C+CP Engagement Charter – Briefing Note

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Prepared on: July 29th, 2014

The AMS has had many concerns over a number of years about UBC Campus and Community Planning’s (C+CP) consultation of students and other members of the community, especially with respect to land use and density. The reasons for this are many and varied. Concerns with regards to consultations include:

- Leading, double-barrelled and framed questions, questions that make assumptions or present false trade-offs
- Limited opportunity for general comments or suggestions
- Acknowledging the specific needs of Acadia Park Residents
- The level of community engagement
- The scope and tone of consultations
- The circular feedback loop of C+CP’s relationship with the UBC Board of Governors (BoG)
- No public access to the decision making body, the BoG

A full explanation of this history can be found in historical AMS documents, such as policies dating from 2005, a report on the Land Use Consultation from the Land Use revisions of 2010-2011, and most recently, in the Acadia Park Community Needs Assessment. These reports lay out the full scope of the above concerns.

Following the release of the Acadia Park Community Needs Assessment Report, a conversation was begun between the AMS and UBC on the recommendations that the report lays out. This conversation involved the AMS VP Academic and University Affairs, Anne Kessler, and AMS Campus Development Commissioner, Brittany Jang, the UBC VP Students, Louise Cowin, Acting Associate VP Campus and Community Planning, Lisa Colby, and the Managing Director of UBC Housing and Hospitality Services, Andrew Parr and occurred on December 6th, 2013. Following this meeting, Anne Kessler and Louise Cowin made a presentation to the BoG on January 28th, 2014. There are three main areas of continuing conversation arising from the Acadia Park report: current issues of renovations and representation, the land use designation of Acadia Park, and consultations.

The engagement charter emerged out of the conversations regarding consultations. This work was begun once Michael White, the new Associate VP C+CP, took office in February 2014. An initial conversation regarding the concerns took place on February 26th, and two past AMS VP Academic and University Affairs, Kiran Mahal and Matt Parson, were invited to this conversation. A draft was created by Aviva Savelson, C+CP Senior Manager for Consultation, and a conversation on this draft occurred on Friday April 2nd, 2014. The AMS provided many suggestions and additions, based on our experiences as outlined in the Land Use Consultation Report and the Acadia Park Community Needs Assessment Report, and throughout this first meeting and approximately five follow-up meetings and conversations, essentially all suggestions made were incorporated on the first five topics listed above.

It is important to note that the engagement charter does not address all the concerns raised by the AMS. It does not address:

- The circular feedback loop of C+CP’s relationship with the UBC BoG
- Lack of public access to decision making body, the BoG

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Although both of these two issues remain important to the AMS, they cannot be addressed by C+CP on their own. C+CP cannot change the undemocratic nature of the BoG as this structure is set by the provincial government, nor can it dictate the relationship with the BoG – rather, this is under the BoG’s purview. This does not, however, mean that we do not have the opportunity to improve the situation. The circular feedback loop wherein C+CP is the “consultation facilitators”, “summarizer of results”\(^4\) and “body which makes recommendations to the Board of Governors” (Mahal 2013, 113) will still exist, however principles 9 and 10 of the charter do improve this situation by working towards an ongoing conversation on consultation. Additionally, one suggestion made within the Acadia Park Needs Assessment Report is to create an independent oversight committee to review consultation practices, which would include the voices of stakeholders on campus. This would allow separate reporting to the BoG on consultation practices, and therefore it is suggested that we recommend to the BoG that they explore options for creating such a body.

Therefore the Office of the Vice-President Academic and University Affairs proposes the following policy:

*Whereas the Engagement Charter, written by UBC Campus and Community Planning in consultation with the AMS and other campus stakeholders, will be approved by the UBC Board of Governors in September 2014; and*

*Whereas the Engagement Charter addresses many gaps in consultation noted by the AMS in the past;*

*BIRT the AMS endorse the Engagement Charter and commend UBC for taking a large step towards improving consultation and engagement practices at UBC;*

*BIFRT the AMS recommend to the UBC Board of Governors the creation of a body that can provide independent oversight of the consultation processes such as a stakeholder’s report to the BoG on consultation that will break the circular feedback loop that exists.*

*BIFRT the AMS recommend to the UBC Board of Governors set a time for a regular review process of the Engagement Charter to ensure that the Principles and Guidelines remain up to date.*

*BIFRT the VP Academic and University Affairs write a letter to the UBC Board of Governors expressing the AMS’s endorsement of the charter and continuing suggestions for improvement.*

\(^4\) It is also important to note that one suggestion – to include a full list of comments in an appendix to the UBC BoG – was implemented by C+CP in 2013.