MEMORANDUM to Office of Public Consultation, City of Montreal, Quebec Proposed development on the site of the former Philosophy College, Montreal, Quebec May 21, 2009

Executive Summary

This memorandum submitted by a private citizen presents opinions on the proposed project.

Overall, this memo finds that the project is not suited to the site. Approvals required by the proposed project do not serve the interests of the City of Montreal and its citizens.

The memorandum consists of the following parts:

Introduction and interest

Opinion on the project as a whole

Concerns pertaining to the project: principle, process, and practical

Suggestions

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Proposed development on the site of the former Philosophy College, Montreal, Quebec

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Introduction and Interest:

This memorandum is submitted by a private citizen and taxpayer committed to protecting and preserving the quality of life in Montreal. Our city represents the diversity and vibrancy of the unique francophone metropolis in North America, and actively promotes itself as a place to live and work, and a destination to visit.

Opinion on the project as a whole;

The project in general does not serve the interest of our citizens or our visitors. In particular, the project is not suited to this mountain site--among the last remaining natural protected landscapes in the heart of Montreal.

Concerns pertaining to the project:

Concerns relate to the principle, process, and practical aspects of the proposed development of this site.

Concerns: # 1 Principle

The objection on principle is to the privatization of natural assets shared by all the communities of Montreal. Prime among these assets are our mountains and our river. These features are as much part of the lives of citizens as are our language and culture; that remains true today, as it always has been.

As land-holders, the Sulpicians were stewards of this city and the well-being of its people. The order's mission was not for profit but for service. Their Philosophy College was a place for the study of ideas and ethics. The site was suited to this mission: a vast, unobstructed view of the city below, reaching to the mighty St. Lawrence River, and beyond, to the south shore and mountains. This lofty perspective was grounded in a landscape that was natural--native woodlands, flora, and fauna; and cultivated--allées, potagers, and orchards.

The developers acknowledge the importance of this treasured site. But their project proposes to appropriate it entirely for private gain.

In what way does the proposed project privatize citizens' shared assets?

First: citizens would lose strong links with the heart of their city that they now enjoy every day through views of and over this part of Mt. Royal. Views from Cote-des Neiges and Cedar over the city and river would be interrupted or blocked by the new buildings. A proposed belvedere would reduce the daily experience of our views of the topography of our city to a vignette available only by a dedicated trip to the designated vantage point. Every day, thousands of citizens passing over the mountain in cars and buses, and on foot would see not the view that is our right, but we would see the elevations of the "approximately 325 single-family-detached, stacked and multiplex housing units" (ocpm brochure) of up to 9 storeys. No wonder requested amendments to by-laws address height of new buildings on this site. What happens to floor/area ratio when you try to maximize area on a mountain side? City of Montreal planners may have explanations involving angles of measurement. For citizens, the calculations are only of diminishing returns in the quality of life.

And that's in the daytime. Think of the evening, with the Sulpicians' place of contemplation brilliantly lit with the street lights, and exterior and interior lighting of this very densely built 15 - 20 % of the site: the illumination of Mt. Royal for the benefit of its new residents. Goodbye night skies and star-gazing from the summits for all the rest of us.

Second, citizens would lose access to this site on Mt. Royal for at least five months of the year, from December through April, when the residential development is closed to the public, according to information from the developers' representatives in response to a question at the information session held here on May 11, 2009.

Further, at that same session, specific mention was made of design requirements for the ornamental fence proposed to surround the residential development. The developers' exquisite attention to detail--be that for preservation of the sanctuary in the seminary building, or for the design of the surrounding fence--conjures the impression of a very carefully maintained gated community, adhering narrowly to the letter of some law, while ignoring the basic principle of occupying a sacred space dedicated until now to the common good.

Does the City of Montreal really stand for gated communities, even on the treasured heights of Mt. Royal?

If the city's elected officials were to accede to such a privatization plan, they would be declaring their allegiance to profit for the few over benefit for many. That would be the platform they run on, and the legacy for which they are remembered at home and everywhere that urban design is studied and recorded.

Concerns: #2: Process

The process leading to this stage of approval for the proposal for the site leaves many questions unanswered.

According to the OCPM brochure, this development "project requires amendments to the Montreal Master Plan and the borough of Ville-Marie zoning by-law. In terms of the Master Plan, the proposed amendments primarily concern uses, heights, and land coverage, while the suggested amendments to the borough of Ville-Marie zoning by-laws have to do with volume, heights, exterior layouts, parking, landscaping, and the conservation of heritage elements."

That's a lot of amendments. It seems that almost everything to do with this building plan requires a significant variance.

Why would the developers not choose a site better suited to their project?

Why would the city not seek the best of both worlds: preserving the last of its mountain green spaces and seeing robust residential development in the many available and desirable locations in centre-ville?

Answers are hard to find. According to Tony Miceli, quoted in the Gazette May 12, 2009., annual property taxes collected by the city on the site would amount to about \$ 5 million. Leaving aside comparisons with revenues for prime real estate development of comparable size, \$ 5 million is inadequate compensation for the irretrievable loss of this part of Mt. Royal.

Concerns: # 3: Practical

Beyond the extensive amendments already noted as being required, the proposal raises further questions.

- 1. How will the site be protected and maintained in perpetuity? What legal and enforcement measures will ensure that once the present cast of characters on the development team and in the city are gone? What if the owners/tenants condo or coproprietaire associations disagree or default? Is there a contract to manage and maintain the conservation areas? Who are the contracting parties? What authority do they have?
- 2. What affect will this development have on the infrastructure and services in the adjacent areas, especially those south of the site? Concerns would include drainage and sewage, and provisions for garbage and snow removal. The proposal calls for 325 single family units. Is that in addition to the condos within the renovated existing building? Either way, in round numbers, counting families as two to four or five people, the site would house a significant population: a town within a city.

- 3. Who will in fact bear the costs of servicing this population: building and maintaining streets within the development, street lighting, presumably connected to the city grid, and landscaping? What would the real net revenues be to the city?
- 4. What will be the effect of 671 additional cars--excluding service and utility vehicles moving to and from the site--on adjacent streets? If the main vehicular access to the site is from Cote-des-Neiges, won't the additional traffic stress that already busy thoroughfare? The Montreal General Hospital expansion already projects heavier traffic for cars, buses, and ambulances on the main arteries adjacent to both sites. Regarding the smaller residential streets adjoining the site, what assurance is there that the access to this development from Place de Ramezay will not be eventually linked to the Cote-des-Neiges entry point? Even if no through-route is planned now, the increased traffic from 670 cars circulating in this area will affect Cedar and Atwater and all their "tributary" streets in Montreal and Westmount.

Suggestions:

Once and for all, recognize the net worth of our city's natural assets that accrue to our citizens and visitors.

Protect them, enhance them, celebrate them, advertise them. Mt. Royal is priceless. Once sold or bartered, this land, once sacred, is lost forever. Pave paradise to put up town houses? It must not be allowed to happen.

Above all, do not privatize our natural assets in favour of a limited elite when more can be gained by sharing them with the broad array of citizen tax-payers.

Use creative thinking to build and repurpose existing sites suited for residential and mixed-use development.

Demonstrate that a range of proposals for the former College property is being or has been thoroughly explored.

If the present proposal is fairly determined to be the only possible use for this site, limit the development to the existing building, scale back underground parking and infrastructure accordingly, and explain clearly how the new project will be integrated with the surrounding community.

The City should consider leasing the building and grounds immediately adjacent to it to the developer chosen in a transparent process, while retaining the historic natural site on Mt. Royal for the benefit of our citizens.