

My brief to the OCPM regarding the redevelopment of the site of the former Montreal Children's Hospital

**from Robert
Hajaly**

March 16, 2017

Good evening; my name is Robert Hajaly, I live and work in the Peter McGill district, and am interested in the redevelopment of the site of the former Montreal Children's Hospital.

First, I welcome the proposed redevelopment insofar as it will increase the number of people living downtown, and provide a community centre, recreational green space and social housing for local residents. These are longtime demands of the local community. However, I have a number of comments and suggestions to improve this project.

First, it is desirable that a major portion, say a half, of the 15% affordable housing provided by this project be suitable for families. It is expensive for families to live downtown, and, contrary to what some developers think, there are many attractions for children, as well as for their parents, to live downtown. Moreover, families create a demand for desirable city services, and it is preferable for the city that they live downtown if otherwise they would live in the suburbs outside Montreal. By units suitable for families, I mean units that can qualify for city subsidies for such housing, specifically that have 3 closed bedrooms, at least 96 square metres (1033 square feet) of floor space, and are on the first five floors of buildings. It is up to developers to make publicly known the many downtown attractions for families and to promote these to prospective buyers. As for social housing, I understand that 18 of 180 such units are planned by this project for families. If this is correct, I believe this figure of 18 family units is too low. The city and developer together should research the proportion of local residents qualifying for social housing who have children, and so determine the proportion of social housing for families accordingly.

Second, I would like to see the size of the proposed Henri-Dunant Park increased, if possible, to allow more room for recreational sporting activities. There are now no public facilities for such activities in the area of this development. More specifically, the Jardin de l'Hopital, proposed by the PPU for this area and on which the expanded Henri-Dunant Park is based, extended further down south to Hope Avenue and Hector-Toe-Blake Park. To achieve this lengthening, even partway, of the Henri-Dunant Park, the length of towers 4 and 5, especially 5, of this project would have to be shortened somewhat. To maintain the floor area of the community centre beneath these towers, the community centre should be extended westward along Rene-Levesque Boulevard. Also, I would like to support the city's assurance, given at the information meeting for this project, that Henri-Dunant Park will be controlled by the city and arranged flexibly for sporting activity, preferably, in my view, as a mini soccer/football field. As well, I think there should also be a mini basketball court, also under city control, in the considerable ground space in the centre of this redeveloped site, between towers 2 and 3 and 6 and 4. As I said above, there is a completely unsatisfied need for sporting facilities in this area, and soccer and basketball are popular sports to allow and encourage people to be physically active.

Third, I believe it would be desirable to have a local public primary school on this site, if possible. There is no such school now in all of Peter McGill district, and this puts off some families with young children from staying here. A school located in this project would have the advantage of being next to a community centre with a public library and next to a green space that could be played on by students. This school could be located in the space now intended for shops below towers 1, 2 and 3. It should, if possible, include local students studying under the English Montreal School Board as well as those studying under the French CSDM, so that all local students can equally attend a local public school (48% of Peter McGill residents speak English at home, 22% French, according to the 2011 census). This is already the practice at the FACE school on University Street downtown.

Fourth, and more critically, I think the buildings of this project are too high and this height should be reduced. First, their height is way out of scale with the height of the neighbouring buildings to the east and

south, whose maximum permitted height is 14 metres. They are also considerably higher than any buildings now around Cabot Square. But of greater practical significance, their great height puts Cabot Square mostly in shade in the morning, Hector-Toe-Blake-Park in the afternoon, and the expanded Henri-Dunant Park throughout the day (as shown in the architects's presentation of this project, dated Oct. 19, 2016, on pages 60 and 61). This project benefits from the proximity of these parks, and yet it is spoiling other people's enjoyment of them, many of whom are already disadvantaged. In my view, this is not right. At the information meeting for this project we were told by the developer's side that they could reduce building heights only by reducing the amount of green space made available by this project. This assumes that the developer would have to build the same number of units, but spread over a greater ground area, to cover his costs and make a profit. But maybe these costs could be reduced, with the help of government, requiring fewer units to be built. For example, the city could pay the developer for the portion of the developer's land that the developer is effectively ceding to the city to make up the expanded Henri-Dunant Park. And the provincial and federal governments can bear at least some, if not all, of the cost of the developer building non profit social housing. Financing such housing should after all be primarily the governments's responsibility. Also, a small point, the height of the two commercial floors under towers 1, 2 and 3 could be reduced from the proposed 7 metres each (23 feet), appropriate only for very large stores, to about 4 metres (13 feet), reducing the total height of these buildings by 6 metres (20 feet). In any case, I believe the permissible height for this project should remain at 80 metres, with all the buildings other than tower 1, and especially towers 3 and 5 next to Henri-Dunant and Hector-Toe-Blake Parks, being considerably less than this--say, 65 metres for towers 2, 4 and 6, and 45 metres for towers 3 and 5. It should be noted that 45 metres is the increased height of buildings now permitted on the portion of St. Catherine Street near Cabot Square, to prevent this pedestrian friendly street from being unduly shaded by the buildings along this street.

Fifth, the proposed tower 6 for social housing overwhelms and to this extent diminishes the adjacent former nurses's residence (on the corner of Rene-Levesque and Atwater) because of the social housing building's much greater height, 20 storeys, as against 3 storeys for the former nurses's residence. This effect is magnified by the social housing building being immediately next to the former nurses's residence, with no space between these buildings. Therefore, to reduce this negative effect the social housing building should be moved eastward at least about 9 metres (30 feet) to separate it visually from the former nurses's residence. There is room for this move as there is now about 27 metres (89 feet) between the social housing building and tower 4 to the east of it. I believe that this move was one of the conditions that the Comite Consultatif d'Urbanisme specified for its approval of this project (page 4 of the Sommaire decisionnel of the City of Montreal), but this condition has not been respected by the developer.

Sixth, truck deliveries should not go on the ground level in the interior space of this project, as now proposed. This would be incompatible with the use and appropriate ambience of this interior ground space for purposes of relaxation, conviviality, and recreation (such as, for example, its use to create a mini basketball court which I have suggested in my second point above). Also, it should be noted that the proposed route of the truck deliveries would not, in any case, reach towers 3, 4 and 5. Instead, truck deliveries should either be made from the street, for which purpose certain parking spots can be reserved for certain times of the day, or via the basement, in which case trucks would go down the same access entrances to the basement as cars. Getting rid of ground level deliveries in the interior space would also give more room for the social housing building to be moved eastward, as I've suggested in my fifth point.

Seventh, on page 52 of the architects's presentation of the project (dated Oct. 19, 2016), it is proposed to build bench seats out of concrete blocks assembled together the length of the east-west axis of the project's interior ground space. I wish to suggest that these benches instead be of the traditional park type, such as is found in Dorchester Square in downtown Montreal, with proper support for people's backs. Such benches, in my view, are more relaxing, precisely because they do offer better support for people's backs, including for those who are reading for a while; and as well such benches are more elegant and attractive, in my view, than concrete blocks.

Eighth, according to the architect's presentation of the project (page 33), tower 4, to be built above the community centre, will be built in a second phase after the community centre is built in the first phase. Care

should then be taken that the building of tower 4 does not interfere with or detract from the use of the already built community centre. If this is not possible then the community centre and towers 4 and 5 should all be built at the same time, preferably in the first phase of the project or as soon as possible.

Ninth, the community centre, its development, uses, programs, etc, should be developed by the city administration in close consultation and coordination with members and organisations of the community, including immigrants (who form 44% of Peter McGill's population, according to the 2011 census), aboriginals and the homeless. Members of the community should be given as much autonomy as possible in the use of the community centre.

Finally, tenth, city approval of this project should not only be by the Montreal city council, as outlined in the city's Sommaire decisionnel (page 5), but also by the Ville-Marie borough council. Though it is claimed by the Sommaire decisionnel that this is a project of city-wide significance due to its scale, and therefore liable to approval by the city's municipal council, it should also be recognised that it has a great local significance for the Peter McGill community, and therefore, as a matter of principle, should also require the approval of the Ville-Marie borough council.

Yours sincerely, Robert Hajaly