

AMS Letter to UBC Board of Governors

January 24, 2023

The UBC Alma Mater Society (AMS) has written to the UBC Board of Governors to share their perspective on the draft 30-Year Vision on behalf of the 58,000+ student they represent. The letter outlines feedback and the AMS position on a number of topics related to Campus Vision 2050. You can [read the letter\(External link\)](#) on the UBC Board of Governors website.

The document referenced in this update can be found below.



RE: 30-Year Vision: Draft for Input

January 24, 2023

Dear members of the Board of Governors,

This submission is being made on behalf of the Alma Mater Society (AMS) of UBC Vancouver in response to the draft 30-Year Vision for the Vancouver campus, Campus Vision 2050. Through the different planning stages of Campus Vision 2050, the AMS has been involved in advising on the terms of reference, supporting engagement, and representing student perspectives as members of the Community Advisory Committee under UBC's office of Campus and Community Planning. The AMS highlights the relevance of this planning process and is committed to student priorities of affordable and high-density housing, rapid transit, sustainability, accessibility, and innovative approaches to learning spaces.

We are surprised by the lack of ambition in the drafted targets for new student housing. In the last 10 years, UBC has created more than 5000 new student housing beds. The drafted target of 3,300 new beds by 2034 is almost a 50% cut in the growth of student housing (with respect to net new beds, we understand the upgrades being made to 1,000 existing beds in residences like Place Vanier). This target does not adequately address the debilitating housing crisis students are experiencing on this campus, especially during a time when 57% of students are reporting financial hardship related to housing costs. This target is merely a 17% increase from last year and is indicative of an unbecoming level of ambition for our tremendously capable SHCS. **The University should prioritize increasing the rate of student housing production over that of the previous decade. Despite leading the nation in student housing development, the waitlist numbers remain unchanged. This process is a real opportunity to grow housing faster and responsibly.** Additionally, the AMS is in support of high-density constructions in communities such as Acadia, Wesbrook, and Stadium.

In terms of rent prices, the **AMS does not support increases in rental prices**, especially as UBC rental prices are exponentially higher than the average price in Vancouver, making it the most expensive anywhere in the Lower Mainland. However, the AMS also recognizes a certain reality to housing cost structures and requests that increases are minimal and only cover necessary costs. Additionally, further housing bursaries should be made available to assist students facing significant challenges

To ensure affordability, **it is vital to prioritize rapid transit through the development of two Skytrain stations to UBC and additional expansions to current transit routes.** This will open up the housing ecosystem by establishing greater high-density housing along the paths of these Skytrains while also supporting the academic mission of UBC by enhancing connections to industry, research clusters, and peer groups. Further, from a climate action perspective greater housing along Skytrain expansions is one of the most tangible ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through urban infilling.

With the lens of sustainability, the AMS recognizes that we can grow and we can grow responsibly. All stakeholders, including the AMS, agree that we need to do more for climate action through the development of a climate action plan for housing neighborhoods. **The AMS suggests UBC continue to be climate conscious by creating such a plan and banning toxic natural gasses in the neighborhoods such as methane.**

The AMS endorses calls to ensure all spaces and buildings on campus are as accessible to all students, faculty, and staff. According to UBC's Wayfinding program, 49 out of 189 buildings on campus are inaccessible to disabled members of our community. **The AMS urges UBC to commit to the necessary infrastructural upgrades to these spaces to ensure accessibility by 2034 and that all new spaces that are developed are universally accessible.**

Finally, UBC must continue to take a futuristic and innovative approach to physical learning spaces. Studies have shown that improved physical classrooms lead to better learning and performance. **Hence, the AMS calls for larger investments in renovating declining learning environments and ensuring that any new academic spaces are outfitted with the best design models that are conducive to improved academic performance.** This includes incorporating multiple display screens, flexible tables, and chairs, eliminating "front of the room" instructor areas, and committing to equipping 100% of all current and developing learning spaces with lecture capture technology.

We appreciate the administration's efforts thus far in engaging with student leadership. As representatives of the largest stakeholder group in this process, which makes up more than half the people that live on this campus, we are optimistic that we can collectively work together to deliver for the UBC community. In the recommendations we make through the Campus Vision 2050 process, we speak for past, current, and future UBC students who call this campus their home. We extend sincere thanks to the members of the Board of Governors for their consideration of this correspondence.



Eshana Bhangu
President
Alma Mater Society



Anisha Sandhu
Interim VP Academic and University Affairs
Alma Mater Society