CUPA/ARUC

Concordia University Pensioners' Association
Association des Retraitées et Retraités de l'Université Concordia
Annex MI, 2130 Bishop, Montréal, QC H3G 1M8

Fall General (Webinar) Meeting

Thursday, December 16, 2021 – 10:00am – 12:00 pm
Minutes

1. Call to Order and President's Remarks (Garry Milton)

Garry Milton, President, called the Fall General Meeting to order at 10:05 am. It was announced that because the Meeting was taking place in the form of a Webinar, it would be informational in nature. It is anticipated that voting will take place at the Annual General Meeting which will hopefully be held in May 2022, with options for both in-person and virtual attendance.

Questions were welcomed at the end of each topic on the agenda and were handled through the Q&A Box. There was an additional question and answer session at the end of the meeting. Craig Buchanan monitored the questions.

The meeting was recorded and the recording is available to CUPA members on request.

Garry introduced the Executive Committee and thanked them for their work over these past two years. Executive Committee members include Craig Buchanan (Newsletter), Bryan Campbell (Pensions), Howard Fink, Wendy Hedrich (Social Activities), Nancy Helms (Member-at-large), Roger Kenner (Technical Committee), Bill Knitter (Past-President), Joanne Locke (Scholarships and Awards), Joyce Payan (Membership), Hal Proppe (Benefits), and George Tsoublekas (Benefits).

2. Reports:

2.1 Pension Committee (Bryan Campbell)

The annual Pension Information Meeting, a legal requirement, was held electronically October 7, 2021. All members were invited. In addition a pension report was mailed to the membership presenting the final results of 2020 which to this point was the heart of the COVID period. The Plan membership boasts over 7100 members of which almost 2300 are beneficiaries.

Returns for the pension fund have been very good at 11.5%, comparing favourably with other pension plans. The objective on a long term basis is 5.9% necessary to meet the liability structure of the defined benefits. The 10-year average of the plan is 7.8% which is well above the 5.9-6.0% target and therefore very healthy. This is also reflected in the Sharpe Ratio Risk measure which shows our risk to be very low. The fund is very well managed, is diversified, and is a poster child of how allocation has been made post 2008 and is very robust during this COVID period. The return shown as of the 2021 third-quarter statement is 11.2%.

As an educational institution a focus this year will be on the responsible investment requirement. Although Concordia has always had a responsible investment policy, it is hoped to have a statement concerning responsible investment early in the new year.

In terms of indexation, although there was a small adjustment up this year, it was not well presented to the membership. An improved communication strategy will be worked out for next year. It is anticipated that because inflation is real beyond the 2% for the first time in two decades this will result in appropriate levels of indexation from the plan. The plan has done well in the past two years and will be able to accommodate inflation. Through reverse calculation, Bryan will present in the next Newsletter report what that indexation will be. The plan may not be able to accommodate all of inflation but a goodly part.

Q: Concerning responsible investment – what are our investments in such areas as mining and oil?
A: While miniscule in both these areas we do have some carbon consequences. Bryan cannot say how small as allocations are so fluid that this can change monthly and therefore a difficult question to answer with precision. The investment managers are queried as to their attitude toward responsible investment. Most managers are conscious of this so that mining and fossil fuels do not play a big role. Broad issues such as these are important and it is important that our members convey their thoughts to us on these issues.

2.2 Benefits Committee (Harald Proppe)

Members will find that much of what is being reported with respect to Benefits can be found in the Newsletter issued in December 2021. The main focus of each of the Benefits committees is group insurance of which health insurance is the primary concern for CUPA. Health insurance premiums have been increasing over the last few years with 2% in 2019, 3% in 2020, 5% in 2021 and 6% next year. Increasing costs of premiums is one of the reasons why this review was mandated by the Concordia Employee Benefits Committee (CEBC). This annual increase in premiums shows that over the long term the plan is not sustainable without modifications. These changes have to do with both cost and design.

One cost factor is the complexity of the plan. When the plan was first introduced back in the 1970s it was simple but over time many different groups, associations, unions have developed so that at this point there are almost eighty different permutations and combinations of elements of the plan. One would expect that large companies such as Sun Life would be able to customize their software to deal with individual client needs. Unfortunately Sun Life cannot deal with our 80 different categories and must therefore in some instances process transactions manually which is costly.

The Working Group (WG) quickly realized that the plan is outdated and needed to be modernized and made more flexible. Changes can not only bring about cost savings but can also improve coverage to the membership. Examples of this include that in the current plan, while name brand medications can be dispensed generic can sometimes save up to 65 percent; in most plans this is the case. It is recognized however that in some cases doctors request that the name brand medication be dispensed. Another example is most prescriptions are filled for 30 days; dispensing fees charged by pharmacies can be quite costly so that refilling every 3 months can lead to some savings. Different pharmacies charge different dispensing fees that can vary as much as 25%.

The Working Group has met on a regular basis since October 2018 and is guided by the following principles:

- Financial security, equity and universality,
- Affordability and sustainability, and
- Value for members and flexibility.

Some three years later these principles continue to govern all the work. Regardless of how the final plan is structured it is important to mention that the cost for each member, whether active or retired, is roughly the same as now. So the "out of pocket" by the members remains basically the same; with some members paying a small amount more and some a small amount less. One detail still being worked on is to ensure that no one gets charged a large amount compared to what they are currently paying. Again, because Sun Life is not able to tailor their software to such a detailed level, in some cases manual transactions will still be necessary.

George and Hal not only serve on the Working Group but are also members of the Benefits Sustainability Forum (BSF). The BSF, similar to the Pension Sustainability Forum when the pension was modified, has representation from each of the unions, associations, and other stakeholders with some 50 participants. The CUPA representatives to this Forum are Garry and Craig. The Forum is a good and effective way of consulting all of the constituencies affected by these changes. Up to now there has been a remarkable consensus of the BSF and the Working Group although there are still some difficulties to iron out.

While the BSF and the WG have not met since June 2021, the Concordia Employee Benefits Committee (CEBC) did meet on December 1, 2021. It was reported that the delay in overall progress was because some of the unions in their collective agreements have articles that have to do with benefits and must be negotiated. It is expected that this will be finalized over the next couple of months. This will be followed by several meetings of the Working Group and the BSF, then followed by a meeting of the CEBC. Hopefully by spring the final presentation will be made for approval by the Board of Governors. A massive communication campaign will then take place with implementation of the plan in January 2023.

2.3 Scholarship Committee (Joanne Locke)

Over the past 19 years, since establishing the Concordia University Retired Faculty and Staff Scholarships and Awards Endowment Fund, we have made over 210 in-course students very happy.

Our awards are primarily funded from the investment of the endowment. Graduate award recipients are selected on the basis of academic excellence and financial need. The School of Graduate Studies administers these awards. Undergraduate scholarships are awarded on the basis of academic merit while undergraduate bursaries are awarded on the basis of financial need and academic standing. Undergraduate awards are administered by the Financial Aid and Awards office.

This past academic year 2020-21 saw modifications to the agreement between our Association and the Concordia University Foundation. With a view to growing the Foundation, in 2014-15 the Foundation reduced the endowment payout from 5% to 3.5%. However, for a three year period (2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17) the University topped up the Foundation payout to the accustomed 5% or $40,000.00. The University as of 2017-2018 ceased to top up the payout from the Endowment. When we learned of this, brainstorming began on ways to supplement the annual endowment payout, perhaps not to past levels, but to a level that would be sustainable and would continue to benefit deserving students.

So as a result of your input through our semi-annual General Meetings and continuing discussions with Advancement, a decision was reached to abide, as best as possible, with the spirit and terms of the original endowment agreement. The 3.5% annual payout results in available funds of approximately $31,000 to $32,000, so going forward, CUPA will offer four awards of $5,000 each at the graduate level, plus eight awards of $2,000 each at the undergraduate level, thus totalling $36,000 annually. The discrepancy between the payout from the endowment and the required $36,000 will be remedied through a CUPA Development Fund.

Set up with the help of Advancement, this independent CUPA account is funded by donations made via the annual Shuffle, five dollars from each membership fee, and any donation revenue. One very successful annual event is the participation of Team Concordia Pensioners and their sponsors in the fall Shuffle. With funds raised from the shuffle over the past 3 years, together with the 5 dollars from each membership and the personal donations, the account now holds enough top up funds to safely cover the next two years. Having said that, when you see Team Concordia Pensioners calling for support for Shuffle fall 2022, please consider either joining the team or offering support. Finally, please keep an eye out for a CUPA Fund One Webpage, which we hope to have live early in the new year which will make it easier to make contributions.

One question was received through the chat feature requesting that in keeping with the original agreement, all four Faculties benefit equally from the awards. This will be presented to the Executive Committee in the new year.

2.4 Social Activities Committee

In Wendy Hedrich's absence, Garry Milton presented the report of the Social Activities Committee. No social activities have taken place during the pandemic but will resume once pandemic guidelines allow. In addition to the types of activities CUPA traditionally holds, the Association could provide a framework for any activity group that would like to start-up offering a service such as communication or use of the Zoom platform. Members could choose to start a cycling group, hiking group, cribbage group or any other area of their interest whether taking place via zoom or in-person.

2.5 Technical Committee

In Roger Kenner's absence, Garry Milton presented the report from the Technical Committee. Roger looks after the email, listserv and the web page. With the changes in systems that have taken place at Concordia, first to the email and more recently to the financial/human resources system, CUPA has run into a number of difficult situations getting things through the process. Although support is provided, we are not, nor do we expect to be a priority, given that technical support has a whole university to keep running. In addition to recurrent problems with the listserv functions, we have learned that many Bell Sympatico users are not always receiving email. Email is the primary mode of communication used by CUPA because of the minimal costs. Roger is now working with Concordia technical support to solve this problem. As a temporary measure until this problem is resolved, Garry is communicating directly with Bell.net and Sympatico users from his own personal account. Because this issue is intermittent, some members may receive the same communication twice.

Another consideration somewhat sizeable, is a redesign of the website. CUPA must therefore look at means and cost. The website has already moved from the Concordia University platform to a private host which allows for increased control.

2.6 Newsletter (Craig Buchanan)

The Newsletter is published two times per year in the spring and again in the fall. The only issue missed was during the spring of 2020 when we were at the height of uncertainty with Covid. Although it is sent by email, any member can request to have the Newsletter in its entirety sent by mail. In addition to the reports, we have two regular contributors being Barbara Black and AlexS. We hope you are enjoying their articles of interest. We encourage members to submit articles; if you wish to do so or discuss this possibility, please contact Craig.

2.7 Membership (Joyce Payan)

Due to Covid, new memberships and membership renewals have slowed. The number currently stands at 235 paid members. Prior to Covid, many renewals were in-person cash transactions taking place at the Fall General Meeting or the Annual General Meeting. New members can join and current members can renew using e-transfer or personal cheque.

One concern is the difficulty for the Association in learning of new retirees and getting in touch with them. Retirees are told about CUPA when they have their information session with HR and are asked if their contact information can be shared with CUPA. If yes, then HR sends forward, normally on a quarterly basis, a list of the retirees to CUPA. CUPA reaches out by email to individuals on the list. Unfortunately we have found that the Concordia email addresses on the list may no longer apply to that retiree and if it still does, the retiree may no longer check it on a regular basis or at all.

In the hopes that results would improve, recently Nancy, Joyce and Garry went back to January 2020 and did a mailing to those retirees who have not yet joined. A second challenge is in the case when a retiree has changed address. If anyone knows of a retiree who has moved, please advise CUPA or ask that retiree to contact CUPA. Sandra Spina who together with Kathleen Perry is responsible for the Facebook page is also trying to reach out to potential members.

Garry thanked Sandra Spina and Kathleen Perry for their efforts and time in setting up the Facebook page. It is a super communication tool.

2.8 Financial Report (Garry Milton)

The Financial Report is normally reviewed in detail at the Annual General Meeting but due to Covid, CUPA did not have an AGM in the spring of 2021. The financial year runs from June 1 to May 31.
Of the $30.00 membership fee, $5.00 goes to the student awards fund. Members do not always make a $5.00 donation; some increase the donation to $10.00 or more while others renew their membership at the rate of $25.00 with no student awards contribution.

As expected, expenses are low as during these past two pandemic years, no formal or social events have been held. Two areas in which savings have been realized are in the switch to private voice mail as opposed to using the University platform and using less mailing and relying more on email communication. However, should any member wish to receive their communications via mail as opposed to email, please contact Garry and he will ensure that the appropriate arrangements are made.

2.9 Relations with Other Associations (Garry Milton)

CUPA participates in two other associations, one formal and one informal. The first is the College and University Retirees Association of Canada (CURAC). CURAC is currently going through a planning process in which Garry has participated. They are examining ways in which they can be more responsive to the retiree associations across Canada and to clarify their role as an umbrella group. Any member of CUPA can take advantage of any of their activities, all of which are listed on their web site. These can include items such as travel or health insurance, future travel or interesting articles on pertinent topics.

The second association entitled *Convergence* is an informal Quebec university retiree group that meets periodically to share ideas of what is going on in the various associations and to share activities. For example, prior to Covid, UQAM was organizing a trip to the Saguenay to which members would have been invited.

Q: As a member of CUPA can we take advantage of Concordia's faculty and staff discounts.
A: Garry responded that yes however he is now checking to what extent. For example if it turns out that CUPA members cannot take advantage of software discounts, then this is a cause that the Association can take up. He did state however that with respect to Word 365, one must be an active Concordia member. He will check to be sure. Joyce added that as a senior non-credit student, you can avail yourself of this discount.

3. Other Business: *Moving Forward: Planning Future Directions for CUPARUC*

The Association is also looking at relations with the University. What does it mean to be affiliated with the University? Many of us spent all or a good deal of our career with Concordia University. We are already very fortunate to have representation on committees such as pensions and benefits. This is not the norm. Departments such as Human Resources, Translation and Advancement are very responsive to our needs providing quick response to our queries. At the beginning of the pandemic, CUPA held its zoom meetings on Garry's personal zoom account. Now we are using the Concordia zoom platform which is not only more advanced but also no cost to the Association. The occasional stumbling block appears such as when the HR/Financial system was introduced, we were not warned in advance so when we tried to access the system we were completely locked out.

As for Moving Forward, we anticipate a discussion of what the membership would like to see the Association doing. The two components, the more formal side looking at pensions, benefits and awards and the social aspect including what kinds of activities and communications members would like to see and have will be the focus in the coming months, initially with a membership survey. Feedback and participation in the survey is of extreme importance as the Executive Committee members do not always approach issues in the same way. The entire retiree community benefits from communication with its members.

There is a plan when it is deemed safe to start gathering informally every 4 to 6 weeks. Everyone is welcome. An AGM will be scheduled for May. We hope to be able to meet in person or to have a hybrid zoom/in-person meeting with the member choosing their mode of participation.

The Association is always looking for people to join or work with the Executive Committee. There is always work behind the scenes with plenty of opportunity and space if you would like to participate.

4. General Q&A

There were no questions in the General Q and A.

5. Next Meeting

Garry thanked the Executive Committee for their work in the last 24 months and thanked Sandra Spina and Kathleen Perry for their setting up and monitoring the Facebook page. An AGM will take place in May.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:42 am.