



MEMO

From the office of the...
Vice President (Education)

TO: Brian McHattie / Members of Hamilton Planning Committee
 FROM: Spencer Graham, MSU Vice President (Education)
 SUBJECT: Hamilton Rental Housing Bylaw
 DATE: September 16, 2013

Dear members of the Hamilton Planning Committee,

The McMaster Students Union (MSU) would like to thank all members of the Planning Committee and staff members who have been working to bring the Hamilton Rental Housing Bylaw to its current state. McMaster students applaud the efforts of the city to address concerns of quality regarding unsafe rental units. Throughout this process, the MSU has been a vocal member when it comes to the McMaster student perspective, and we look forward to continuing the discussion with the City of Hamilton.

While the spirit of the bylaw and its ability to address uninhabitable housing is welcome, McMaster students are concerned about the habitable rooms requirement (as a proportion tied to parking) and the effect it will have on student housing. Students feel that this will affect the number of rooms in a house and cars on the street without actually doing very much to address quality. In the current draft of the Rental Housing Bylaw, the maximum number of "habitable rooms" stands at eight, including various rooms beyond simply bedrooms (i.e. kitchen and living rooms). However, in the Ainsliewood-Westdale community, the number of rooms in a house is not necessarily linked to the quality or livability of the house. Many students currently live comfortably and safely in houses with more than 4-5 bedrooms, which would be the approximate maximum capacity should the bylaw be passed in its current state.

We suggest that loosening or counterbalancing the rooms requirement with other property standards, such as having the appropriate number of windows, proper electrical sockets, property maintenance, and all other standards on the Rental Dwelling Unit Self-Certification Checklist. By taking number of rooms into account as one factor, staff may better address any quality of living concerns in the Ainsliewood-Westdale area. Our worry is that the bylaw is very black-and-white right now, and despite looking at other factors of quality, the habitable rooms supersede all other considerations of rental unit quality.

Although we aren't experts on bylaws - bylaw enforcement agents in some areas have their hands tied when it comes to enforcing anything that could be viewed as subjective - we wish to simply to convey the concerns of those on the ground. Simply put, we are concerned that the bylaw in this form will not properly address quality in student housing, and instead potentially displace students from quality housing close to McMaster campus. There are many good quality houses which would break the bylaw in its current state, and as such, we must seriously consider the after-effects of this bylaw on the supply of housing for McMaster students.

Thank you for hearing our concerns, and thank you once again for your hard work and dedication.

Spencer Graham
MSU Vice-President (Education)

David Campbell
MSU President