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RENTAL HOUSING BY-LAW TO BE DISCUSSED AT CITY COUNCIL

Huzaifa details the potential license program for landlords in Hamilton that could have a significant impact on students



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Student housing in near-campus neighbourhoods is an important part of the McMaster student experience. The McMaster Students Union (MSU) has a role in encouraging the development of high-quality communities, both on and off campus. Student housing issues should be overseen in a manner that promotes safe, secure and stimulating environments. Housing should be conducive to students' academic success and personal growth, and foster a sense of community, civic responsibility and an appreciation of the diversity of the University community. Amongst our principles is that student housing must ideally be a safe, sound and secure environment for all students while also being financially accessible, so as to represent fair market value. The municipal

government must take active steps to provide rent control and legislation against artificial price inflation. To tie it all together, municipal by-laws should consequently help foster this harmonious community between students and local homeowners within McMaster's surrounding neighbourhoods.

However, there are strong concerns prevalent in the housing market today:

First, dwellings are often modified to add extra bedrooms, adding an unsustainable number of people to the capacity of a house.

Second, there is the issue of neglect by absentee landlords, who live well outside Hamilton. Absenteeism can lead to the deterioration of landscaped areas, as well as a lack of property maintenance which detracts from the residential amenity of the neighbourhood.

Third, there is a lack of automatic regulation by City staff for several violations of municipal by-law. Most infractions are based on a self-reporting mechanism.

Due to the high turnover of students each year, little attention is paid to both the internal and external

appearance of houses. As most houses are designed for a lower density, they are frequently (and quickly) being renovated in order to accommodate more students. A landlord's neglect of investment leaves issues and damages to perpetuate year after year. The lack of respect the landlord shows for the house will inevitably influence the tenants to adopt the same frame of mind.

The MSU already operates a service called the Student Community Support Network (SCSN), the purpose of which is to develop and strengthen relationships between McMaster students and members of the community. That being said, our advocacy wing, following the publication of its research report last year has been actively engaged in looking at the big picture policy issues surrounding student housing.

The proposed by-law would make a number of important changes to the Hamilton housing market. First, it would require a registration fee for landlords of \$192 (with a recurring \$100 annual fee) per rental property. This fee will go towards hiring by-law officers in an attempt to enforce standards. Semi-annual inspections

will be at the consent of both landlord and tenants. Secondly, landlords will be required to provide proof of house insurance, fire safety certification, electrical compliance, etc. for each rental property. The goal of this policy is to make sure that housing is safe and up to building codes. Finally, the by-law also limits a rental property to eight livable spaces (including kitchen and living/common rooms, but not bathrooms).

The rental housing bylaw is up for delegate discussion at City Council on December 11th and the MSU will be presenting the student perspective.

Several municipalities have already instituted by-law changes to govern rental housing, including Oshawa, Waterloo and London. While the former was controversial since it directly targeted student neighborhoods, the latter two have passed with relatively positive feedback from student groups. The MSU is on the side of students, and will continue to work towards safe and affordable housing for you. We are monitoring this by-law and encourage you to do so as well. Visit msumcmaster.ca to view the staff report coming before City Council in December.

BRIDGES TO REMAIN OPEN AS STUDY SPACE FOR EXAM PERIOD



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It's exam time, and study space - to put it lightly - is at a premium on campus. If you've ever gone to the library in hopes of finding a comfy chair with a nearby plug in which to settle down and study, yet found yourself flat out of luck, then trust me, you are not alone.

Faced with this space crunch, campus has started to be more creative with our use of space. The MSU has been working on this particular issue for numerous years and to that end, has helped secure more study space in the libraries, as well as extended hours of operation during the exam periods. Moreover, the MSU has helped create more space through the opening of TwelvEighty for study during exams. It was this particular move that prompted MSU President Siobhan Stewart to put a new idea in her platform last year - opening up Bridges Café for extra study space.

The good news is we've succeeded! Bridges will be open extended hours for

study space this semester during exams. The eatery will be open until 11pm every weekday, allowing you to study in one of the most beautiful and relaxing spaces on campus. Normal closing time for Bridges is 8pm Monday through Thursday, and 3pm on Friday. There won't be any food served in the space past these normal business hours, so try going to Bridges for dinner and just sticking around for your study session.

There is some bonus good news to go along with this initiative - student jobs! Every day after Bridges normally closes, the space will be kept open for study by paid student monitors. If you're looking to make extra cash this holiday season, go to msumcmaster.ca/jobs and apply to be one of these monitors. You may be able to work anywhere from 10-20 hours and study at the same time.

Like last year, the MSU will also be opening up TwelvEighty for extra study space. Try dropping by for a snack and some relaxed studying anytime between 11am and 7pm after December 10th.

We know how stressful exams are, and that's why we run these initiatives - from extra study space, to free food days at TwelvEighty, to puppy visits on campus. Stay tuned to our website, Facebook and Twitter for more updates as December goes on, and best of luck on exams!

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