



June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018

## An Open Letter re: Leased Space from SFU

Dear Wade Parkhouse and the SFU Administration team,

We at SFPIRG would like to begin this letter by expressing our gratitude to SFU, and to President Andrew Petter in particular. Burnaby-Lougheed MLA **Katrina Chen's office** recently informed us that Dr. Petter expressed support for SFPIRG to her directly at a recent meeting. It is uplifting to know that SFU remains supportive of the SFU students and faculty who engage with social and environmental justice issues through SFPIRG.

We also appreciate Wade Parkhouse taking the time to meet with us on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018, to discuss SFPIRG's **continued presence** on the Burnaby campus. As SFPIRG is dedicated to engaging SFU students in social and environmental justice through advocacy and education, we value our ongoing organizational relationship with SFU. Our meeting with Wade Parkhouse was positive and it affirmed that **SFPIRG's 35+** year relationship with SFU remains mutually respectful, collaborative, and based on a holistic understanding of the student experience.

With all of this in mind, SFPIRG requests a meeting with SFU Administration in order to resume discussions about SFU leasing space directly to SFPIRG. Without leased space from SFU, SFPIRG will be evicted from the Burnaby campus on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – which we hope you will agree is an unacceptable outcome.

In our meeting with Wade Parkhouse, SFPIRG was urged to negotiate with the SFSS to secure long-term leased space on the SFU Burnaby campus. A priority for us in negotiations was that all of the organizations who had been denied space in the SUB receive long-term, leased space on campus, either from the SFSS or from SFU. As we stated in a letter to the SFSS, we did not want to be pressed into competition with other student organizations – we would rather that another group have the space, than for SFPIRG to have it while another group was left homeless. In response to this, Hangué Kim, the previous SFSS President, stated that since they could not ensure that all of the organizations would have space, they would take our letter as declining the Undergrounds. **This surprised us, because we didn't see our letter as declining space;** we saw our letter as raising issues that needed to be addressed.

At Hangué Kim's **request following** a March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018, meeting between the SFSS and SFPIRG Boards, and following several email exchanges on the matter, we sent another letter on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018, **to the SFSS in which we attempted to address the SFSS's** concern about our needs. We clarified that the SFSS could meet our need to not be in

competition for space with other student organizations by publicly supporting the other student societies in securing long-term, leased space from SFU. We were simply suggesting that the SFSS act in solidarity with the other student societies.

In this April 16<sup>th</sup> letter, we also asked that the SFSS Board of Directors reconsider the allocation of space in the SUB and revisit the possibility of including the excluded societies. It seems clear to us that the current SFSS plan does not actually address the lack of student space – if that were the case, we would see all of the longstanding organizations housed, along with flexible bookable space being available, which is how the SUB was designed. Instead of improving access to student space, the current plan exacerbates the problem by threatening to entirely displace several student organizations.

On April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018, in response to our letter regarding long-term space negotiations, the SFSS sent the following letter to SFPIRG:

*Dear SFPIRG Board of Directors:*

*In response to your letter regarding long term space, the SFSS Board of Directors has decided to withdraw the offers of space in the Maggie Benston Centre.*

*We wish you all the best in your future endeavors.*

*Sincerely,*

*Hangu Kim  
President*

*Jaskarn Randhawa  
President Elect*

We are deeply disappointed by this letter and the SFSS's refusal to acknowledge or respond to any of SFPIRG's very valid concerns.

SFPIRG has been approaching these negotiations with the SFSS in good faith, and held onto the belief that the SFSS was doing the same. This retaliatory move by the SFSS came as a shock to us. Since then, we have heard some concerning things. We have learned from multiple former SFSS Board members that SFSS management was never in good faith exploring the possibility of including the independent student societies in the SUB, despite public demonstrations such as broad community consultations and the Expression Of Interest process. Board members involved in SUB design committees in 2015 were told by SFSS management that if space in the SUB was ever leased to societies like CJSF or SFPIRG, the SFSS would “never get them out”. It appears that SFSS management has been acting in bad faith, implying to students, to societies like SFPIRG, and indeed to the University itself, that the SFSS would provide long-term organizational space, but has never intended to follow through.

We understand that SFU has placed the responsibility on the SFSS, as the largest student society, to act as landlord for some of the independent student societies, with the belief

that they would fulfill this role with the best of intentions and in the interests of students. The space crisis on campus, meant to be alleviated by the SUB, has only been **aggravated by the SFSS's** disinterest in fulfilling the role of landlord, and by their narrow approach to community and shared responsibility on campus. We are increasingly concerned that the negative consequences for marginalized student groups are quickly escalating.

It is clear that the SFSS no longer has space for SFPIRG. In order for SFPIRG to continue our vital work on the Burnaby campus, including supporting those students who are passionate about equity and integrity in student governance, we need SFU to come to the table and lease long-term space directly to SFPIRG. We would also like to stress that our fellow student society, Embark, also faces precarious housing; we would love to see SFU provide them with a long-term lease as well.

Please let us know when the SFU Administration team is available to meet to continue this conversation. If you could please provide us with a few possible dates and times to meet in the coming weeks, we will find a time that works for our Board and staff.

**Once again, we're grateful for SFU's continued support of social and environmental justice advocacy work at SFU, and the recognition that a holistic campus community is enriched by a diversity of opportunities for students.** We look forward to continuing to collaborate with SFU departments and faculties in engaging the student community and enhancing the student experience.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Warmly,

The SFPIRG Board of Directors