

Memo

September 21, 2015

To: the OCPM

RE: Consultation publique - Projet Îlot Wanklyn

Good day,

I am writing this memo as a concerned citizen who lives in the zone impacted by the proposed project Wanklyn. I am familiar with the project and its previous iteration, and I am opposed to this project for various reasons, which are as follows:

1. **This proposal is anti-democratic and is taking advantage of a process set up for large public good projects such as hospitals, airports, etc.** Putting lipstick on a pig doesn't mean that it still isn't a pig. The original proposal was submitted to a referendum of those living in the area, we, as a group, evaluated the proposal and deemed it unfit for the area. The current project is too close to the other project to be realistically differentiated. A few extra units and floor height doesn't change that it is a bad project. Rather than accept and work with local residents to come up with a project that would better suit all stakeholders, the city of LaSalle has elected to take advantage of the process provided for in the OCPM, in the charter of the city of Montreal. Thus this is an attempt to ram a project down our collective throats, despite the clear opposition from those citizens who voted in the referendum.
2. **The public transport system is inadequate for the population in this area.** Proponents for the project will argue that vehicular traffic; will not be as heavily impacted because there is public transport in the form of bus and train nearby. I would disagree. The current Candiac train provides no service on weekends, and provides 9 trains per day in each direction. While this works somewhat for people who work 9-5 jobs, not all people work those hours. That the last train available leaves downtown at 6:20 makes it hard for me to take public transit. After 10am heading downtown via train is virtually impossible (thus I cannot schedule appointments in LaSalle without driving to work after). Furthermore the train platform in LaSalle has inadequate sheltering for winter months, and is unsafe for those with limited mobility (I've often slid on the improperly cleared snow on the wooden platform lacking grips). The Metro/Bus network is equally inadequate, unlike Angrignon developments which have steady access to the metro, the Wanklyn commute involves walking to the Lafleur terminus and then taking at least a 45 minute bus to reach the metro. Thus, a bus/metro trip to downtown takes approximately 1h:30m+. Thus most people with irregular hours, which include customer service shift workers, professionals, etc, will elect to drive. Adding 786 households to this network will result in at least a high proportion of additional cars on the road.

3. **The addition of 786 residences would strain an already fragile transportation network.** *“Statistics are like a drunk with a lampost: used more for support than illumination” – Winston S. Churchill.* As one of the residents who voted against the prior project, I took issue with the conclusions of the traffic study. Though the study was performed by a reputable engineering firm, it was clearly commissioned to lobby for the approval of the project. As someone who lives in the area day in and day out, regardless of what the study found, I have personally and frequently ended up in traffic back-ups on Lafleur from Clement to sometimes as far south as Wanklyn. Further, this part of the city is bottlenecked as the Lachine canal doesn't provide enough bridges to mitigate the flow of cars. From this part of the city, the main exits to other boroughs are via Lachine, the 138, or driving along Newman, LaSalle/de la Verandrie, or St-Jacques streets, until another bridge is reached. Adding 727 vehicles (the # of parking spots) to an already congested network at peak hours, without the city planning additional traffic relief in the form of wider arteries, fewer lights, or more bridges across the Lachine canal, would only end up exasperating an already problematic situation.
4. **Aesthetically the project is an eyesore.** I find this particular project, as proposed, reminds me of a concrete bunker. While I am all for redevelopment of an empty lot, I don't believe in redevelopment for redevelopment's sake. Ideally neighbourhoods should be continuously striving to improve their appeal to both the existing and future residents. Thus new developments, in my mind, should be guided with an eye to improve the aesthetics and calibre of the neighbourhood. This project does not do that in the slightest. Replacing an empty lot with these condominiums will not improve the aesthetics of the neighbourhood.
5. **At the risk of sounding unpopular, I do not believe we should be promoting the development of more low income housing in this part of the neighbourhood.** With the poor public transport in the area I think it would cause hardship for those buying with constraints. Further as a property owner, living near even more low income housing will only reduce the value of my lot. While I understand recent studies on the Island of Montreal concluded we should overall have more affordable housing, I would argue that the solution would be to ensure that a small percentage of all new city wide housing have low income subsidies. However, I don't think that it should be concentrated at higher percentages in a given project as it does nothing to help the existing neighbours nor the future purchasers. If a large percentage of a building is subsidized housing, the resale value won't be as high, whereas a small percentage would be unnoticed by future buyers. Further, subsidized housing projects should by their nature be close to adequate public transport, something, living in the area itself, I find to be lacking.
6. **There are too many condos.** If you go around Montreal there are several condo developments that have yet to come online in what is already a saturating market. I believe most condo buyers would choose a downtown condo or one in a pleasing neighbourhood over one that involves a larger commute, an inadequate road and public transport network, and very few commercial enterprises other than sami fruits, in walking distance. I therefore can't see the benefit of building things of little utility, just because we can. Rather, we should be promoting a project should which would grow the commercial and residential tax base of the area in a positive way.

7. **Who will benefit from this project?** I fail to see how this project will actually benefit the neighbourhood or those living in the area. The project was originally voted down for that reason, yet the city persists to promote this project despite clear opposition. If this project is so dissimilar to that which was rejected, why wouldn't they put it to a second referendum vote? Why use a process that is typically reserved for hospitals, airports, etc. While I don't know for sure, I suspect the city of LaSalle is in favour as they project a welcome taxes windfall, but that is a short-sighted view if it will make the neighbourhood less desirable in the long-term.

As a citizen of the area, I agree with the development of this empty lot, but only in the right way. The area could benefit from light office space or low density housing. A project of this nature could, in my mind, only work after the public transport and road network improved. Adding 786 households in a low density area is a shock to the ecosystem for which I don't think it will well recover.

The city government has a responsibility to approve projects that improve the lives of the citizens that reside here, and budgetary gains should be secondary to that directive. Poor choices can kill a neighbourhood, while the right ones help improve it. A proposal of single family homes and duplexes could be profitable, and would attract the right type of households in this neighbourhood. The empty lot is a great opportunity for the city in general to improve the character of this part of LaSalle for generations of households to come. I ask that you don't squander this chance for some poorly planned eyesore. If this project fails, another developer will find a way to finance construction that respects both those living there and the quality of the neighbourhood.

I conclude by saying that urban planning in LaSalle should strive to grow and improve the quality of life for its citizens. I look at St-Henri and Verdun, the plateau, and NDG, and I see those boroughs taking positive steps to work with their citizens to make it a place to live, work, and grow families. I would love a project that could improve the community and the residential/commercial mix making it a destination people want to live in. However, this project, in my mind would do the opposite. If passed, it will be imposed on citizens who live there, and would create an unnecessary eyesore straining the neighbourhood resources closer to their limit. Thus, I urge you, to evaluate this project openly and fairly and respect the wishes that those living in the area. We are educated people who are aware of the pros and cons of this project and are better suited to evaluate its merits as we will live with the consequences. Ideally this project too should be put at referendum, but if the OCPM process is the option available to us, then I hope that you will consider our wishes in its stead.