

Presentation to the

COMMISSION ON DEVELOPING A POLICY TO GOVERN CULTURE

PUBLIC HEARINGS: CITY OF MONTREAL

Presented by
Lucia Kowaluk
Urban Ecology Centre
Montreal
February 28, 2005

Presentation to the City's
COMMISSION ON DEVELOPING A POLICY TO GOVERN CULTURE

Thank you for the opportunity to express my ideas on several aspects of a new policy on culture for the City of Montreal.

I am using as a model, the policy developed by the *Corporation du Centre interculturel Strathearn* in the late 1980s and early 1990s for the use of the building at 3680 Jeanne-Mance, formerly Strathearn School. This policy, developed by a large group of community, cultural and ethnic organizations and individuals, led the Centre for six years, before it was undercut and destroyed by the City administration in power at the time (1996 and 1997). I include here as Annex I a short history of this sad episode in our history.

The philosophy that governed the initial years of the Centre's functioning developed out of an extensive survey carried out in the geographical community in 1983, and then a series of public hearings held in 1987 at which over 40 briefs were presented; the philosophy continued to be developed as organizations and individuals were involved in the ongoing functioning of the Centre which opened officially in January, 1991.

Several principles were prominent in the philosophy :

1. That artistic expression in one way or another is an intrinsic part of being human;
2. That the difference between professional art and amateur art, although real, is one of sophistication and self-discipline, and is not one that should be artificially engraved in policy in such a way as to divide people from each other;

3. That the artistic expressions of all cultures are a richness in our communities which everyone can enjoy.
4. That the democratic functioning of an artistic Centre is essential to bringing communities together, to giving them an opportunity to know and respect each other, and to creating a policy and programme which reflects the needs and desires of the participants. This policy and programme should be developed and decided upon in a transparent and democratic way.
5. That when policies and programmes are developed and decided upon in this fashion, the space in the Centre is well-used.

“THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING”

When the Strathearn Centre was governed by its original philosophy (see Annex II) which reflected these principles, the building was rigourously and fully used (see Annex I).

Since 1997, it has been very under-used and has been essentially used by the City as rental property. The geographically-based community is totally alienated from the building.

I still believe in the original philosophy of the *Corporation Centre interculturel Strathearn*; I saw how it worked. I would like to present that philosophy to this Commission as a model; and I urge the Services of the City to understand it, to use it, and to be governed by it, rather than to fear it.

**Background to the legal case against the City of Montreal
by the Corporation Centre interculturel Strathearn**

From 1991 to 1996, the governance and the programme at the Strathearn Intercultural Centre was managed by the Corporation Centre Interculturel Strathearn with its elected board of directors in close cooperation with the City of Montreal's Service of Sports, Leisure and Community Development (section at the office on St-Joseph near d'Iberville). The City contributed nearly all the budget which paid the salaries and the programme, although a modest amount was raised by fundraising events, membership dues and individual donations.

There were disagreements among all the governing participants as to how the Centre should be managed and what the content of the programme should be; however, the net result was that the Centre was, during that period, a « beehive of activity » : the gallery always had an exhibit, the theatre always had a show, the café was used for eating, socializing and small meetings. The greater geographical community was always present. There were press conferences, intercultural activities, classes, film showings, a hugely successful New Year Party (1995-6). Black History Month was celebrated, as was La Semaine nationale interculturelle.

Apparently, however, the Service was not happy with the arrangement. In January 1996, the Service's representative on the board (Daniel D'Agostino) moved to fire the executive director; because the board had found it hard to work with her, the members of the board voted to support the motion. The director, Marie-Dominique Bonmariage, left in mid-February. A hiring committee was established immediately and began its work. However, at the board meeting in March 1996, Keder Hippolyte of SANQUI, a member of the hiring committee, made a motion to hire on a temporary basis a woman known to the City but not interviewed by the Committee; this motion had not been discussed by the Committee. The City's representative seconded the motion. The other members of the Committee retreated in confusion and the motion carried.

In April, at the Annual Meeting, Lucia Kowaluk was not re-elected to the board, having served the mandatory 2 terms. Pat Moore was also not elected to the new board, having taken a full-time job out of town. The board lost 2 of its strongest leaders.

The new director took over with no pretense of working with the board; indeed she confessed to a board member she saw as an ally, that she had been instructed not to work with the board.

Nothing much happened over the summer, and the board became very demoralized.

At the board meeting of October 3, the Service's representative (D'Agostino) declared that there had been financial mismanagement and that the board would be sued if they didn't resign and relinquish control. D'Agostino moved that an interim board committee be struck to continue to govern in the Corporation's name until the end of the fiscal year (December 31, 1996). D'Agostino and Hippolyte were named to the committee; in order to sound

democratic, D'Agostino asked if anyone else wanted to be on the Committee. Unexpectedly, Lise Lesage, a board member representing the Milton-Parc Citizens' Committee on the board, volunteered. Mme Lesage kept careful notes for the subsequent 3 months as she pushed for meetings, collective decisions and openness, mostly to no avail.

A new bank account was opened in a different bank with Hippolyte and the new director as the signing officers. All subsequent City funds were deposited in the new account. Meanwhile, the balance and a few thousand dollars in receivables gave the old account, still with the original signing officers of the Corporation, about \$3,000 in liquidity.

The Interim Management Committee paid salaries and invoices for October, November and December. They also paid the employers' responsibilities to Revenue Canada and Revenu Québec for October and November (due in November and December). However, when December's D.A.S. requirements came due in mid-January, the accountant was instructed by the director not to pay them (this information comes from the accountant). The accountant also did not pay the GST-TVQ requirements, nor the CSST requirement.

Mme Lesage had access to the bank statements for the months ending October 31 and November 31, 1996, but not the statement for December 31, 1996 since that statement is normally sent to the company a week later, and by January the Interim Management Committee was no longer functioning.

Revenue Canada contacted the Corporation and in July 1997, the Corporation made a settlement with Revenue Canada and paid \$1,400 (about). The Corporation, however, was not able to pay Revenu Québec.

The Corporation continued as a legal entity through 1997 and in the fall, decided to take legal action against the City for expenses, for money owed to Revenu Québec, and for damage to reputation.

No financial mismanagement was ever found nor ever spoken about after the fall of 1996

The action was filed in court December 24, 1997 and delivered by bailiff January 9, 1998. Our lawyer (working pro-bono) was and is Me Adelia Ferreira.

Sometime in 1997, the CSST contacted Me Ferreira regarding the Corporation's responsibility of tax to the CSST. Me Ferreira negotiated a settlement in which the City paid the tax, thus setting a precedent.

After the suit was filed, the City's lawyer asked to meet with a member of the Corporation. Me Ferreira set up a meeting with the lawyer, herself and Lucia Kowaluk, the Corporation president who also was the one individual who had the clearest memory of all the details and all the facts as they had occurred. The lawyer refused to question Mme Kowaluk, and instead

insisted on questioning Hadji N'Gamorio, the past president. Me Ferreira refused that request, knowing that Mr. N'Gamorio, although active and supportive throughout all this crisis and a board member of the Corporation since 1994, had not been involved in all the details and might give an answer to a question which would contradict an assertion in the deposition accompanying the legal suit. This contradiction would then be used to throw out the whole deposition.

The City's lawyer continued to refuse to question Mme Kowaluk.

Every year, Revenu Québec contacts the Corporation regarding the debt owed for the December 1996 D.A.S. Every year, the agent is sent to Me Ferreira.

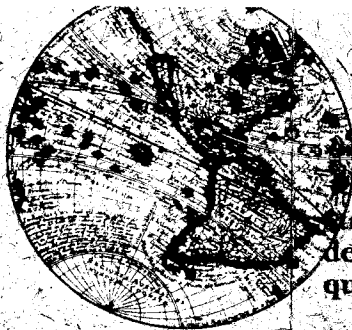
To date, nothing more has happened.

Written by Lucia Kowaluk
October 6, 2004

Annex II

Strathearn! Une maison pleine de "cultures"

Un carrefour pour les communautés culturelles du quartier, un lieu d'échange entre les générations



Strathearn! Qualité de vie pour notre quartier

- Une programmation d'activités culturelles et artistiques
- des projets sensibles aux préoccupations de l'heure, l'éducation, la vie communautaire et l'engagement social

Strathearn! On est tous des artistes

Un espace pour les artistes amateurs et professionnels pour partager leurs expériences et stimuler leur créativité

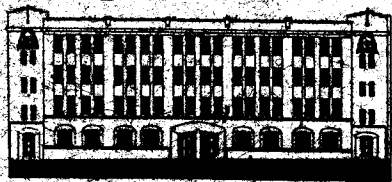
Un "Art" de vie À votre portée

À utiliser

- théâtre de 150 places, salle de répétition, loges
- aire d'exposition multi-ethnique et éducative
- salles polyvalentes
- locaux pour groupes communautaires
- café, accueil et animation
- salles de réunion à vivre
- théâtre, danse, musique, chant choral
- expositions, conférences, films
- arts visuels
- ateliers d'artisanat ou pratiques
- repas communautaires
- etc

POUR TOUT L'ART DU MONDE...

CAMPAGNE DE FINANCEMENT 1990



Centre Strathearn
 Centre communautaire, culturel et multi-ethnique
 3680 rue Jeanne-Mance
 Montréal (Québec)
 H2K 2K5
 (514) 949-2777



Financement et gestion du Centre

La Société d'aménagement St-Louis administre le Projet Strathearn et prend la responsabilité de la totalité des coûts d'un étage, de la moitié des frais d'exploitation, du programme d'activités et de la gestion du centre. La ville de Montréal assumera les coûts de rénovation et l'autre moitié des frais d'exploitation.

Le Centre sera géré par un organisme sans but lucratif (OSBL). Les groupes locataires et les utilisateurs peuvent participer à la gestion du centre selon la volonté exprimée. Les étudiants publics et les étudiants de l'OSBL.

Imprimé grâce à un don de la Fondation de la famille Samuel et Sabine Brodman

Conception: Martin Jéze

OUI

J'aide à construire

AUTRE

ARGENT COMPTANT

DON

NOM

ADRESSE

VILLE

CODE POSTAL

TF

Veillez me faire parvenir un reçu

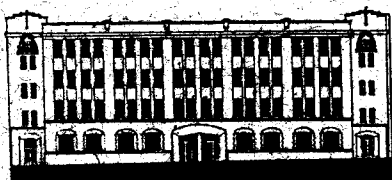
OUI NON

Veillez libeller votre chèque et faire parvenir à l'ordre de:
 Société d'aménagement St-Louis inc.
 3575 boul. St-Laurent, Bureau 122
 Montréal, Québec
 H2K 2T7
 (514) 849-6512

POUR TOUT L'ART DU MONDE...

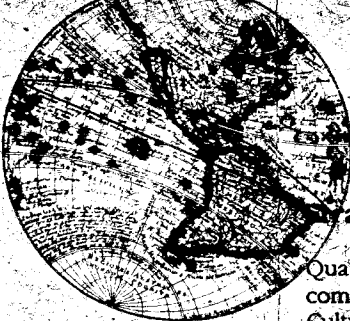
FOR ART'S SAKE...

FUNDRAISING
1990



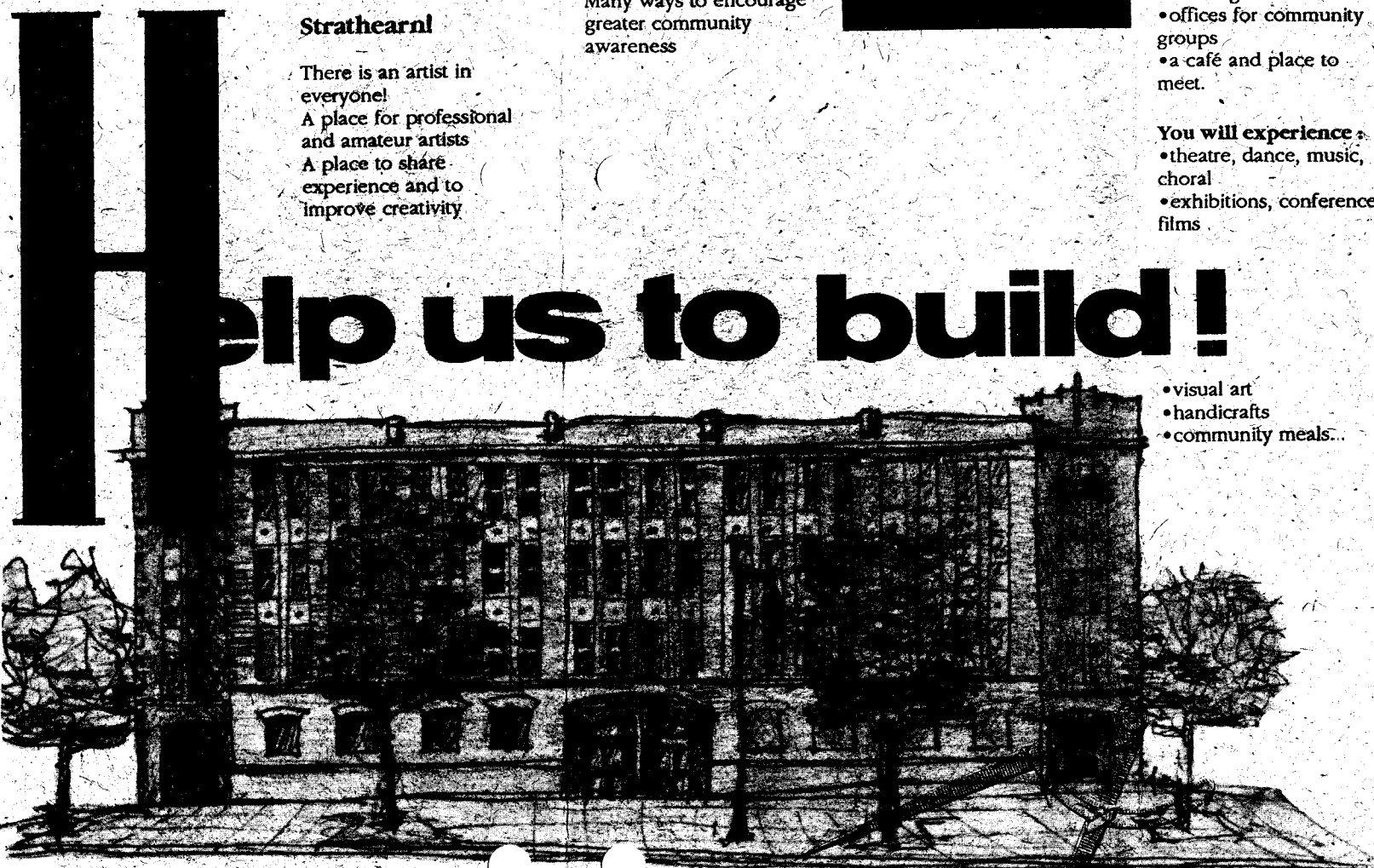
Strathearn Centre
Cultural and Multi-ethnic
Community Centre
3680 Jeanne-Mance Street
Montreal (Québec)
H2X 2K5
(514) 849-0552

Strathearn!
A centre full of friendship
Where cultures meet
Where generations meet



Strathearn!
Quality of life in your
community
Cultural, artistic and
educational activities
Many ways to encourage
greater community
awareness

Strathearn!
There is an artist in
everyone!
A place for professional
and amateur artists
A place to share
experience and to
improve creativity



Financing and management of the centre

Municipal funding will pay for the renovation as well as for half of the costs of managing the building. The other half, as well as the costs of all the programme will be financed by La Société d'aménagement St-Louis, through the fundraising. The Strathearn Centre will be run by a non-profit corporation. The tenant groups and the users will share in managing the centre along the lines expressed at the public hearing in April 1987.

The "Art" of living
within your reach!

- You will enjoy :
- a 150-seat theatre for professional and amateur productions
 - rehearsal and dressing rooms
 - an exhibition hall for local ethnic art and cultural works
 - meeting rooms
 - offices for community groups
 - a café and place to meet.

- You will experience :
- theatre, dance, music, choral
 - exhibitions, conferences, films

- visual art
- handicrafts
- community meals...

YES
I will help to
build

Write out your cheque and mail to:
Société d'aménagement St-Louis Inc.
3575 boul. St. Laurent, Bureau 122
Montreal, Québec
H2X 2T7
(514) 849-0552

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ADDRESS _____

POSTAL CODE _____

TELEPHONE _____

CITY _____

DONATION CASH OTHER

Please send me a receipt YES NO

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