



**THE ALMA MATER SOCIETY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA VANCOUVER**

**AMS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Minutes of August 25, 2021

**Attendance**

Present: Cole Evans (President), Eshana Bhangu (VP Academic & University Affairs), Mary Gan (VP Finance), Lauren Benson (VP Administration), Saad Shoaib (VP External), Lorris Leung (Senior Student Services Manager), Mitchell Prost (Student Services Manager), Keith Hester (Managing Director), Sheldon Goldfarb (Archivist & Clerk of Council)

Guests: Laurent Levesque and Megan Quigley (Utile Student Housing), James Cabangon (AVP External)

Recording Secretary: Sheldon Goldfarb

**Call to Order**

- The meeting was called to order at 12:05 pm and took place by videoconference.

**Agenda**

- The agenda was adopted (Lauren, Eshana).

**Minutes**

- The minutes of August 18 were approved (Eshana, Lauren).

**Utile**

- Saad:
  - We've been working with Utile, planning on building non-profit student housing
  - There's a horrible housing crisis in Vancouver.
  - Feasibility study with Utile on what non-profit housing would look like.
  - Bringing it to the next Council meeting for feedback.
  - It involves a lot of work with government and other lenders.
- Laurent:
  - Utile is a Montreal-based non-profit developing affordable housing since 2013.
  - The feasibility study ("Moving Towards Affordability") looks at the need for affordable housing.
  - BC is facing a housing crisis, and students are at the forefront, making up tens of thousands of renters in one of the toughest markets in the country.
  - Only a minority of students are in campus housing.

- Student renters pay more than the average rent in Vancouver, and Vancouver's average is the highest in the country.
- The federal government has come into housing again with a big splash; all parties in the election are talking about it, but not a lot are presenting solutions.
- Utile is presenting solutions (so is a group in Ontario).
- Utile has five different projects in Quebec: non-profit, no shareholders or investors. By students, for students.
- Aiming to stabilize rents.
- We start from what students need, not with what we can charge; and we're not aiming at dorm-style buildings.
- Our students are mostly in self-contained apartments.
- We were inspired by projects around the world, e.g., in Germany.
- We've started Woodnote in Montreal in collaboration with the Concordia Student Union: the first of many projects.
- The feasibility study:
  - Explored the feasibility of the Utile approach in BC.
  - We concluded that it is feasible.
  - A project will not have to be funded 100% by the AMS.
  - Even with below market rents, a lot can be funded from them.
  - Lots of funding sources are possible, e.g., the CMHC.
  - The AMS contribution would be 32% (\$21 million).
- The parameters:
  - 200 rooms.
  - Rents below market value.
  - Market-based land and construction costs.
- Looking at this as a pilot.
  - 200 units just scratches the surface, but it would take us years if we planned for 2,000.
- A non-profit distinct from the AMS would do the development, protecting the AMS from financial risk and keeping the AMS from becoming a landlord for its members.
- We recommend that you partner with development experts rather than trying to build expertise in-house.
- Could save students \$150 million over 40 years.
- Timeline: 5 years. Real estate takes time. It took Utile seven years to develop its first project.
- There's political work: mobilizing funds, involving other student unions so that you're not the only ones.
- Saad:
  - Will send the feasibility study.
  - Establishing a relationship with BC Housing.

- Already have something via David Eby, our MLA and the minister responsible for housing.
  - Scoping government funding.
  - Optimistic.
  - Recently the government invested \$2 billion into housing for low and middle income people.
  - Also scoping out the establishment of a non-profit.
    - We'd have a majority vote on their board.
    - They'd assume the financial risk.
  - Financial health of the AMS is a priority.
  - Not within our mandate to build housing.
  - Preparing a model for Council.
- Keith:
    - Want to follow the same model as Concordia: a sizable contribution as a seed fund from their student union.
  - Laurent:
    - There is a financial mechanism in Quebec called a rotating non-profit investment fund.
    - There are many ways to do the financial piece.
  - Saad:
    - To cut costs we're looking at working with the province.
  - Laurent:
    - Our approach involved setting up two non-profits.
  - Saad:
    - Students are not in a good place coming out of COVID.
    - Forcing a fee on them this year (through a referendum) is not the route we want to go.
    - We want to do a positional referendum first: find out if students are interested without asking for a fee.
    - Then we would determine if we would have a fee referendum next year.
  - Laurent:
    - Our report is agnostic about how the AMS raises and allocates its funds.
    - In Quebec not all five student societies went to referendum, but most did.
    - We've spoken to people in BC: everyone is excited about this.
  - Cole:
    - The red flag is the \$21 million contribution from us.
    - That's \$20 per student for 20 years.
    - To be honest, the rental rates you're forecasting in this new project are not much different from what UBC is trying to do:
      - A studio apartment at \$1150 a month.
  - Saad:
    - That's considerably below market value, especially on campus.

- Cole:
  - For a studio apartment, it's not a huge difference, maybe \$2,000 a year, a marginal saving for each student.
  - Does that justify a \$21 million commitment?
  - We could partner instead with UBC.
  - To my mind, a studio at \$1150 a month is not affordable housing.
  - You can get a nano suite at UBC for \$900.
  - I don't know if there's enough here to justify charging a fee.
  - I do like the coalition approach: if we could create three projects, maybe this would be more tenable.
  - The project is too ambitious for the limited cost-benefit for students.
- Megan:
  - The path forward is up to you, but remember the long-term view.
  - We project that 40 years from now students will be paying 60% less in this project because of its stabilized rent model.
  - And the more external funding you can secure, the lower the AMS contribution.
- Laurent:
  - We're not asking you for \$20 million.
  - It's possible to work back from the contribution you want to make.
  - We can adjust target rents, project size.
  - We took \$2 million from the Concordia Student Union and found the other \$2 million, but we could hope for 2:1 funding, dividing AMS funding by three.
  - It's important to think of long-term affordability.
  - UBC is committing to rent increases of inflation plus 2%, but that's still 2% above inflation.
  - There's a benefit to having something student-run, student-led.
- Cole:
  - Forty years in AMS time is like a millennium.
  - There's a risk factor there.
  - Contributing more to general student housing in a coalition might be better.
- Keith:
  - Looking at ways to avoid a fee levy.
  - We need \$20 million to pay for the land.
- Cole:
  - At UBC on-campus housing is more appealing than off-campus.
  - Might make more sense to work with UBC to find land for free on campus, if \$21 million is the land cost.
- Saad:
  - We're going to try scoping out what that looks like.
  - Not looking to compete with UBC Housing.
  - Our audience is long-range commuters.
  - If we get the land donated, that makes the project easier.

- Megan:
  - Over half of students rent on the private market.
  - Market research would be a great idea to find out what students want.
- Cole:
  - Best to present options to Council.
  - And \$21 million would go to zero if we partner with UBC.

### **Building Hours**

- Lauren:
  - UBC is looking for a conversation with the AMS and the GSS about building hours.
  - How late should they be open?
  - What about weekends?
  - The issue seems to be controlling building access during after hours events.
  - Building access will be programmed onto students' cards, but if someone has to leave during class, then they have to call security to get back in the building.
- Eshana:
  - That's an issue for the David Lam building.
  - Is it an issue for others?
- Lauren:
  - They listed all building hours and asked for feedback.
- Cole:
  - Just keep all the buildings open till 8 pm.
- Keith:
  - Are they trying to mandate our building hours?
- Cole:
  - No, we're separate.
- Lauren:
  - The card system is confusing, and if students want to attend a class before deciding to register for it ...
  - UBC said they'd have all hands on deck to troubleshoot.
- Cole:
  - They can just have no hands on deck and leave it.
  - Something for Eshana to speak to them about.

### **Managing Director's Update**

- Keith:
  - Mandatory mask signs are back up.
  - Received draft financials from the auditors.
  - The vaccine evidence issue is proceeding.
  - New signs over the doors make it clear that we're the Student Nest.

- We may want to look at Musqueam signage on the building as well.
- Cole:
  - That's something we're looking at as part of the Indigenization of the Nest.

## Executive and Services Updates

- *Saad's update:*
  - Get Out the Vote:
    - Finalized schedule:
      - September 8 Quadra debate.
      - September 9: Leaders debate in lower Atrium.
    - Boothing inside and outside the Nest September 10-20, with free swag.
    - Budget to Council tonight.
  - SUDS registration sent out; payment link is up.
    - 97 or more delegates have tentatively signed up, a great turnout.
    - Almost all venues booked.
    - Confirming speakers.
  - U-Pass: same exemptions as before.
- Sheldon:
  - Polling station in the Nest?
- Saad:
  - Waiting on that. Hoping for the Great Hall.
  - If we don't get one, we'll have to invest in getting students to the polls.
- *Mary's update:*
  - Repayment terms with clubs.
  - Q1.
  - Health & Dental is looking at products and funding criteria.
  - Looking at fees and funds to potentially eliminate ones not serving a purpose anymore.
- Keith:
  - Should look at expanding eligibility on Health and Dental.
- Mary:
  - I'd like to increase benefits.
- Cole:
  - COVID-19 test kits would be great.
- *Eshana's update:*
  - After three months of advocacy, we have a vaccine requirement in student residences and masks in all indoor spaces.
  - Working on rapid testing.
  - Looking at drug testing.

- Advocating for greater usage of lecture recording.
  - Working on accommodating international students who can't be here.
- Lorris:
  - Will vaccine cards be required for lecture halls and classrooms?
- Eshana:
  - Conversations are still ongoing.
  
- *Lauren's update:*
  - Interactive Sustainability Centre:
    - Furniture, decals, storyboard.
    - Gearing up for September opening.
    - Rethinking the mural layout.
    - Communication plans.
  - CampusBase promo: video.
  - Clubs Days:
    - Strategizing re COVID: want to be as safe as possible.
  - Working with the Operations Committee on a clubs recovery benefit.
  - Clubs are cleaning out their lockers; all on track.
  - Clubs & Societies Working Group is looking at a last few club applications.
  - Planning for the Clubs Resource Centre: opening mid-September.
  
- *Mitchell's update:*
  - Safewalk vehicles all insured and ready.
  - Peer Support all trained. Will be in person in October.
  - Chapman Learning Commons MoU and Tutoring in Residence MoU.
  - Bothing and outreach scheduled for 18 locations.
  
- *Lorris's update:*
  - Recruiting.
  - Mimi Neufeld is the new Policy Advisor.

## Council

- Cole:
  - Probably three hours
  - Relatively full agenda.
  - Two presentations.
  - Policy I-7A revisions, but they've been made sort of redundant because there's a new Provincial Health Order.
    - The only change we may try to hold onto is to add language about removing people from the Nest for being abusive.
  - Bylaw changes: Discussion to see if we want them.

- Not as sweeping this year.
  - Some minor changes, e.g., updating Executive job descriptions.
- Fermentation Lab discussion.
- Keith:
  - Simply Voting agreement?
- Cole:
  - It's under Consent Items.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:30 pm.