PREAMBLE
The McMaster Students Union (MSU) encourages the development of thriving communities off-campus in order to support the educational aims of the University community. In order to maintain an environment that fosters a sense of community, civic responsibility, and an appreciation of the diversity of the university and Hamilton communities, student-housing issues must be addressed.

Just as the reputation and success of McMaster University is associated with the quality of near campus neighborhoods, the academic success and personal growth of students is closely tied to their residence in a community that promotes a safe, secure, and stimulating environment. In recognition of these facts, the MSU has developed its Student Housing in Near Campus Neighborhoods policy paper, which outlines its principles, concerns, and recommendations around these issues.

PRINCIPLES
The MSU believes that:

- Off campus student houses must be safe, liveable, and non-hazardous environments for all students.
- Landlords in the McMaster community should be held accountable for adhering to municipal, and provincial laws to ensure students’ quality of life.
- Information regarding housing and off campus living should be accessible to all students regardless of background or current living situation. This ensures that they can make educated and informed decisions.
- Off campus student housing must be accessible and housing prices must be representative of its natural market value.
- Students should feel safe travelling to and from their off campus residence, and living in their off campus homes at all times of the day and night.
- Students and homeowners living in the same neighbourhoods should be able to have a harmonious and mutually beneficial living relationship.
- The City of Hamilton should provide students the opportunity to engage in cultivating a safe and unified community environment. This engagement ranges from participation in neighborhood watch/community policing, bylaw adherence, youth advisory committees and so on.
- The City of Hamilton should research and/or be receptive to innovative improvements to the creation and administration of student neighborhood and related bylaws.
CONCERNS

The MSU is concerned that:

- Dwellings are often modified to add extra bedrooms, adding an unsustainable number of people to the natural capacity of a house.
- Student dwellings do not meet safety standards outlined by provincial and municipal laws.
- Student housing has no standardized “accreditation” or licensing mechanism that ensures the safety standards necessary for student tenants.
- There is a lack of oversight for many properties based on “absentee” landlords.
- The city lacks automatic regulation for several housing and community violations of Municipal Bylaws. Most infractions are based on a self-reporting mechanism.
- Many students are trapped into signing leases, which include terms and conditions not supported by the Landlord and Tenant Act of Ontario.
- The process required to report negligent landlords is inaccessible. Many students are unaware of the process or available resources, and may not report infractions due to fear of retribution or eviction. This fear perpetuates the frequent violation of laws by landlords.
- Some international students face barriers because they are not aware of aspects of Canadian law and the process of renting a home.
- Often landlords will impose unreasonable rent increases thereby inflating the value of the property beyond that of market value and making it less accessible for students.
- Often the responsibility of a lease is shared amongst multiple renters. This design makes it difficult for students who do not wish to be held legally responsible for the actions of their housemates.
- Historically, there has been discord and miscommunication in the relationship between long-term residents and student renters.
- Noise violations are a frequent infraction and point of contention between students, long-term residents and bylaw officers.
- There is a lack of student representation and invitation for regular consultation in community organizations.
- Despite the large population of students in Hamilton, there is currently no position or opportunity for students to engage in the housing policy making process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The MSU recommends that:

- The city of Hamilton move forward with the Rental Housing Licensing Bylaw as proposed in 2013 by the planning and economic development department of the City of Hamilton.
• The availability and accessibility of housing information to students be increased, particularly pertaining to tenant rights, responsibilities, and resources. These resources should help students to make educated decisions when looking for a house or signing a lease.
• A landlord screening process be introduced to the Off-Campus Resource Centre website to ensure the quality of house postings.
• A formal agreement is created between the McMaster Students Union and the Ainslie Wood/Westdale Community Association (AWWCA) to be able to advocate for students and improve community relations within the student neighbourhoods close to McMaster.
• A McMaster advisory committee is created to work as a direct liaison with Hamilton City Hall and to provide a voice for McMaster students.

FURTHER READING

For more information about Student Housing in Near Campus Neighborhoods, visit the General Policies section of the MSU website to read the full Policy Paper.