

Office of Public Consultation of Montreal

Comments by Phyllis Lambert

on the Proposed Master plan for Benny Farm of 26 September 2003

25 November 2003

To the Commissioners:

I herewith wish to make certain comments on the abovementioned plan.

Although many thoughtful studies have been prepared in order to develop the plan as presented I find two fundamental problems with the concept: the social context and issues of planning. I will conclude with recommendations relating to both.

The Social Context My first and primary concern is the social approach adopted. Benny Farms as originally constituted by the CMHC had a social purpose. This rare commodity – social responsiveness, is of the greatest importance to the well being of all Montrealers.

In the Avi Friedman study of Affordable Housing for Benny Farm, August 2003, the targeted population is based on the local household income profile of NDG. However the initial population drew on need – the need of veterans. The present approach should target the need, the need of those Montrealers who do not have a choice -- or very little choice -- of where they can live.*

*see »Logement et pauvreté au Québec», dossier FRAPRU, 1999
The need for affordable housing should therefore not be based on the local market but on the well documented need for social housing throughout the city. The findings of the Fonds d'Investissement de Montréal (FIM) in 2001 with regards to some three hundred and fifty units renovated by FIM in certain areas of the city (Cartierville,

Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, Rosemont, Ahuntsic, Pointe Saint-Charles) show the following statistics on household revenue *:

83 % of the households concerned had annual revenues inferior to \$30 000

50 % of the households concerned had annual revenues inferior to \$18 000

However the Friedman study of Affordable Housing for Benny Farm is based on a population with an income range from \$24,454 to \$50, 000. The income range for which the redevelopment of Benny Farms has been designed therefore is well above the needs of a significant and needy sector of the population.

Furthermore, with regard to the projected cost of housing for the Benny Farm Redevelopment, Canada Lands in a document entitled “A Project for the Community” dated 22 September 2003, states on page 18: “[T]he costs of renovation...are lower than the costs of new construction.” The document then concludes that renovation therefore provides affordable rents at a lower cost. **However the plan presented maintains only 22 of the 52 existing units.**

It does not make sense to reduce the affordable units by over 50%.

* See Fonds d’Investissement de Montréal, 2001. On verification, these percentages have hardly changed

Planning Issues

The Friedman report and the Canada Lands document “A Project for the Community” both state that existing units have been removed in order to create greater density and therefore to provide housing at a lower cost.

There are many ways to increase density and maintain the existing units. These include increasing the land coverage of low units (adding low units as proposed in the Fonds Foncier plan), or

increasing the height of the new units. In both cases the existing units could be renovated at a lower cost than that of new construction and therefore provide many more affordable units at a lower cost.

Another concern regarding planning is the quality of open space. The Canada Lands document (page 18) states that “the project calls for large green spaces.” Except for the community garden, the plan as presented shows basically vest-pocket spaces, cut up by access paths. This is particularly problematic along Cavendish Boulevard where units are slated for occupation by young families. The green space proposed does not provide appropriate recreational areas.

Finally the planning of units around deep courtyards is outmoded, belonging to century old planning .

Recommendations

- Provide more low-income housing by maintaining the existing units.
- Revise downward the level of rent for affordable units in order to provide for the real need of the city, and not just that of the local area.
- Establish community management for all types tenancy – not-for-profit cooperatives and OSBLs similar to Milton-Parc, as well as private tenancy in order to assure permanent affordable ownership and rental units, the maintenance of the units, landscape and all public amenities.*
- Provide green spaces adapted to recreation and play for small children and the elderly.

*I have not yet seen *Maintaining affordability for home ownership on the Benny Farm Site* (Luba, Serge, Consultant. Fall 2003) but will comment on it at the hearings.