

Office de consultation publique de Montréal
1550, rue Metcalfe – Bureau 1414
Montréal (Québec) H3A 1X6

October 10th 2020

Re : Ilot Ste Catherine Ouest

Honorable Commissioners,

I write to you in regards to the zoning changes which are being developed for my neighborhood, and with particular regards to the decrease in building heights and densities which is being proposed by the City of Montreal. I have lived in the neighborhood for over 20 years and have a background in urban planning. I feel that my insight may be of some assistance in assessing these zoning proposals.

In brief I would like to express my strong reserve regarding the decrease in building heights and densities on the unusual swath of land proposed by the City planners. I believe this overly cautious approach will set back what is the previously expressed development strategy for the immediate downtown core, namely: to densify, to augment the number of residents; to offer diverse housing types, and; to support economic dynamism. It is precisely these goals which were set out in Montreal's Urban Master Plan as well as the Specific Urban Plan put in place for this neighborhood. Following these clearly set-out objectives, we can create a rich urban landscape and reinvigorate this neighborhood and downtown Montreal. The approach currently proposed runs counter to these objectives for reasons which are neither substantiated nor well-founded.

In support of their position, the City planners cite the protection of heritage buildings in the area. I am intimately familiar with this neighborhood and I cannot agree that the intervention area is full of such heritage structures. While there are certainly some older apartment blocks and row houses, the area is also full of concrete high-rises and unremarkable older buildings that, at best, have reached the limits of their architectural life. The existing varied mix of low rise and high-rise buildings within the area under review does not seem to follow any set urban planning pattern as far as height or density is concerned. To now impose a 16-meter limit on such a heterogenous amalgamation of structures shows absolutely no sensitivity to the neighborhood as it is, and will only serve to freeze the natural evolution of the area.

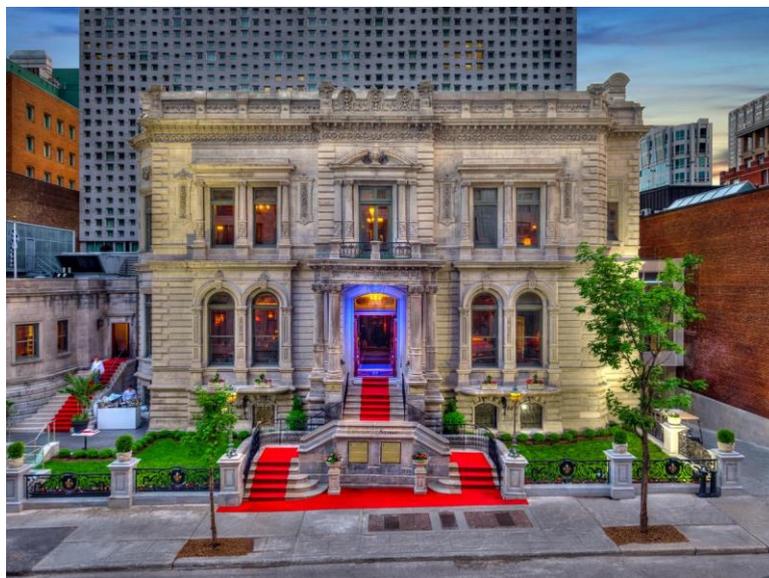
In support of their proposal, the city's urban planners state:

« L'analyse du territoire existant révèle que les plafonds de densité et de hauteur du Plan d'urbanisme sont nettement trop élevés pour assurer la conservation du bâti ancien dominant dans le secteur visé par la modification. »

This statement is patently untrue and hypocritical, at best, as the city planners are considering to increase the height of density for a particular project in the context of these same hearings. Height and density zoning have nothing to do with the conservation of older buildings. Maximum zoning height and density do not convey unconditional rights. The city always retains the right to examine the merit of any future project. If we wish to protect the heritage of the area, this wary approach is both outdated and questionable.

If planners instead provide a framework towards densification in the context of a plan which protects heritage, what naturally results is build-in and build-up of the area. When builders are permitted to “think-big” older structures can benefit from extensive and expensive rejuvenation and the neighborhood can thus renew itself. In simply freezing a dynamic neighborhood in time we reject the needs of a growing and ever-moving downtown core.

One need only look at some of the recent marquee projects in the downtown core to understand that the protection of patrimony often goes hand-in-hand with increased densities.



Le Mount Stephen saw the restoration of a building of great heritage value through the inclusion of a boutique hotel (behind).



The Beaux-Arts Condominiums witnessed the restoration of Victorian grey stones which had deteriorated over many years.

The Commissioners should also be aware that there is a large undeveloped surface parking lot on boul. De Maisonneuve between rue St Marc and rue St Mathieu spanning about 25% of the city block, directly in the middle of the zoning area to be modified. The parking terrain sits beside the Royal Montreal Curling Club and represents a fantastic redevelopment opportunity. Not only could vacant terrain be developed, but one can also imagine bringing additional value to the Royal Montreal Curling Club and the beautiful *École des métiers de la restauration et du tourisme de Montréal* on the other side.

Once again, the imposition of such low building heights on a vacant piece of land in the middle of the downtown core, which is itself surrounded by larger structures, makes no sense and serves only to discourage the improvement of the area.

I have lived in this area for a very long time yet only in the context of this plan have I heard of it referred to as “Shaughnessy Village”, and I think that this colored branding of the neighborhood is not at all accurate. The area which was historically called Shaughnessy is south and west of the neighborhood being reviewed. This neighborhood, closer to rue Baile and the Canadian Centre for Architecture is a much wealthier demographic, marked by ownership of turn-of-the century homes surpassing 1 million dollars. We could easily refer to Shaughnessy Village as Westmount adjacent and compare it to a quiet suburb.

In contrast, the area under review discussed is more commonly known as Peter-McGill or even simply Ville-Marie. It is part of the western downtown core of Quebec’s largest metropolis. It is highly densified with large apartment blocks and a high proportion of renters. Branding this area as a village and then limiting heights to 16 meters is not a fair reflection of reality or the specific needs of this area.

With due respect to the urban planners of the City of Montreal, the proposal to reduce building heights in this area is not at all justified or supported by the facts. I am uncertain if there are other considerations at play, but the reasoning provided does not support the proposed conclusions. The reduction of building heights will only serve to inhibit the continued evolution of this area and the objective of the Master Urban Plan of Montreal and the Specific Urban Plan for this area. I respectfully submit that this proposal should be rejected.

Yours truly,

Gregory DeGroot