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ENLARGEMENT OF THE PERCIVAL MOLSON STADIUM

In the course of two evenings June 24th and 25th, the proprietors of the Montreal Alouettes football club laid out their proposals for the enlargement of the Percy Molson Stadium. Previously published on the Internet, the proposals prepared by the architects Werleman Guy McMahon and their consultants- are clear and explicit leaving little doubt as to eventual built result and physical impact of the final project. Simulations of views from various locations would suggest that the additional increase in height of the southern stands will be moderately perceptible and the extension of the northern stands eastwards will in time be screened by new planting. Improvements to the entrance at Aylmer Street, greening, screening choice of materials aim to better integrate the facility with neighboring buildings; similarly the new eastern entrance appears relatively self effacing.

As an architect, long an educator and critic of architectural and urban design I might be expected to conclude that this is a reasonable proposal assiduously prepared by experienced and competent hands, one moreover approved by the Borough of Ville Marie's planning commission. However I come to no such conclusion for here, as too often is the case, professional skills are deployed on behalf of a proposal that is contrary to public interest. The entire history of urban renewal in our cities is littered with examples – fascinating projects presented with pomp and publicity that had adverse consequences, destroyed buildings of patrimonial value, a church, a convent, even an entire neighborhood. We need look no further than here in Milton Park, where visionary plans would have obliterated six entire city blocks had they not been halted by financial uncertainty and citizen mobilization; the result a harmonious community of co-operative housing we know today. What was at stake then were not the design qualities of the future Cite Concordia but the protection of a viable part of the city's fabric. **What is at stake today is the protection of Montreal's most precious asset, Mont Royal, against further encroachment**

DESIGN IS NOT THE ISSUE

Like the thousands currently opposing the proposed misguided sale of a national park, and the construction of vacation residences on the slopes of Mount Orford neither I nor fellow citizens wish to discuss the design qualities and details of the Alouette's proposal to extend the McGill stadium into our own landmark site. Design is not the issue:

- Whether the additional bleachers are visible or not:
- Whether the proposed video screen is too large or sufficiently hidden:
- How many trees will be cut and what species will be planted:
- Whether wrought iron railings should replace frost fence....
- How humble or monumental are the entrances to the stadium

It is an idle and misleading debate when the initial proposal is contrary to public interest.

McGILL'S RESPONSIBILITY

McGill University must take responsibility for the current impasse. Long ago it initiated encroachment on the mountain with the construction of the original Percival Molson Stadium for physical education and inter-varsity sports activities. Later it permitted the enlargement of this modest facility to satisfy the needs of a commercial football operation which eventually proved temporary. In the euphoria of Expo 67 the Alouettes decamped to the Autostade - of which the construction entailed the demolition of working class Victoria town and the expulsion of its working class residents. Content with its new home until the new Olympic Stadium promised greater rewards, the Alouettes moved house once more and the publicly funded Autostade was reduced to rubble. The promise of the Big O unfulfilled and fans uneasy in its cavernous space it was back full circle to a refurbished Percival Molson.

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

The adaptation of a university facility serving educational and active community needs to a commercial entertainment operation drawing on a metropolitan wide clientele has already had a negative impact throughout the surrounding neighborhood – noise, aggressive behaviour vandalism, increased traffic, *stationnement sauvage*, litter and worse. This has been documented and will be presented by those directly affected and present at these hearings. Adding five thousand additional attendees can only exacerbate the conditions of which they have been victim

While situated in the Borough of Ville Marie, the McGill stadium borders on that of Plateau Mont Royal. The elimination of the disastrous Pine Park interchange in the Plateau is eagerly awaited by residents and promises easy and safe access to the slopes of the mountain. A proposed eastern entrance to the stadium foresees 12,000 spectators enter at this point and that which borough residents foresaw as a welcome community improvement might well prove a further channel for anti-social behaviour.

WHO BEARS THE COST

One has to admire the business acumen – some might say effrontery - of the promoters. Their business plan –as much as we know of it- assumes a four million dollar investment, easily raised among a clientele that will enjoy a view of the games and the Montreal skyline from a glass enclosed perch at the head of the north stands. They expect to acquire the necessary additional thirty five million dollar construction costs from Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments - **that is from our taxes**. With the newly discovered financial shortfall facing the Tremblay administration, there can be little hope in that direction. Beset with rising costs for its two Superhospitals, Metro extensions, rail- car replacements, glass shards tumbling from its Grande Bibliotheque, Quebec looks an unlikely source of support. (with a government ready to sell off a National Park to ease its burden one cannot be too sure). Any public body prepared to subsidize this spectator sport, facility should consider whether its money were not better spent in encouraging genuine physical activity for the young - and not so young - encouraging amateur sports, local football, soccer, athletics, building a genuine cycling network throughout the city, adding year round swimming pools...

Twenty thousand spectators for varsity sports and the some 200 activities that take place within the stadium each year has long proved enough. Twenty thousand seats for a commercial sporting entertainment was enough to bring the Alouettes back to the Molson Stadium.

There is absolutely no reason to grant its owners the **right to augment this capacity by twenty five percent nor for the public purse to foot almost ninety percent of the bill**. Moreover, should the increase in capacity not prove sufficient to maintain the Alouettes' presence what further demands will be made on the Mountain's slopes? Or should greener fields once more beckon and the Alouettes again decamp one might well wonder what alternative lucrative activities will find a home at the Percy Molson to justify and recuperate the significant public investment involved; what disagreeable sounds will emanate to disturb the tranquility of the Mountain and the peace of neighbouring residents.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

What is at issue is not the architectural design of the proposed stadium expansion, the competence of the design professionals, their choice of materials, colours, and landscape proposals, although these are the aspects which the promoters of the project invite the public authorities, its commissions to assess and those attending these hearings to consider.

What is truly at stake is the further and unpredictable encroachment on our city's most precious natural asset Mont Royal, an asset that must be protected for the enjoyment of generations to come.

What is truly at stake is the improper call on the public purse to the tune of 35 million dollars in order to facilitate the expansion of a private commercial entertainment enterprise.

What is at stake is the security and enjoyment of a harmonious community that has long accepted a University athletics facility in its midst and a commercial football operation prepared to respect the limitations of its initial commitment.

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