

AWWCA Annual General Meeting Sept. 30, 2013--McMaster Community discussion group

Led by John Wigle, AWWCA past president

Guests: Dr. Patrick Deane, president, and Gord Arbeau, director public and community relations

Notes: Carolyn Kinsley (two sessions consolidated)

John noted that this is the fourth year that Dr. Deane has attended our AGM, and Dr. Deane said that he enjoys the discussions. He thanked John for co-chairing PACCR (the President's Advisory Committee on Community Relations) with Gord Arbeau.

Dr. Deane said that a European Union report calling for the modernization of higher education makes recommendations that McMaster has already been doing, including emphasizing community engagement. It's a conscious policy for the university to think about everything they do through a community lens, and the relationship between the university and the community is "dear to his heart." The university must contribute to prosperity and a good quality of life. (Gord has provided a link to the university's brochure on community engagement:

http://www.mcmaster.ca/presidentsoffice/reports/community_eng.html)

Dr. Deane is well aware of issues of immediate impact in the university's neighbourhood—student housing, the university's size, the fact the Westdale campus is landlocked. He would like to see McMaster have a smaller enrolment. McMaster has 29,000 students as a result of the province's push, under Premier Dalton McGuinty, for university and community-college graduation to increase to 70 per cent of high school graduates, much higher than Germany's rate. This drove a dramatic increase in enrolment. Another problem is that the university's internal rate of inflation is 5-6 per cent, which under the present funding formula can only be met by rapid growth; there are funding incentives for growth. Now there is talk from the minister that the province can't continue to fund future growth and that it wants universities to be able to decide not to grow without experiencing a financial penalty. Open-ended growth may be over. Last spring McMaster graduated 5,000 students and this fall has about the same number of incoming students, so it is holding steady. Dr. Deane is interested in a change of composition of the student body, with an increase in graduate students and a decrease in undergraduates. Enrolment management is an art, not a science, however.

The university is looking at the feasibility of building another residence on campus. The province does not provide capital funding for residences, but the buildings do generate revenue, so the problem is not insurmountable. Living in residence can be incorporated into the educational experience.

The province is also talking about "differentiation" among universities (the Globe and Mail uses the term "specialization"). The fear is that this would mean teaching versus research. Five Ontario universities are research intensive, including McMaster. Dr. Deane says McMaster will continue to be both formidable in research and creative in instruction. He doesn't think it will become totally focused on health sciences; he wants the humanities and social sciences to be integrated. It's highly unlikely this government will push the UK model that such and such a university will specialize in math, for instance. Some may have a legitimate local mission, however, like Lakehead University for the North.

Discussion period:

Students' awareness of the larger city: Janet Woodward met a third-year student who was unaware of Supercrawl. Are students being exposed to the city? Could a bus be funded between campus and Supercrawl, like the bus between events on James St. North and the waterfront? Gord said that students are bused through downtown at least once a year on Employment Crawl, which ends at City Hall, where they're told about their importance to the city. Also, Marie-Louise Kallsen, facilitator for the Westdale Business Improvement Area, works to promote Westdale Village. Dr. Deane said that he's been here three years and sees a big improvement in student awareness of the city. The student affairs

office works at this. Marie-Louise takes small groups of students on tours of Westdale, and health sciences places its students in the community.

Welcome bags: The AWWCA's student liaison, Shelli Eisenberg, said that she was completely responsible for the welcome bags for students living in the community last year and complained to Jennifer Kleven (head of off-campus housing). But then no bags were delivered this year. Janet pointed out that the AWWCA had taken on the job of distributing these bags because our block representatives knew which were the student rental houses and they wanted to meet the students. Shelli said that the bags should include information about the city and also goodies (last year, students complained that it was just printed material). David Hitchcock was also unhappy that the bags had been discontinued, as he would distribute them on his block with a letter he'd written and would go back until he's succeeded in speaking to someone in each house. Michael L. lives on Haddon between King and Sterling and said there are only two families left on his block (including his).

Off-campus housing: Mark E. asked, What was the university's position on the proposed rental-housing licensing bylaw [which the city has rejected for the time being]? Gord replied that a concern would be its impact on the availability of affordable housing, but the university is interested in instruments for safe housing, and the city's proactive bylaw enforcement has helped.

Bylaw infractions: Peter S., who lives on Dromore, said that he's found the city and the Student Community Support Network to be very slow in responding to complaints about bylaw infractions. Vinnie Welsh pointed out that proactive enforcement should improve now that there are four fulltime permanent staff. She wondered if the SCSN could be more proactive with more funding from the MSU, as they are very effective. Gord explained that Mac 91/92 are two uniformed police officers paid to work overtime by McMaster to patrol in Ainslie Wood and Westdale; this costs the university \$50,000-\$60,000 a year. In the fall and spring they work Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights (Friday and Saturday nights in colder weather) and proactively check bars and a list of problem houses. If residents want to add an address to the list of problem houses, they should contact him (arbeaug@mcmaster.ca).

Marie-Louise suggested a "block pride" competition among students. Vinnie said that the University of Minnesota did that. Mark E. suggested working with the university on this idea.

Dr. Dean said that he's been in higher education about 33 years, and he's seen a change in students' sensibility. He thinks they're more considerate and civil.

Student residences (on and off campus): Vinnie asked about co-operating with private developers on housing. Gord replied that there has been some interest from developers, but they want a guarantee from the university on a set number of heads every year. Western and Guelph are using this model. McMaster has 3,400 beds on campus and would need about 400-500 more to accommodate all the first-year students who would like to live on campus. McMaster is unusual in not guaranteeing a space to all first years and would like to be competitive in this respect. It's still a commuting university, however, and GO buses have made it feasible for students to commute even from the western GTA. Dr. Deane said that long-term residency on campus is not feasible for McMaster and said that MSU president David Cameron has pointed out that there's a learning opportunity to living in the community.

The university has made an offer on the house at 88 Forsyth Avenue (presently Cordoba House, used by the Muslim Students Association). It would be used for off-campus student services and as a base for commuting students but would require a zoning change.

Dr. Deane said that the downtown medical campus will bring activity to downtown. The new Wilson Building (humanities) at the Sterling Street entrance will be oriented outward toward the community. A yearlong initiative, Spotlight on the Arts, is part of reintegration of the humanities and social sciences with the other faculties.

Students moving off-campus: A landlord asked, Could landlords check on students who've been living in residence? Gord and Dr. Deane said that students are not reported to rent check. The university is constrained by privacy legislation. They can't share identifying information about a student

even to their parents (unless the student consents, as lawyer John Wigle interjected). Gord pointed out that the Off Campus Housing Office has an online video about garbage and recycling. Residence-life staff help students moving out with information about living off campus.

Traffic: Jean P., who lives on Sterling, noted that school buses are more numerous. Gord said that students are bused in to use athletic facilities. Michael asked about having traffic lights at the Sterling Street and King Street entrances on Forsyth. Gord said that in summer the university uses police officers. Jean also asked about trucks on Sterling when construction gets under way for the new humanities building. Gord said they will have designated routes through campus from the Main Street entrance with on-campus marshals. He offered her his card to report problems.

An audience member asked about driving versus public transit. Gord said there are peak times for campus parking (September, winter weather) but students have a bus pass. The Campus Master Plan (2002, updated 2008) called for a pedestrian central campus, but the question now is how to better configure campus for public transit. UBC has a hub on its perimeter. McMaster supports light-rail transit, and Cootes and Main Street would be the hub. A couple of audience members noted that students are driving less.