including Engineering's Nut Drive with Kingston rotary clubs and the Arts & Sciences' Shinerama campaign, which donates up to \$60 000 per year towards cystic fibrosis research

A key part of Orientation Week's success is the partnership formed between the AMS and the City of Kingston and other community partners. Each year, Orientation Week events utilize City resources such as City and Breakwater Park at the permission of City staff and council. Moreover, large scale events like the Frosh Concert could not go on without the necessary noise bylaw exemption granted from the City. City council and staff also help to welcome first year students by coming to speak on campus, advertising welcoming messages and letters, offering useful information about City services to Queen's students in general, and attending the various events themselves.

In recognizing the importance of Orientation Week for town-gown relations, **the AMS recommends that City Council candidates continue to support Queen's Orientation Week by granting the necessary bylaw exemptions after careful consideration, as well as providing a welcoming atmosphere for incoming Queen's students.**

Conclusion:

The AMS is confident that the recommendations set forth in this platform will have a substantial impact on the quality of life for students in Kingston, while remaining cognizant of the City of Kingston's fiscal responsibility. Students play an integral role in the economic, social and cultural viability of Kingston, and by implementing these recommendations the incoming City Council will also advance City-wide priorities such as maintaining infrastructure, waste diversion, and enhancing the sustainability of Kingston.

Building on the innovative partnerships and programs already formed between the AMS and City of Kingston, financing proactive housing inspections with student officers will ensure the safety of homes in the University District as well as encourage a sense of responsibility among Queen's students to their community. This potential program also addresses concerns with currently existing enforcement methods, while remaining financially prudent for the City.

The consideration of a single stream recycling system and its more intangible benefits is critical to improving the City's waste diversion services for all Kingston residents. Students remain committed to doing their part to help achieve the City's waste diversion goal, and the AMS looks forward to continuing to engage the City and other groups as the business case for a regional MRF develops.

The AMS' recommendation of a cohesive network of arterial snow removal routes for the University District, will also encourage active transportation among Kingston residents commuting to Queen's University, Kingston General Hospital and KCVI. This will undoubtedly demonstrate the City's strong commitment towards sustainability by facilitating active transportation for residents as well increasing the accessibility of sidewalks during the winter.

A key opportunity to foster strong town gown relations continues to be Orientation Week. For almost all Queen's students this week represents their first interaction with their new home of Kingston. Preserving the strong relationship between the City of Kingston and the AMS while

planning for these events, helps ensure that every first year student recognizes the value of living in their new home of Kingston.

The AMS urges all City Council candidates to commit to our recommendations, which will send a strong message that students are a vital part of the City of Kingston. Our goals reflect many of the City's own in advocating for a safe, sustainable, and welcoming community to live in. The AMS looks forward to continuing to work with all City Council candidates and City staff to ensure that student voices are heard as we plan for the future economic and social prosperity of the City of Kingston.

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