

BRIEF
SUBMITTED TO THE OFFICE DE CONSULTATION PUBLIQUE DE MONTREAL
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION
CONCERNING THE PROPOSED
WANKLYN'S BLOCK PROJECT

BY
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INTRODUCTION

My name is Sonja Susnjar. I have lived in LaSalle since 2003, when I moved here after twenty-three years spent in the Mile End, in order to help my parents when they started to have major health problems.

In 1978, after fifteen years living in NDG, where public transport was fairly good in the sixties and seventies, and where they did not have a car, my parents bought a duplex in LaSalle on des Oblats street south of Airlie, because they had heard a subway station would soon be built at the corner of Airlie and Lafleur. Thirty-seven years later, they are both gone, having never lived to see the subway station built in their neighbourhood.

My move to LaSalle was intimately linked to transportation problems in LaSalle complicating my parents' situation. Since the metro station was never built, and since the bus service in LaSalle is most inadequate, this made things difficult when my 78-year old mom, who did not drive, found her husband (and driver) hospitalized long term and then placed in a nursing home, while she herself developed serious health problems which required her to go for regular treatments at the Jewish General Hospital. The options for going for treatment were: a) walk 10 minutes, take a bus for 25 minutes, take three metro lines, take another bus, for a total of about one and a quarter to one and a half hours one way (if there was no traffic); b) try adapted transport, but since this was often unreliable and might not show up, this was not deemed adequate for going for life-saving treatment appointments; c) take the newly implanted train, followed by two metro lines and a bus, which would have cut about a half hour from the travel time, but she could not manage the very high step to get on or off the train (a problem that many older people no doubt have); d) pay about \$50 per return taxi trip (in 2003, it would be more now) to go to and from the hospital; or f) get a family member to drive her to hospital. Visiting my father at the nursing home in NDG was similarly complicated, since this involved a five minute walk, a 110 line bus ride followed by a 123 line bus ride, then a 51 line bus ride and another five to ten minute walk or a fourth bus, with waits sometimes up to half an hour between buses. We can imagine what this would have been like in winter. Trying to take the metro would have taken her far out of the way to get to Cavendish and Chester and would probably not have been much shorter time-wise. And she surely wanted to visit him every second day at least.

Being the only family member in Quebec, I decided to move to LaSalle and give my parents a hand, even though this meant that it was now I who had to do the crazy commute of walking ten minutes, taking the bus, for twenty-five minutes, followed by three metro lines, followed by another bus, a total of one and a quarter to one and a half hours, to get to my office in Outremont, if I wanted to take public transit. Taking my bicycle was faster, at one hour, even though it is uphill most of the way, but not really an option in the rain or winter. Eventually I moved my office to the Plateau on Laurier street, near the metro station, in an effort to make it less onerous to take public transit, but this still involved a ten minute walk, a thirty minute bus ride, and two metro lines, for a total of 17 metro stations, still a total of the same one and a quarter to one and a half hours, however, with the option of reducing it to one hour by driving to the metro (an option that is quickly becoming less possible with the densification of the area around the metro station).

After twelve years of living with the woeful state of the public transit system in this part of LaSalle, hearing the promoter say at the information session that the traffic study concluded

that the planned Wanklyn development is well-served by public transit seems so disconnected from reality that, to me, it automatically throws into question the credibility of everything else the promoter said.

MY INTEREST IN THE PROJECT

I never attended an activity at the borough hall until eight years after moving to LaSalle, when in the dog days of mid-August 2011, I happened to be idly flipping through the local weekly paper, Le Messager LaSalle, and saw a legal notice, written in tiny print and impenetrable language, but possessed of a sketch which allowed me to see that it had to do with changing the zoning and the urban plan with respect to several large areas in our neighbourhood, allowing 3 to 12 store highrises and medium to high density development where the zoning was currently two floors with low to medium density. The notice announced a public consultation for these zoning changes and corresponding changes to the urban plan, meant to allow the development Quartier de la Gare LaSalle (QDLGL), for September 6th, the day after Labor Day. I attended and what I saw there made me decide to get involved simply because I didn't feel I had any other choice.

My husband and I were nearly the only citizens at the public consultation meeting for a major zoning change, since the legal notice about the meeting had been published in mid-summer. When we arrived on the dot of the time specified, the mayor was already reading the draft bylaw to an empty room. The urbanist showed three quarters of an hour of photos of empty lots we were all familiar with but not a single drawing of the proposed project which, however, was hanging in her office earlier that afternoon. After forty-five minutes, the mayor interrupted the presentation which was left unfinished and asked if there were any questions. We had fifteen minutes to both ask questions and give feedback on a major change in the western part of LaSalle. No mention was made of the citizens' right to ask for a referendum, until I asked about it, even though Article 127 of the urban planning law *Lois ur l'anénaement et l'urbanisme* states that it must be mentioned at the public consultation meeting.

I made efforts to inform LaSalle residents I knew about the proposed change since I did not find it acceptable that these changes should be effected without the citizens having a say. When the legal notice re petitioning for a register for a referendum came out a few weeks later, with a handful of other residents I collected 200 signatures on petitions to ask for a register for a referendum. The draft bylaw to allow the QDLGL was hastily withdrawn. However, the changes to the urban plan, which are not subject to the possibility of a referendum, were adopted, five days before Christmas by Montreal city council, on December 20th, 2011.

The administration then decided to proceed with piece-by-piece concrete projects rather than an overall zoning change. I remained involved when the first Wanklyn Project was proposed in December 2011, since I continued to have concerns about the impact on the neighbourhood of such a project. I have attended nearly every regular borough council meeting since September 2011 and have attended all information sessions and public consultations held with respect to the first project and have followed closely the evolution of events relating to

development in the western part of LaSalle. I was also involved with mobilizing the population to sign a register for a referendum with respect to the first version of the Wanklyn Project because, in my opinion, the changes made to the project still left it inappropriate for the neighbourhood. The project was overwhelmingly rejected by the population, as 107 people signed the register where only 65 signatures were required to either force a referendum or have the project be withdrawn, and this on a day when it was 33 degrees Celsius outside.

I am interested in this second version of the project because I believe that if it is implemented as is, it will radically change the nature of my neighbourhood, my quality of life, and my ability to get around in a reasonable manner. I take Lafleur, Clément, des Oblats, and Airlie streets every day and sometimes several times a day, so traffic congestion there will have a major impact for me. If the remainder of the larger development, the Quartier de la Gare LaSalle, of which this is the first phase in the borough's plan, is implemented, there will be major development even closer, on Airlie street just around the corner and at the current cul-de-sac at the end of my street (according to the Map 33 of the *Schéma d'aménagement et de développement de l'agglomération de Montréal*). Since Lafleur, Airlie, des Oblats, Clément and Route 138 are streets and arteries I need to navigate every day and often several times a day, I am very concerned about the traffic congestion there and anything that might influence it. But, most of all, I am concerned about the quality of life of all residents in the area, and also about democracy being respected in LaSalle.

SOME WHITE ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM

- 1) The moral and possibly the legal legitimacy of the borough's referral of this project to Montreal city council under Article 89 of the city charter is questionable.** Perhaps it is legally possible, but it does seem strange that the borough is changing horses mid-stream, so to speak, after having followed the normal zoning change process involving the possibility of a referendum for the first Wanklyn Project, which was of a similar size and therefore would have been eligible for the Article 89 exemption. It seems that the register process not having given the result the borough and the developer hoped for, the borough has decided to go around the population (see Linda Gyulai, "Skirting the public's input" and "LaSalle invokes clause to bypass register", *Montreal Gazette*, July 21st, 2015). The reasons invoked by the mayor to justify this do not hold water: She says it was to "depoliticize" the process, but it actually politicizes it more, given that the ultimate decision is to be made by Montreal city councillors to the exclusion of the population. She says this project fits with the residential vocation of the Wanklyn block but so would a smaller project that would be acceptable to the population. She touts the project as an example of a transit oriented development, a TOD, but does not show that this is appropriate in this location (see below). She attempts to disparage the usual and legal zoning change process as somehow unfair to those who were for the project, but they were as able as anyone else to participate in the public consultations on the project and chose not to participate in the register to show their approval of the project. The elements that the Jacques Viger committee praised have nothing to do with the neighbours of the eventual development. The mayor also claimed that a referendum on the project, which would have allowed everyone entitled to vote to have a say, was not held because it would have cost \$600,000, the same as an election. She was later forced to retract this at the start of the September city council question period, as approximately

only 543 people would have been eligible to vote in such a referendum, but no correction has appeared in Le Messager LaSalle, which is delivered to over 32, 000 LaSalle households, who presumably still believe this incorrect information.

Notwithstanding the excellent reputation for impartiality of the OCPM this has led to some bitterness and demotivation in the population. Residents who participated in the democratic register process in good faith, have now seen their efforts swept away with the wave of a hand, and many have the impression that the political decision about the project has already been made, regardless of the eventual recommendations of the OCPM. This, combined with the onerous elements of participating in the consultation process, has discouraged many and led to lesser participation than might otherwise have been obtained. I deplore it as deleterious for democracy, as the population gets more cynical.

- 1) **This project is only the first part of the megadevelopment Quartier de la Gare LaSalle.** Since the withdrawal of the first QDLGL in November 2011 in response to citizens' objections and petitions, the borough has been very cagey about admitting that this is the ultimate plan, often seeming to deny it. The current consultation will, I hope, at least have the salutary effect of putting an end to this tergiversation, as there can be no doubts in the wake of the publication on the OCPM's website of the borough document "Projets futurs sur le territoire LaSallois", in appendix B of the call for tenders for a traffic study (document 4.5.1), what the actual plan is. One of the tables shows a total of 2900 residential units planned in the area of the train station. In my opinion, this unrealistic plan, given the many physical barriers in the area, should be submitted to thorough impact study, before its phase one, the Wanklyn Block project is authorized.

- 2) **This is essentially the same project which was massively rejected in the register for a referendum in 2012**, a fact that appears to be skipped over in the borough's and the promoter's documentation and presentations at the first session of the consultation (see Annex A for a copy of the official certificate produced by the borough after the register). To explain: although there are differences between this project and the first version such as the actual foot print and placement of the buildings, the exact details of where the park is proposed to be built, no doubt some of the architecture which is in fact yet to be decided on, these are not aspect of the development which make a great deal of difference to the development's neighbours. Like the noise level inside the residences near the highway, they will matter more to the future inhabitants of the development. However, what is distressing and disappointing is that the oft-expressed preoccupations of those neighbours and indeed the reasons the project was rejected in a referendum back in 2012 have not been taken into account. The **height** (maximum number of storeys) is 8 in the current version (8 ½ really when the fact that there will be stairs to climb to get to the "ground floor" level on account of the parking lot being only half underground is taken into account) compared to 9 in the version which was rejected in the register as too tall. The **number of units (density)**, deemed too high in 2012 at 750 or 755, is now **worse** at 786; there are **fewer parking spots**, 727 compared to 784 in 2012, thus there is likely to be even more competition the existing residents with regards to parking on the surrounding streets; **the parking spots in the development still do not seem to be included in the price of the units**, raising suspicions that most of the new residents, (many of whom it must be remembered

need financial help to purchase or rent their unit) will not be paying \$25,000 to \$30,000 for a parking spot in the development but will try to park on the surrounding streets for free, complicating the lives of current residents and no doubt ultimately requiring parking permits (\$\$) in the area, which will still not solve the problem, as both current and future residents are all residents.

We were told at the information session that the 50 parking spots on the future street in the middle of the development would constitute the visitor's parking (they hope, because nothing prevents anyone else from parking there). Taking as an example this week's Thanksgiving holiday, if my calculations are correct, this means that the planning allows for a total of one car of visitors per approximately 16 condos!

- 3) **This high-density development is being promoted and justified as a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) but TODs don't work:** Please see the work of Wendell Cox, a specialist in urban planning policy, transport and demographics, who reports that according to the latest Statistics Canada research, contrary to the idea underpinning the entire concept of TODs, that is, that people in TODs will eschew cars in favor of public transit, (hence the dense occupancy coupled with few parking spots), people in TODs do not, in fact, take public transit any more than people living outside of TODs, and this because public transit often does not go where people need to go. Only a minority of jobs are deemed to be downtown, but that is where all the public transit is usually headed.

(<http://www.montrealgazette.com/business/Urban+sprawl+gets/6709648/story.html>;

<http://www.macdonaldlaurier.ca/files/pdf/Mobility-and-Prosperity-in-the-City-of-the-Future-Commentary-May-2012.pdf>)

On the other hand he mentions that this type of high-density development leads to greater congestion, more pollution from idling cars, loss of productive time for individuals and company employees while they sit in traffic, an increase in land prices as land scarcity is created by restricting the areas where one might build, a resulting increase in evaluations and rents, land speculation and corruption. Apparently for all these reasons, some jurisdiction, such as Florida, have started to repeal this type of law.

- 4) **This is a so-called Transit Oriented Development (TOD) – without transit**

- a) Subway: There is no subway station in LaSalle. The closest Metro station is the Angrignon station in the South-West borough, about five kilometers away, a twelve to fifteen minute car drive (if there is no traffic) or a thirty minute bus ride away in good conditions.
- b) Bus service is very poor: all the bus lines meander throughout LaSalle before getting to the metro (35 to 40 minutes for the 110 from des Oblats street); Most of the lines go to the Angrignon metro station, which means

that anyone going north, northeast and west must make a very long detour via the green metro line. The links diagonally with NDG/CDN/ Outremont/ St. Laurent/ or points west where people might work, such as the Dorval airport are extremely poor or non-existent (example:).

- c) Train service: There is a train station which is the excuse being used for calling development in this area a TOD, but it has very limited service and cannot be compared to a subway service which is I estimate to be every five to fifteen minutes for eighteen hours a day

The train is a very good way to get downtown, to Lucien L'Allier train station, in about 20 minutes and it cuts about thirty minutes from trying to go anywhere that would usually require taking the bus to the metro and then the metro. The problem is that there are very few departures, at awkward times outside of rush hour and having little coordination with buses if you need to go farther afield than the destination train station. The LaSalle train station is on the Candiatic line from the south shore which has very limited service, much less than the Hudson-Vaudreuil line that West Islanders complain about.

(<https://www.amt.qc.ca/Media/Default/pdf/section4/Horaires-Train/horaire-ca.pdf>).

On weekdays there is service **towards downtown only** during the morning rush hour and service **towards the south shore only** during the afternoon rush hour. There is often standing room only on the rush hour trains before they get to LaSalle. When I contacted the AMT to ask why neither the trains returning to the south shore during the morning rush hour nor the trains returning to downtown during the afternoon rush hour stop at any of the stations including LaSalle, I was told that this was because the CP does not wish to take more time with passenger traffic to the detriment of transporting merchandise (There has been a huge increase in the frequency and speed of non-passenger trains on the Candiatic line with the explosion of oil output in recent years). This does not augur well for expanding passenger service in the future.

Outside of the rush hour there are only two departures towards downtown, one at 10:51 a.m. and one at 1:41 p.m., rather strange departure times that have one generally arriving either too early or too late for anything one might have to do downtown. There are likewise only two departures from Lucien L'Allier towards the south shore outside of the rush hours, one at 9:35 a.m. (arriving in LaSalle at 9:52) and a second one at 12:20 p.m. (arriving in LaSalle at 12:37. This means that anyone working a different shift than 8 to 4 or 9 to 5 is essentially out of luck in terms of using the train even if they do work in the general direction of the train. The noontime train leaves downtown at 12:20, so you may or may not be able to make it if you have something downtown that lasts till noon.

Both my husband and I work afternoons and evenings, and even though I have some flexibility in my schedule, being self-employed, I cannot use the train to go to work, and believe me, I have tried, including

combinations of two trains, and so on. Also, most of the trains do not coordinate with bus lines near the train stations, often leaving one waiting for a half hour for the next bus. I sometimes used the train to go for medical appointments at the Royal Victoria Hospital, since I did not want to take a car for that purpose and since I could try to schedule the appointment in the morning so that I could try to get the 12:20 train back from downtown. On several occasions, the wait for the doctor was longer than I anticipated, and I missed the train, leaving me the option of taking the bus and metro system back home which would take 1 ¼ to 1 ½ hours, or waiting three and a half hours till the first rush hour train departure towards the south shore at 3:57 p.m. (Believe it or not, the bus trip and walk from the metro to my home is so frustrating, that I actually tried to find something to do for three and a half hours at the hospital.) The last two times I took the train downtown to the Royal Vic, the connecting twice-hourly 107 bus to go up to the hospital had been rescheduled to several minutes earlier than before, making it impossible to connect from the train, and meaning I just missed it and had to wait a half hour for the next bus. The last time I tried, it never came, so I waited for an hour in all for the bus and ended up seeing the doctor only because of his kindness.

There is no train service evenings, weekends, or on holidays. I was looking forward to taking the train to the new Glen campus of the Royal Vic and thought it would be so much better to go there for a test scheduled on Labor Day, since the new location of the hospital is right near the Vendome train station, until I realized that in fact there would be no service that day. Anyone hoping to go downtown for a movie or dinner is also out of luck since there are no trains after 1; 41 p.m. and none returning after 6:15 p.m. from downtown. At one point I tried to take the Hudson-Vaudreuil 9:21 p.m. train from Vendôme coming back from my office which at that time was in Outremont and there was a half-hour wait for the twice-hourly 123, followed by having to connect with either the 110 or 495 at the corner of Dollard and Newman.

- d) The lure of the road: Presently, **the site of the future development is actually closer to the highway entrances** to Hwy 138 towards Hwy 20 and the Mercier Bridge **than to the train station.** The proximity to the highway entrances is mentioned as a plus in the “Quartier de la Gare LaSalle” document.

The borough’s and the promoter’s own documents on the OCPM website admit that it takes 15 minutes via car to get to downtown versus 30 minutes by bus to the metro and thence at least another 30 minutes to points downtown, so that residents of this area are every day faced with a choice of spending 30 minutes in the car versus more than two hours in public transit and guess which wins out? Would you act any differently? For this reason none of the residents here believes that the development residents will be taking public transit rather than buying, driving and parking their cars in the area like everyone else! When I was going door to door gathering signatures, most people laughed when they heard this theory and often said that the residents will all have one car when it’s not

two or three because of the deplorable state of public transit in this area of LaSalle. And this is also why there was lots of laughter in the room at the first consultation meeting when the promoter's representative said that this development will have no impact on traffic in the area! On account of the greater proximity of the highway than public transit, combined with the poor public transit service, this is actually a COD, a car oriented development!

I) OTHER REASONS WHY I AM AGAINST THIS PROJECT

- 1) **It breaks a social contract between people who bought or rent property here and the borough/city** by flooding the area with many more people than already live here and by fundamentally changing the nature of the neighbourhood. Only 545 people were eligible to vote in the referendum that involved three of the four residential contiguous zones because this is a relatively low density area, whereas the Wanklyn project would bring in 786 X 2.2 or 1730 residents on its own and close to 5,000 could be expected were the borough's plans for the Quartier de la gare LaSalle to be realized). This suburban, low-height, low-density area by the river and the canal would be transformed into a dense, tall, and very urbanized environment. People who bought property or chose to rent here did not choose to live downtown, cheek-by-jowl with highrises. Likewise, people who bought houses to be close to the train station will feel the borough is moving the goalposts by moving the station to please the promoter and the new residents. It is a question of taking from Pierre to give to Paul. If the train station and the bus terminus are moved this reduces service for everyone south of Airlie in favor of the new development.
- 2) **Building heights of over 5, 6, or 7 stories lead to disaffection, alienation and social problem.** There is a reason buildings in much of Europe are kept to these heights—it results in a much better living environment. Henri Aubin summarizes some of the expert opinion on this subject (“Condo Conundrum”, The Gazette, February 23, 2012)
- 3) **There is insufficient social infrastructure in the area in terms of schools, daycares, sports facilities, cultural activities, parks, etc.,** as ampl explained by others during the consultation.
- 4) **The project appears unfinished.** It leaves one wondering whether one is giving a carte blanche to anything the borough and the promoters decide to do in the future. I note that Madame Louise Roy, the former President of the OCPM gave an interview where she mentioned that projects sometimes change after the consultation session, and how unfair this is to the citizens who participate in good faith in the consultation process. For example, I wonder if the zone where the promoter says he wants to build four stories but the borough specifies six in the bylaw will result in six-storey buildings (I found the borough's explanation on September 15th unconvincing).
- 5) **There has been a lack of transparency on the part of the borough.** See for example the erroneous information provided which has had to be corrected on the OCPM website.

- 6) **There is a lack of transparency on the part of the promoter.** Similarly, the promoter talks about 10 and 11 stories in the project which was rejected, whereas it was 9 stories.
- 7) **To justify the project, we are told the project corresponds to the urban plan and to the new land-use plan but I know in what conditions those were adopted. I was there....**Please see the transcript of the October 15 session for details).
- 8) **We do not need more condos in LaSalle.** There is already an oversupply, and the existing units are not selling. Many of the newly built condos are for rent.

ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTIONS

- 1) Three story low-to-medium density development with up to 350 units like the similar sized part of LaSalle Heights between des Oblats and Bergevin or like the Highlands project which Mme Handfield tells us is selling like hotcakes, and this with parking included in the price of the units as is the case for that development.
- 2) I am not sure I would include duplexes simply because there are already a lot of those in LaSalle (87% of the buildings in LaSalle according to the Centris website!), but town houses seem popular,
- 3) **Public market like Atwater but smaller** with indoor and outdoor shops, cafés where you can sit outside (currently there is nothing of the sort in this part of LaSalle), with a community center upstairs.
- 4) Light industry.

CONCLUSION

I thank you for your kind attention to my brief.