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 McMaster University:

• 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 Neighbourhoods, visit the General Policies section of the MSU website to read the full Policy Paper.
POLICY PAPER

Student Housing in Near Campus Neighbourhoods
An Evaluation of Existing Concerns and Future Policy Directions
Introduction

Student housing in near campus neighborhoods is an important aspect of the McMaster student experience. The McMaster Students Union (MSU) encourages the development of high-quality communities on and off-campus in order to support the educational aims of the University community. Student housing issues need to be addressed in a manner that promotes a safe, secure, and stimulating environment conducive to students’ academic success and personal growth. Such an environment is vital in fostering a sense of community, civic responsibility, and an appreciation of the diversity of the university and Hamilton communities. The MSU operates a service called the Student Community Support Network (SCSN), whose purpose is to develop and strengthen relationships between McMaster students and various members of the surrounding community. Moreover, the SCSN provides support to off campus students through information, resources, programming, and community advocacy. In addition, McMaster’s Off Campus Resource Centre (OCRC) provides rental listing services for landlords and provides a variety of housing-related resources and support for students.

Rationale

The reputation and success of McMaster University and its students is strongly related to the quality of near campus neighborhoods. Quality of living conditions has become increasingly important due to the rise in student enrollment at McMaster over the last decade. In addition, consequences of poor housing planning within neighborhoods potentially threaten the health and sustainability of these surrounding neighborhoods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle One:</th>
<th>Off campus student houses must be safe, liveable, and non-hazardous environments for all students.</th>
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The MSU believes that McMaster students should have access to rental housing that is safe and non-hazardous. Due to the diverse nature of McMaster University, its population is often composed of students from all across Canada and the world. Students have the opportunity to live within residences on campus, commute from home, or opt for nearby residential housing by living in the area surrounding the main campus. Though these surrounding neighbourhoods have a large concentration of rental homes, the houses within these locations must adhere to the same standards of safety as homes across the province. Students should not have to worry about basic requirements and bare minimum living conditions within their rental homes. These basic requirements include building codes outlined by provincial law such as fire safety; ventilation; indoor, designate temperature; and the structural integrity of the building.

| Concern One: | Dwellings are often modified to add extra bedrooms, adding an unsustainable number of people to the natural capacity of a house. |
One of the primary student rental housing issues is the excessive number of bedrooms, specifically developed for increased rental purposes within one home. Accordingly, considerations should be given to limiting the number of bedrooms in dwelling units in order to address the problem of over-occupancy in a single home. This “over-intensification” of a single detached dwelling has the potential to create safety issues, as well as parking problems. The Ontario Building Code does not define a bedroom or regulate the number of these rooms in a dwelling unit, but does specify minimum requirements for bedrooms such as the location of a window, floor area, and ceiling height. This tool does not address the problem of over intensification. Section 34 of the Planning Act permits a municipality to regulate the character and use of buildings and, therefore, provides the City with the authority to regulate the number of bedrooms in dwelling units.

A By-law provision that applies to residential dwellings could potentially alleviate the issue of overcrowding and improper or unsafe conversions for additional bedrooms. In Oshawa, problems exist due to rental by-laws passed in 2008 limiting most homes to 4 rental bedrooms. This limitation has been reported to reduce profit for landlords as well as make it more difficult for students to find rental homes. Similar problems to this can arise in the McMaster community if inappropriate measures are taken to address the current situation1 (CBC 2008).

The Ontario Building Code2 sets standards that ensure the safety and security of residents all across the province including guidelines for fire safety, roofing, ventilation, and plumbing. These standards are set in addition to Municipal By-Laws, which further delineate standards of housing. With an estimated 9000 students relying on off campus housing, it is common to hear of negligent landlords and housing conditions that violate safety laws and regulations (Al MacRury 2014). These infractions can range from minor, temporary afflictions, to potentially harmful ones that remain neglected for extended periods of time. Although the City of Hamilton has taken note of these issues, they do not currently have a system to fix this problem. In a proactive enforcement pilot project called ‘Project Compliance,’ the City of Hamilton investigated building standards in wards 1 through 8. The last count in 2012 resulted in 722 properties inspected with 928 orders to correct and 3231 by-law infractions (Parking and Bylaw Services Division 2013). This data further provides further support for some form of standardization to regulate student housing so that landlords comply with provincial and municipal law as it is clear that current standards are not being met.

**Concern Two:** Often, student dwellings do not meet safety standards outlined by provincial and municipal laws.

The Ontario Building Code2 sets standards that ensure the safety and security of residents all across the province including guidelines for fire safety, roofing, ventilation, and plumbing. These standards are set in addition to Municipal By-Laws, which further delineate standards of housing. With an estimated 9000 students relying on off campus housing, it is common to hear of negligent landlords and housing conditions that violate safety laws and regulations (Al MacRury 2014). These infractions can range from minor, temporary afflictions, to potentially harmful ones that remain neglected for extended periods of time. Although the City of Hamilton has taken note of these issues, they do not currently have a system to fix this problem. In a proactive enforcement pilot project called ‘Project Compliance,’ the City of Hamilton investigated building standards in wards 1 through 8. The last count in 2012 resulted in 722 properties inspected with 928 orders to correct and 3231 by-law infractions (Parking and Bylaw Services Division 2013). This data further provides further support for some form of standardization to regulate student housing so that landlords comply with provincial and municipal law as it is clear that current standards are not being met.

**Principle Two:** Landlords in the McMaster community should be held accountable for adhering to municipal and provincial laws to ensure students’ quality of life.

1. For more information visit: http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2008/02/19/divisive_bylaw_aimed_at_oshawa_student_ghetto_set_to_pass.htm
2. For more information visit: http://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/120332
Principle Two was brought forth by Ward 1 City Councilor Aidan Johnson during Hamilton’s municipal election in 2014. Johnson drew attention to the prevalence of absentee landlords in the McMaster community and the substandard living conditions of student houses that he had witnessed (Johnson, McMaster Students Union). As stated previously, in 2012, 722 properties were inspected with 3231 by-law deficiencies noted. Substandard student housing and by-law infractions are prevalent in the McMaster and Hamilton community. The MSU believes that landlords in the McMaster community should be held accountable to municipal and provincial laws to improve the quality of student housing and lead to safe and secure communities. In 2014 Johnson also spoke to this issue identifying that absentee landlords must be regulated (Johnson, McMaster Students Union).

Concern Three: Student housing has no standardized accreditation or licensing mechanism that ensures the safety standards necessary for student tenants.

Currently, there is no landlord licensing board or enforcement program to ensure the quality of rental housing units in Hamilton. Thus, landlords are not held accountable for adhering to the City’s by-laws, and many student housing rentals remain in poor condition.

Many students find rental units through the off-campus resource centre website. This site serves as a rental listing service for landlords; however, it contains no regulation to ensure that the landlord’s posting ads on the website are reliable and accountable.

Concern Four: There is a lack of oversight for many properties based on ‘absentee’ landlords.

In the highly populated student housing areas surrounding the university, there is often a general reduction in the quality of housing. Due to the fact that students are temporary residents, little attention is paid to both the internal and external appearance of houses. Absentee landlords neglect maintenance and repairs which are necessary to maintain the quality and safety of rental units, and ensure that the housing meets by-law standards.

In some cases, landlords live in other cities, making immediate contact difficult and increasing the timeframe for repairs. Often times, landlords residing in other cities are less willing to attend to the damaged properties. The lack of respect that the landlord shows for the house will inevitably influence the tenants to adopt the same negligent mentality.

Concern Five: The city lacks substantial or efficient regulation for several housing and community violations of Municipal Bylaws.

3. For more information visit: http://www2.hamilton.ca/NR/rdonlyres/687A9F6F-FB37-42B2-9D94-2AED99AD017A/0/July05EDRMS_n187402_v1_PED10049e.pdf
4. For more information visit: http://macoffcampus.mcmaster.ca
Currently, Hamilton lacks automatic regulation for several housing and community violations of municipal bylaws. This regulation includes ensuring that rental units adhere to municipal bylaws, having a proactive enforcement program, or other means of regulation. Instead, all individuals, including students, must rely on self-reporting mechanisms to report housing problems or problems with landlords. Many students are unaware of self reporting mechanisms including those facilitated by the Landlord and Tenant Board\(^5\), and find some to be inaccessible or at too high a cost. Thus, many infractions go unreported.

**Concern Six:** Many students are trapped into signing leases that include terms and conditions that violate the Landlord and Tenant Act of Ontario.

Although such clauses are void because they violate the Residential Tenancies Act 2006, many students are unaware of their rights and sign leases that include unreasonable conditions. These violations can lead to poorer housing experiences due to possible unnecessary troubles caused by the landlord. For example, a ‘no pets’ condition is commonly included in many leases signed by students. This condition is often accompanied by other illegal terms, requiring students to pay security deposits and many months rent in advance (Residential Tenancies Act 2006).

**Principle Three:** Information regarding housing and off campus living should be accessible to all students regardless of background or current living situation to ensure that they can make educated and informed decisions.

Student housing is an important part of student life, impacting up to 9000 McMaster students living off campus (MacRury 2012). McMaster University plays an essential role in terms of encouraging and cultivating healthy and active communities on and around campus that supports the academic environment of the University. To this end, McMaster should support students in their quest to find and maintain suitable housing, which includes all aspects of housing such as finding a home, signing a lease, education on tenant rights, and steps to reporting a landlord if necessary. Resources such as in-person consultation, safe house listings, legal resources, and housing seminars should be readily available to ensure that students are well informed before attempting to find housing. This investment in student life will vastly improve the experience of students and will enhance McMaster’s public perception.

**Concern Seven:** 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.

Currently, property standards complaints are made by tenants, neighbours, or through referrals from other agencies. Quite often, tenants are reluctant to make complaints about living conditions due to fears of retribution or eviction. Tenants may accept unfair leases and

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5. For more information, visit: http://www.sjto.gov.on.ca/ltb/
substandard living conditions because of the affordability, proximity to facilities and transit, or for various other reasons.

As a result, landlords often implement lease and rental practices that violate the Residential Tenancies Act, and continue to rent substandard homes with little chance of being apprehended. Students are left to suffer from a massive culture of neglect and indifference from landlords.

**Concern Eight:** Some international students face barriers because they are not aware of aspects of Canadian law and the process of renting a home.

McMaster has a substantial population of international students, often coming from countries with vastly different cultures and legal systems than Canada. The International Student Services (ISS)\(^6\) deals with organizing exchanges and acclimating international students to Canada. However, the ISS does not address the very common, and at times complicated process of finding off-campus housing. International students, who are not yet comfortable with Canadian culture or its legal system, face extensive barriers to finding safe and fair housing. These difficulties can include a lack of familiarity with leases, the process for reporting a landlord, finding a fairly priced house, and knowing their rights as a tenant.

**Principle Four:** Off campus student housing must be accessible and housing prices must be representative of its natural market value.

Housing prices should reflect the quality of the housing, and rental units should not have elevated prices beyond the natural market value. A 2014 Statistics Canada report regarding labour market outcomes and student debt of Canadian graduates stated that in 2013, after three years of graduation, only one-third of graduates had paid off their student loans, with the proportion being the lowest among Canadian bachelor graduates (Statistics Canada 2014). Students often face challenges paying for high tuition costs and accumulate a lot of debt during their degree. The MSU believes that off-campus student housing should be financially accessible and represent natural market value so that it does not unnecessarily add to this accumulating burden.

**Concern Nine:** 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.

According to the Residential Tenancies Act 2006 and Ontario Rent Increase Annual Guideline (2016), landlords are only able to increase rent annually by up to 2.0%, and can apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board for an above-guideline rent increase (that cannot exceed 3% above the Annual Guideline Increase) for things such as repairs, renovations or security

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\(^6\) For more information visit: https://iss.mcmaster.ca
measures (Residential Tenancies Act 2006). Often landlords inflate prices by above-guideline rent increases, increasing the value of the property beyond market value.

Furthermore, student tenants are temporary residents with high turnover rates. As a result, landlords have the opportunity to increase house prices with every set of new tenants. Due to this possibility of price increase, the value of property is at risk of being further inflated beyond that of market value.

**Concern Ten:** 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.

A lot of students in the McMaster community sign leases for a house with multiple rooms. Thus, multiple students sign the lease and occupy a single house, becoming “joint tenants.” This joint tenancy makes students responsible for not only their portion of the house (i.e. the rent that they need to pay), but the house as a whole. This includes if the rent shown on the lease is for the full amount of the house. Due to the joint tenancy, the landlord can hold any of the tenants accountable for the full value of rent, or hold any or all tenants accountable for obligations outlined in the lease (University of Ontario Institute of Technology).

Students may find this inaccessible, especially in the case that they do not necessarily trust the other tenants that they are signing a lease with. If a tenant were to leave, this would put the remaining tenants in a difficult and unreasonable position where they would be responsible for the remaining financial responsibility and other responsibilities outlined in the lease (University of York).

**Principle Five:** 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.

The McMaster Students Union believes that students should feel safe within the McMaster community and the surrounding Hamilton community. In fact, McMaster offers services including the Student Walk Home Attendant Team (SWHAT) to ensure the safety of students as they walk through neighbourhoods surrounding the campus at night (McMaster Students Union). Although students are not necessarily permanent residents in the community, they should be treated as such and should feel secure living in their homes.

**Principle Six:** Students and homeowners living in the same neighbourhoods should be able to have a harmonious and mutually beneficial living relationship.

Although many students are transient residents in Hamilton, their time and resources spent in the community are no less valuable than permanent residents. Regardless of the time spent in a Hamilton residential neighbourhood, students should be treated with equal respect as a non-student moving in. Moreover, students should also conduct themselves in a dignified and respectful manner. The negative perception of student tenants, derived from a few extreme
examples, creates community discord and decreases the potential for a cooperative community life. It would be in the best interest of both parties to renounce their previous assumptions and work together to create a vibrant and thriving community.

**Concern Eleven:** Historically, there has been discord and miscommunication in the relationship between long-term residents and student renters.

Relationships between long-term residents and student renters living in the surrounding McMaster community are far from ideal. “Studentification” is a term used to describe the perceived negative impact that students have on the communities surrounding universities. This negative impact is a combination of students’ lack of awareness of municipal bylaws and regulation, absentee landlords, and a lack of teamwork within the community. Thus, due to this ideology, there is a discord and breakdown in the relationship between long-term residents and student renters.

**Concern Twelve:** Noise violations are a frequent infraction and point of contention between students, long-term residents and bylaw officers.

There is often an associated stigma with a large amount of students living in a small area. Noise complaints are one of the most common complaints lodged by neighbours, and can be a source of grief amongst neighbours. There is currently no program that effectively deals with this issue.

**Principle Seven:** 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.

During Hamilton’s municipal election in 2014, current Ward 1 City Councilor Aidan Johnson stressed the importance of having organizations to educate students, regulation and inspection for absentee landlords and bylaws, and organizations which aim to engage students within the community (Johnson, McMaster Students Union). The McMaster Students Union believes that there should be an increased number of opportunities for students to become involved in the community.

**Concern Thirteen:** There is a lack of student representation and invitation for regular consultation in community organizations.

Community organizations such as the Ainslie-Wood/Westdale Community Association (AWWCA) are the core of the community and represent a unified voice to its respective neighbourhoods. However, they often lack student membership, especially as they have only recently allowed renters to join the association with voting rights. Though this is a step in the right direction, it still does not address that fact the there are no leadership roles for students on the AWWCA and similar organizations. Many of the executive decisions will be made by
non-students who cannot accurately represent the entirety of the neighbourhood. These organizations should work to create position(s) available to McMaster student representation.

**Principle Eight:** The City of Hamilton should research and/or be receptive to innovative improvements to the creation and administration of student neighbourhood and related bylaws.

Student housing and its associated rental culture is a phenomenon that is unique to university cities. It is common to hear complaints from permanent residents that students are too loud, irresponsible, and do not take care of their rental property. Conversely, students often deal with a highly saturated yet unregulated rental market leading to unresponsive landlords, illegal rental agreements, and potentially dangerous homes. Since such obstacles are unique to these regions it is incredibly important to implement municipal regulations that accommodate for both sides. It is important to recognize and comprehensively account for the subtle nuances of resident experiences.

Examples of cities that have done this well include London, which is home to institutions such as the University of Western Ontario, Brescia University College, and Fanshawe College. It is estimated that 28 000 of London students live off campus, with enrollment growing every year. As a result, in 2008 the City of London passed several new by-laws and an overarching strategy, which took consultation from both students and long-term residents (Benedict 2008). In contrast, the City of Oshawa, which faces similar problems with student housing, launched an anti-student by-law the same year with incredibly different results. Largely ignoring the recommendation of students and landlords, the by-law was met with great backlash and was withdrawn by the Oshawa Council. (Maclean’s 2008).

It is imperative that student have the chance to be a part of the process through which the City of Hamilton will create and implement housing regulations. Moreover, the City of Hamilton should be open to finding innovative solutions to account for the uncommon situation that student housing creates.

**Concern Fifteen:** 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.

While there is a youth advisory committee for Hamilton youth ages 14-24, there is no outlet for students to participate in housing policy making directly. As a result, there is a gap where a student perspective should exist. Student housing struggles are vastly different from those of landlords and long term residents. All stakeholders including landlords, neighbourhood associations, the municipal government and the MSU should collaborate to find solutions that will appease all parties and address all outstanding concerns.
In March 2010, the City Council approved an 18-month Proactive Bylaw Enforcement Pilot Program for Wards 1-8. This plan was put forth to address issues regarding illegal rental properties and a serious level of substandard living conditions (Parking and Bylaw Services Division 2013). The City of Hamilton identified issues with the rental properties, and regularly received complaints from tenants and members of the community (Parking and Bylaw Services Division 2013). These complaints addressed poor living conditions and safety density of rental housing, illegally zoned buildings, property maintenance issues, long grass and weeds, and more. From July 2010 to October 2012, a total of 3,629 property standard deficiencies were identified with 65% of deficiencies associated with 551 rental properties. In the Rental Housing Licensing Model PED10049 (j) published by the Planning and Economic Development Department of the City of Hamilton (2013), a model to regulate rental housing was officially proposed in the form of a Rental Housing Licensing By-law. The proposed Rental Housing Licensing By-law is planned to come into effect in 2017 and includes a variety of recommendations to improve the quality of rental housing in Hamilton. The by-law will ensure that minimum requirements outlined by the City are met (Parking and Bylaw Services Division 2013). This plan includes the creation of a manager for rental housing, hiring a team of city employees and officers to actively enforce the By-law, and implementing a $100 annual licensing fee per dwelling unit.

The McMaster Student Union recommends that the City of Hamilton implements the Rental Housing Licensing By-law and its associated administrative changes to ensure the quality and safety of rental housing in the Hamilton community. However, the city must explore how the annual licensing fee may impact housing costs and ensure that these costs are not simply being passed onto tenants.

Nonetheless, a large portion of McMaster students reside in off-campus lodgings or rental units and are impacted by the low quality housing and lack of regulation. By implementing this By-law, both the quality of life and security of McMaster students and the surrounding community will be enhanced.

**Recommendation One:** The City of Hamilton should move forward with the Rental Housing Licensing Bylaw as proposed in 2013 by the planning and economic development department of the City of Hamilton (Parking and Bylaw Services Division 2013).

**Recommendation Two:** Increase the availability and accessibility of housing information to students, 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.

The Off-Campus Resource Centre of McMaster University currently has a variety of resources that are available to students. These resources can educate students on existing bylaws, ways

7. For more information visit: https://macoffcampus.mcmaster.ca
to self advocate, and the Residential Tenancies Act. However, many students are unaware that these resources exist, making them ineffective.

The resources provided by the Off-Campus Resource Centre must also be updated and revised to increase their accuracy and value to students.

The MSU recommends that the Off-Campus Resource Centre work towards revising these documents, and disseminating this information in an effective way, so that students are aware of the resources that are available to them.

With the use of these resources, students can make educated decisions when looking for a house or signing a lease. These resources include checklists to determine what should be provided in a reasonable house/lease, methods for self-advocating, and how to report landlords who may be negligent.

### Recommendation Three: Introduce a landlord screening process to the Off-Campus Resource Centre website to ensure the quality of house postings.

The Off-Campus Resource Centre (OCRC)\(^8\) is a rental listing service for landlords where hundreds of McMaster students turn to find housing. It is a convenient location where students can filter listings based on price, number of bedrooms, zone, and/or occupancy date. OCRC also serves a resource pool, providing services such as human rights information for both landlords and tenants, one on one consultation for tenants, lease reviews, information fairs, and a housemate connector program.

Many issues can arise with such a widely used system; primarily, it is not regulated or screened in any way. In order to post a listing, one must simply create an account on the website and pay a fee. There have been incidences with repeat problem landlords who use fake identities in order to post their listings. Moreover, there is no way to regulate whether these homes abide by building, safety, and fire codes.

The MSU suggests that the OCRC implement a system of screening potential landlords and keeping a database wherein they can be tracked. Thus, it will be more difficult for multiple offence landlords to take advantage of McMaster students. McMaster University should inquire into hiring new full time staff to support this system, as there is currently only one staff member running the website.

### Recommendation Four: Create an accessible forum or group which can easily be accessed by the McMaster Students Union and the AWWCA to be able to advocate for students and improve community relations within the student neighbourhoods close to McMaster. Moreover, the AWWCA should be a more accessible venue for student engagement and participation.

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\(^8\) For more information visit: https://macoffcampus.mcmaster.ca
The AWWCA is a volunteer non-profit association that was established in 1998. Their mission is “to preserve, protect and enhance the environment of the Ainslie Wood/Westdale community and the quality of life for all residents, as well as to organize and lobby on behalf of the interests of members of the association.” In 2004, the AWWCA entered a formal partnership with McMaster University, in hopes to develop a community to model campus towns in Canada. Students are welcome to join this organization, which is situated in neighbourhoods surrounding McMaster, to become better involved in the community and stay informed about community issues or ways to participate. Within this association, students would have the chance to voice concerns or hear about the concerns of those in the community and ultimately promote positive change.

The MSU recommends that the AWWCA and the community become more involved with students and become more aware of student issues. A strong partnership between the AWWCA and the university will foster a better relationship between the university and the surrounding community. The concerns of students and individuals within the community may be better addressed within this organization.

**Recommendation Five:** Create a post-secondary institution advisory committee to work as a direct liaison with Hamilton City Hall and to provide a voice for McMaster students.

There is currently a Hamilton Youth Advisory Committee (HYAC), which is comprised of young leaders, aged 14 to 24 (Parking and Bylaw Services Division 2013). The HYAC exists to provide a youth perspective on municipal issues and to advise council through the Community and Emergency Services Committee. They work to address issues faced by youth by holding events, providing opportunities for leadership development, and integrating youth into municipal affairs.

Since McMaster students represent a unique demographic with unique needs there should also exist a similar council to advocate to city hall. This would create a simple and streamlined connection to the city where city council members and students can easily voice a unified agenda.

**Recommendation Six:** The city must proactively educate students with regards to bylaws and their responsibilities so that they can properly engage in the community. Ultimately, this will improve relations between students and the surrounding community to produce a safe environment.

The MSU and the city should provide accessible resources to educate students with regards to bylaws and their responsibilities as tenants living in the community. Within the MSU, there are services that provide information about living off-campus, including the SCSN (Student Community Support Network). McMaster also houses the the Off-campus Resource Centre

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9. For more information visit: http://awwca.ca
which provides many great resources that students can used to make educated housing decisions and learn about laws and regulations.

In off-campus communities where many students live, there is often talk of ‘studentification’ or the negative impact that students have on the communities neighboring universities. Although ‘studentification’ is not always solely caused by students, if students are educated with regards to bylaws and their responsibilities, they will be able to engage in the community and respect the neighbourhoods surrounding McMaster, minimizing this problem and improving community relations.

**Recommendation Seven:** McMaster University should create unique services and outreach that cater to the needs of international students who may not be familiar with Canadian laws and housing.

The International Student Services (ISS) is an office within McMaster that is responsible for international students transitioning to Hamilton and organizing exchanges. We recommend that their mandate be extended to cover matters that would deal with student housing and account for differences in culture and language. With the ISS exclusively catering towards international students, this would guarantee that they are adequately prepared to seek off campus housing and will not be taken advantage of by any landlord or company.

**Recommendation Eight:** Landlords should not increase rent above market value.

Landlords should adhere to rent increase guidelines outlined by the Residential Tenancies Act 2006, and the Ontario Rent Increase Annual Guidelines. Landlords should ensure that the cost of rent accurately reflects the quality of the house to ensure that students are paying a fair amount for their living arrangements. If there have been alterations made to the property, increasing the quality of the rental unit, the landlord can apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board for an above-guideline rent increase, which is no more than 3% above the “Annual Guideline Increase” (Residential Tenancies Act 2006). However, this increase should also be fair and reflect the quality of the house. This recommendation aims to decrease the financial burden on students, maintain the quality of off campus houses, and ensure ensure that students are paying a fair amount for their living arrangements.
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