



## Insights from a Masterful Plan

**In light of a new Campus Master Plan, Dalhousie University's Rochelle Owen talks density, capital funding, and tacky sweaters** BY JOYCE FINN

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY, founded in 1818, is an urban campus sited on 79 acres in the heart of Halifax, Nova Scotia. With 3 campuses, 110 buildings, and more than 16,000 students from more than 110 countries, the university is one of Canada's leading research universities. In 2010, the Campus Master Plan cited sustainable development and green practices as a major focus throughout the university. *GBQ* talked with Rochelle Owen, director of the Office of Sustainability, about the business of environmental stewardship in higher education.

**When did Dalhousie institute a program for sustainable development?** Dalhousie has been involved with green practices for a number of decades, includ-

ing the spearheading of the International Halifax Declaration for Sustainable Development in 1991. More formal programs were instituted in 2008, when the university created the Office of Sustainability and the College of Sustainability—the first program of its kind in Canada. The Student Union then, through a student levy, created a Student Sustainability office. At the moment, the university has almost a dozen projects underway.

**What are some strategies for sustainable growth?** One of our strategies for growth is to not grow so much but use our space more wisely and instead become denser. For example, we have building stock from the 1890s, but mostly from the 1930s through the 1970s. We

recently released a Campus Master Plan. In terms of growth, it's suggested that we not buy any more land, so we'll either retrofit existing structures or demolish ones with structural defects then replace it with certified green buildings.

We have three buildings going up in the next three years, and they'll be designed to LEED Gold standards. One will be built on a parking lot, another will be on the site of four adjacent houses scheduled for demolition, and a small research building will be attached to the rear of another research building.

### **How are the university's green practices and projects funded?**

Dalhousie is a public school and funds come from the government, tuition, and research. For the sustainability projects, we use a multi-prong approach—university funding, grants, models for paying back loans using cost savings. We also use different deferred-maintenance budgets. We bring together all the funding we can at the capital level so we can fund our initiatives.

### **How do you inform the students about the sustainable**

### **efforts on campus, and how do you get them involved?**

We are working on having our building-automation systems send data to public dashboards accessible on the Web and LCD screens around campus. We hope to do challenges from building to building and even from floor to floor. For example, in the residence halls, students living on one floor can compete with other floors to reduce their water and electricity usage. We work with other partners like the World Wildlife Fund and have events like Sweater Day... where we reduce the heat in buildings by three degrees and ask everyone to wear tacky sweaters.

In October, there is a Green Week put on by the Student Sustainability Office and Sustainability Teams. ... There is also a Sustainability News Blog and for the bikers, we have approximately 550 bike spots on the three campuses and a campus bike center. We have more than 150 faculty members who are actively doing research that touches on sustainability, and the business school is world renowned for its courses on sustainability in business practices. **GBQ**

PHOTO: DANNY ABRIEL



The heart of Dalhousie University's work in the sciences, the Life Science Centre received a major sustainable upgrade last year. Photo: Nick Pearce.