



To the SFSS Board of Directors,

I am writing on behalf of the Graduate Student Society at SFU (GSS) to add to the discussion surrounding the new Student Union Building (SUB) and the space campaign of the Simon Fraser Public Research Interest Group (SFPIRG). As you are likely aware, SFPIRG is campaigning to secure accommodations within the SUB that meet accessibility standards and is large enough for their staff, library, and associated club storage. They seek similar arrangements for the other student groups currently located in the Rotunda.

First, let me offer my congratulations to all newly elected and re-elected Board members, especially those who I have not yet met in person. As you begin your new term, SFU begins a new annual budget process, which is one of the reasons why I am writing this letter about the space issue. It has come to our attention that there are more and less expensive methods of resolving this debate, with SFU having drawn up a pricey backup plan in case negotiations between the remaining groups and the SFSS don't result in a mutually satisfactory agreement. Finding ways to reduce the pressure on student tuition and fees and avoid cuts to student services is one of the key mandates of the GSS (and, I believe, a shared concern of all SFU students), and so we are keenly interested in any possibility of avoiding unnecessary costs arising from this dispute.

In addition, as the Board is largely composed of first time members, I thought it would be helpful to remind you that the GSS Council has endorsed the SFPIRG space campaign, an April 2018 endorsement which included tasking our directors with writing a letter to the SFSS Board. This letter has unfortunately taken some time, through the twists and turns of the space debate and the turnover of directors that is all too familiar to student societies. However, I believe that as we draw closer to critical points in the 2019-20 SFU budget process and the opening of the new SUB, now is an appropriate time to offer our perspective and friendly assistance in resolving this long-running dispute.

This issue matters. At the beginning of the design process for the new SUB, SFPIRG was informed in communications with the SFSS that space would be made available to them. Their long-term planning around student services thus rested on this assumption: provision of services of course depends on having an appropriate space to work in. As the GSS has heard from many students, undergraduate and graduate alike, SFPIRG and the other Rotunda groups like CJSF, Embark, SOCA and FNSA fulfill a very important role on campus and have done so for many years. SFPIRG not only provides meeting places, effective organizational guidance and other assistance to student clubs, but holds various workshops and events that help make SFU a safer, more inclusive and diverse educational environment.

It appears that in the past few months, Embark and the FNSA have secured space arrangements. As mentioned earlier, the SFU administration has been working on a backup plan, which involves an expensive renovation of the Forum Chambers, an area not optimized for Rotunda group space. Keeping in mind overall SFU budget priorities and the need to emphasize student affordability, the GSS believes that the best solution to this issue is a continuation of the long relationship between the independent groups and the SFSS and GSS. Of course, the details matter, are complex, and need to be worked out through dialogue, but the GSS believes renewed efforts at dialogue are well-worth the nearly \$1M in savings.

It is important to the GSS and to the campus more broadly that a deal be worked out to allocate space to SFPIRG and the other groups that are part of the space campaign, so that they can continue to provide services with minimal disruption when the new SUB opens in the coming academic year. The transition to the SUB has caused quite a lot of uncertainty for student groups around campus. Even the GSS is currently dealing with serious questions about its future home, which has given us a heightened awareness of the stresses and planning difficulties that such a situation can create. I therefore hope that you take this letter both as a sign of how much importance we place on a fair resolution to the often-fierce debate over the future of SFPIRG and the other Rotunda groups at SFU and as an open offer of any assistance from the GSS that could help the SFSS and student groups achieve this resolution.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have – as GSS Director of External Relations, my door is always open for members of the SFSS Board.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt McDonald". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "M".

Matt McDonald

Director of External Relations, The Graduate Student Society at Simon Fraser University