

FAQ //

COOPERATIVE STUDENT HOUSING



IS A HOUSING CO-OP LIKE A TRADITIONAL RESIDENCE HALL?

Not at all! Besides being a dedicated housing project for students, it will become obvious from the answers to questions below that a student housing co-op is fundamentally different from a traditional residence hall in virtually every way.

WHERE WILL THE HOUSING CO-OP BE LOCATED?

The specific location has **yet to be determined**, but from research both done internally and collected from the PHARE survey, a market study conducted last year on the living conditions of students in Montreal, we have a strong understanding of which neighbourhoods Concordia students currently live in. With this in mind, **the location will likely be in the South-West of Montreal along the metro system's green line.**

HOW MUCH WILL THE RENT COST?

Our target rent is between \$425 to 450 per room per month, or **80% of the market median.**

This projected rent is for an average sized room in an apartment with 3 to 6 bedrooms. At the moment, most apartments are projected to have 4 bedrooms. Each apartment will include spacious and furnished collective spaces, and the co-op itself will also have shared common spaces (including a laundry room).

HOW WILL THE RENT STAY AFFORDABLE OVER TIME?

The primary factor in keeping rent low is that a cooperative structure implies a certain degree of **self-management**. This means lower management costs (tenants typically choose their roommates themselves), lower cleaning costs (members are responsible for their own space) and lower staff costs (no security agents or front desk person). The co-op could choose to add any of these services, but this would definitely increase rent.

Other significant factors in cost are location and architecture. **By building near a metro station instead of near the downtown core, land is much cheaper.** The construction of a new, medium-density building allows for highly efficient architectural design adapted to flat-sharing, and it minimizes wastage of space.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that this is a **non-profit project where rent will be calculated at cost.** Because the rent increase will be limited to inflation (an estimated 1,5% yearly over the long run), the co-op will actually become cheaper and cheaper over time as compared to the traditional (for-profit) rental market.

WHAT ABOUT UTILITIES (INTERNET, HEATING, HOT WATER AND HYDRO?)

Internet will not be included in rent, but it would be **possible for the co-op to negotiate a collective discount** with an internet provider to lower costs if so desired by its members. For example, the student co-op in Sherbrooke currently take advantage of a 'group rate' for internet.

Hot water and hydro will also not be included in rent, but each apartment will have its **own water heater and electricity meter to avoid wastage**.

The **cost of heating is expected to be substantially lower** than in most apartments, because **the building will be built from scratch and therefore more energy efficient**. Most apartments in Montreal were built before 1960, so you can imagine the difference of living in a building made in 2016!

HOW LONG WOULD THE LEASE BE?

Leases will last 12 months. This length of lease promotes year-round community building, but maintains affordability by keeping management costs low. Otherwise, the co-op may have to operate a hotel or hostel in the summer months, which is both costly and against the mission of housing co-ops.

WILL YOU BE ABLE TO SUBLET YOUR ROOM?

Absolutely!

As long as the law is respected, a **co-op member is free to sublet their room** (for example, if a member leaves for a semester while abroad or for summer holiday). The co-op will be able to collectively manage and facilitate the sub-leasing process, if needed.

IS THERE A MEAL PLAN?

Since this is a self-managed community, **no meal plan** is in the works.

However, if desired, there will be opportunities for the co-op to facilitate group purchasing of food in bulk, to install urban agricultural facilities in the courtyard, or to collaborate with community organizations that work on food-related projects to **lower the cost of food for everyone**. The co-op could also potentially act as a drop-off point for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) boxes.

WILL THE CO-OP BE WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE?

In line with the principles of universal accessibility, all of the co-op's **collective spaces will be wheelchair accessible, as well as ground floor apartments**.

Unfortunately, it will not be feasible within the budget to provide an elevator to make other floors more accessible. Therefore, ground floor apartments will be prioritized for members with declared accessibility preferences.

WHAT HAPPENS IF A PIPE BURSTS, OR IF THERE IS A BED BUG INFESTATION?

There will be a **reserve fund**, collected from a portion of monthly rents, which will be set aside for any major structural repairs as consequence of normal wear and tear. The co-op can act as a perfect “landlord,” since each year there will be sufficient budget to act quickly in response to any issues with the building.

In the case of burst pipes or other accidents, the building insurance will cover unexpected expenses so it will cost near to nothing for the co-op itself.

For bug infestations and smaller repairs, the co-op has an annual budget to hire exterminators and technicians.

WHERE WILL I BE ABLE TO PARK MY CAR?

Just like with other rental apartment buildings in Montreal, there will be street parking for your car near the co-op.

Depending on the finalized location of the co-op, in certain neighborhoods a parking sticker may be required. However, **close proximity to metro stations and accessibility by bicycle remain high priorities in choosing a location**, so ideally you won't need a car to get around!

WHO WILL OWN THE CO-OP?

The entity of the co-op itself is the property of its members, i.e. the tenants, who manage and organize themselves. This way, the day to day management is administered by the co-op, which decides what staff to hire, who the new tenants are, what they do with common spaces, etc. **This also means that the members are their own landlord!**

The goal behind creating cooperative student housing is to expand the accessibility of affordable housing. Eventually, this would mean establishing multiple co-ops overtime which would network, share resources, and pool assets in order to amplify the capacity to build even more affordable housing for students.

WHO WILL SIT ON THE BOARD FOR THE CO-OP, AND HOW ARE THEY SELECTED?

The legal structure planned for the co-op is called a “solidarity co-op” (like the Hive Café’s model), and will be composed of a **nine-person board of directors, made up of tenant-members and support-members**. This model was inspired by the success of student housing co-op in Sherbrooke.

The **majority of board members will of course be the tenant-members**, and they elect amongst themselves six people to sit on the board at an Annual General Meeting.

Then there are support members, who generally represent organizations chosen to support the co-op (for example, the CSU would occupy one of these member seats). **Support-members make up a minority of the board**, with three seats in total. These support members, despite having no significant power on the board, can play an important role in compensating for institutional memory due to tenant turnover, which is an issue due to the transient nature of university students.

TENANT MEMBERS 6



SUPPORT MEMBERS 3

WHO WILL BE THE FIRST TENANTS TO LIVE IN THE HOUSING CO-OP, AND HOW WILL THEY BE SELECTED?

Members of the CSU—**that is, registered undergraduate students at Concordia**—will have exclusive registration for the Co-op.

A provisional committee will be composed of people interested in recruiting the first cohort of co-op members. This committee will be responsible for choosing other members (on precedent, co-ops usually do so through interview process).

This entire process of finding tenants will only begin after the co-op's location has been finalised.

WHO WILL RUN THE DAY TO DAY MAINTENANCE OF THE CO-OP?

In line with the co-op's self-management values, tenants will be in charge of (collectively) cleaning their own apartment.

Since there will be no corridors or hallways, the only collective spaces to maintain in the co-op will be a big outdoor courtyard and a common interior space. It is currently included in the budget forecast for the co-op to provide a free room to one of its members in exchange for the regular maintenance of these collective spaces (eg. shoveling snow in the winter).

The co-op has a budget for hiring administrative personnel for collecting rent, accounting, renting of empty apartments, managing the co-op's insurance coverage, and hiring specialized labor for building repair and specialized maintenance (eg. ventilation checkup, extermination, etc.) when needed.

DOES CO-OPERATIVE STUDENT HOUSING EXIST ELSEWHERE?

Absolutely! In many countries—such as Canada, the United States, Switzerland, Norway and Germany – student unions and co-ops play important roles in providing affordable housing for students. There are dozens of student co-ops spread throughout North America, most of which are members of the US-based North American Students of Co-Operation (NASCO).

There are currently two student housing co-ops in Quebec: one in Sherbrooke and one in Trois-Rivières.

WHAT WILL CONCORDIA STUDENTS GET OUT OF THIS?

The student housing co-op will have many benefits for the Concordia community.

First, the co-op will have exclusive registration for registered undergraduate students, as CSU members. The co-op will be located in a neighborhood where many Concordia students already live, to be determined by market survey data collected last year.

In addition, by demonstrating real alternatives to the troublesome tenant market in Montreal, Concordians will have the opportunity to be innovators in practical solutions that address the baseline necessity of affordable, safe, and dignified housing.

Through the prioritization of collective living spaces and common areas that are adaptable to the creative minds of students, **you decide how you live as a tenant in an empowering living environment!** For many of us, this may be our first time living independently, so why not have the experience be one that's stimulating and transformative.

This project is an important step towards potentially building student housing co-ops at a larger scale in Montreal, which would benefit the city's university students for decades to come!

WHAT LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS ARE PROVIDED BY COOPERATIVE HOUSING?

Housing co-ops offer a unique opportunity for **self-managed living-learning communities**.

For example, the courtyard can easily be used for urban farming, composting, or other activities. The collective space will be soundproofed, and therefore could host events like concerts and conferences.

Not only is the development of a housing co-op a learning opportunity in itself - the project is being handled by students and offers plenty of internships and collaborative opportunities - but the resulting living space will be specifically adapted to individual and collective projects, both within and outside the academic world.

WHAT IMPACT WILL THIS HAVE ON GENTRIFICATION?

Given that sectors with a high concentration of students (i.e. student “ghettoes”), exert a huge pressure on increasing rents and land prices, **the construction of permanent student housing removed from the tenant market would in fact take away from the phenomenon of gentrification and ameliorate its consequences.**

Optimistically, non-profit community housing (like student co-ops) which has rent increases at or below the inflation rate of traditional real estate markets, they are instrumental in countering gentrification by ensuring and maintaining permanently affordable housing free from speculation. Students and offers plenty of internships and collaborative opportunities—but the resulting living space will be specifically adapted to individual and collective projects, both within and outside the academic world.