

Dear Mr. Vezina,

Hello, this is Robert Hajaly. After the presentation of my brief last Thursday, Dec. 1, to the Commission on Heights and Densities of downtown, I was asked some questions by the Commissioners. I tried my best to answer, but I wasn't satisfied with my answers. Since then I thought of some additional points in answer to these questions which I would like to share with the Commissioners. Could you therefore please transmit these brief points to them.

I was asked first by the Commissioner to the left of the Chairwoman--sorry I didn't catch his name--whether my recommendation of reduced building heights in some parts of downtown might not diminish the financial interest of developers building there. I replied that the example of the "Viva Lofts", a condominium project on Bishop Street between Rene-Levesque Boulevard and St. Catherine Street now being built and of 8 floors, within the current limit of 25 metres (82 feet) that I supported, shows that there is some real estate interest within these height limits. I would now like to add some other residential projects that have been built downtown within these height limits in the last 10 years or so: Le Jardin du Fort at 2055 duFort Street, 6 floors (built around a semi-enclosed garden); Lofts 1200 St. Alexandre on St. Alexandre Street just below St. Catherine Street, 7 floors; condos of 4 to 5 floors on the east side of Bleury Street below Rene-Levesque, on the south side of Sherbrooke Street going west from Jeanne-Mance Street to Bleury Street, and on the east side of Berger Street just south of St. Catherine Street; and condos of 3 to 4 floors on Anderson and Jeanne-Mance Streets south of Rene-Levesque to De La Gauchetiere Street and on De La Gauchetiere itself. These are just the projects that I can recall off the top of my head, without having made any special search for such projects.

Secondly, I was asked by the Chairwoman how could residential development be promoted downtown, apart from raising permitted building heights. I replied that it would make downtown more attractive to prospective residents if they were provided with more community services, for example, a community centre and outdoor sporting facilities. However, this misses out the most important service, which I forgot to mention, the provision of a local public school, at least at the primary level--there are already about 2000 children from 0 to 17 years of age living in the western part of downtown according to the 2006 census, and there would no doubt be more if there were a local school (the current numbers of children drop off above the age of 5 years, according to the census, because some parents of children older than that leave the area because there is no school). To this could be added a local public library, preferably next to the school. Even more directly related to promoting residential development is the inapplicability now of municipal programs, intended to promote low cost condo development, to the downtown area. I am referring here to the Habiter Montreal and Acces Condo programs. The Habiter Montreal program gives a grant of up to \$12,500 and a real estate transfer tax refund to purchasers of new condos, while the Acces Condo program gives a grant of 10% of the condo price, which may be used as a down payment (though it has to be paid back when you sell the condo, together with 10% of the net capital gain). These programs can be combined together, providing a considerable incentive to purchase and build such condos. Unfortunately, the limit on the condo price to which these programs apply, for example, \$310,000 for a 3 bedroom "family" unit (including taxes), is far below the prices at which condos are sold downtown, making these programs incapable of promoting residential development there. So what you can recommend in your report is that these limits be raised to the point where these programs can promote residential development downtown; and that all the community facilities that I've mentioned above be provided to the local residents, as is their just due in any case, since they are paying for all these facilities and programs elsewhere in the city.

I hope that these comments are helpful to you.

Yours sincerely, Robert Hajaly