

**Brief presented to the
Office de Consultation Publique de Montréal
Secteur St-Raymond et abords du futur CUSM**

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by

Cooperative de solidarité en environnement la Maison Verte

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Introduction

Coop la Maison verte, the first environmental solidarity co-op in Canada, is a community-based, member-owned co-operative that puts our mission into action through our co-operative structure of worker, community and support membership, providing ecologically sound, sustainable products and technologies, and whole foods. We operate a friendly store and café in the Montréal borough of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG). Founded in 1999, today we are over 9000 members strong and offer more than 1,000 ecological and fair trade products. In partnership with other groups, we are also committed to promoting outreach, education and social action to foster and inspire environmentally healthy and sustainable practices.

Our members participate in a variety of ways from being consumers in the physical and virtual stores, participants at workshops and special events such as Earth Day celebrations and dropping by for a coffee and chat with other like-minded residents.

Considering the primary vocation of the Coop la Maison Verte with respect to environmental issues, we will be focusing particularly on those aspects of the impact of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) on the St. Raymond neighborhood and the broader NDG community.

A. Joint Planning with the Community

The lack of collaborative, joint planning between the institutional partners, the MUHC, the CdN / NDG borough and the city of Montreal and residents and community organizations has been extremely disappointing and discouraging. NDG has a long history of active citizen involvement in planning and implementation of local projects, with the Monklands Community Centre and Residence and the Benny Farm redevelopment being but two examples of multiple involvements. Despite the professed intent of institutional partners to collaborate with residents and the community, the reality has been experienced as little more than obligatory lip service.

The Coop believes that residents and community organizations, as those who live and work in the local neighborhoods, have a special form of expertise that can contribute to the overall quality of planning decisions and ultimately the results in the community. However it is exhausting to have to continuously knock at the door, make requests, indicate interest with very little serious response and engagement from the institutional partners.

Recommendation:

1. That for the remainder of the planning process and after the hospital is open that forums be created for real collaboration and joint planning involving residents and community organizations, recognizing the value added which can come from such co-operation.
2. That the necessary tools and studies be provided to stakeholders such as citizens and community organizations in a timely fashion in order to equip them to participate in an informed manner on a level playing field with the institutional partners.

B. Making better use of the Madison Public Works Yard

The NDG Madison Public Works Yard is an approximately 6 acre city owned lot, located north of Upper Lachine Road bordered Madison Avenue and St-Jacques. We perceive this space as a potential asset for which much better use could be made to benefit the community.

NDG was a pioneer in the field of recycling, with the non-profit group Ecosense offering pilot drop-off and curbside projects in recycling in the late seventies, with NDG residents participating enthusiastically. We consider it unfortunate that this exceptional support has not been built on as fully as it might have been, most notably through having an Eco-Centre and composting services. There has been a long-standing desire on the part of NDG residents to have an Eco-Centre in our community, with this location having been noted as a priority location for such an installation. It has been a source of much disappointment that the necessary decisions have not been taken for NDG to be able to take advantage of such a resource because we are convinced that with the strong environmental preoccupations and commitment in our community, it would be extremely well used.

Currently the closest ones are in the Darlington district in Cote-des-Neiges and in the Sud-Ouest. Each of these is extremely challenging to reach by public transit, therefore likely impacting considerably on the quantity and quality of materials recycled by NDG residents.

Given that most of NDG is already built, vacant or underused spaces very rare commodities, if the function of the Public Works Yard was not necessary at that location, it could be a very interesting location for a variety of social and community uses, including social housing and urban agriculture. It would have the added advantage it already being property of the City of Montreal, thus removing the cost of having to acquire the property.

A potential alternative location for the City yard would be at the base of the Falaise St. Jacques, south of Pulman Street that runs parallel to the Falaise. While the design of the Turcotte

exchange is now the object of another review, most proposals to date have not had the traffic lanes flush with the Falaise. There will likely be considerable space between the most northern lane and Pulman.

We are aware that land is technically in the Sud-Ouest borough and will undoubtedly be raised as a barrier to proceeding to consider the relocation of a work activity for the CdN-NDG borough. We would urge that those in decision-making positions engage in collaborative problem-solving with respect to this in order to arrive at a solution that would be mutually acceptable, considering as both boroughs are part of the City of Montreal! There are multiple examples of shared use of space between School Boards and the CdN-NDG borough where conditions for partnership have been worked out for city programs to take place in School Board properties. Surely a similar spirit could enable two boroughs to co-operate in order to benefit urgent needs in the community.

Recommendations:

3. That the establishment of an NDG Eco-Centre, ideally to be located at the Madison Public Works Yard, be a priority and included in the budget for the Agglomeration Council for 2014.
4. That the possibility of relocating the functions currently taking place at the Madison Public Works Yard to south of the Falaise St. Jacques, south of Pulman St., be studied with a report of this assessment made public.
5. That the Sud-Ouest and CdN-NDG Borough engage in negotiations to ensure that the fact that land south of Pulman is part of the Sud-Ouest borough not constitute a barrier to a creative solutions making best use of collective resources.
6. That if a decision is made to relocate the Madison Public Works Yards, that current space which would be liberated in St. Raymond be used for social housing or urban agriculture.

C. Safety for cyclists and pedestrians

Increasing the use of mass transit and the multiple forms of active transport is a preoccupation of many of our members, following logically from the environmental values of our organization. We recognize that ensuring safety for the most vulnerable, that is pedestrians and cyclists, is a critical factor in contributing to greater numbers of residents opting for these alternatives to cars as their mode of transport.

We share the concerns expressed by many others who have already presented to the Commission (The NDG Cycling and Pedestrian Safety Association, the Westmount Cycling Association, NDG Women's Group, Projet Montreal etc.) with respect to the current and future safety for cyclists and pedestrians at the Decarie and de Maisonneuve Boulevard intersections and in the space immediately in front of the Vendome Metro. Without repeating, what we consider very valid arguments presented in those briefs, we would like to indicate that we echo their preoccupations and support unequivocally the need for a bike and cycling bridge over the intersection and a solution that would create increased safety by having an off-road cycling route to avoid the intensity of traffic that will occur in front of the Vendome Metro.

Recommendations:

7. That a bike / pedestrian bridge be constructed over the de Maisonneuve and Decarie Boulevard to ensure safety.
8. That an off-road solution for the bike path be studied, with these studies made public, with a minimum of two options to be considered: a bike path between the existing buildings south of de Maisonneuve and the train tracks and re-routing cyclists, once across the intersection briefly eastward, then southbound on Decarie to enter the hospital grounds north of the main entrance with a connector to the de Maisonneuve bike path at or east of Claremont.
9. That the planning for such solutions be done in collaboration with local stakeholders, most notably the NDG Cycling and Pedestrian Safety Association and the Westmount Cycling Association.

D. Falaise St. Jacques :

We believe that the Falaise St. Jacques is an unexploited asset both for NDG and the Sud-Ouest as well as having the potential to serve as a more effective link for cyclists between western Montreal, downtown and further east. We consider it a travesty that plans that were developed and paid for by tax-payers seem to have disappeared into thin air with the decentralization of the City of Montreal.

Recommendations:

10. That the long proposed linear park for the purposes of walking, cycling and cross country skiing be developed along the base of the Falaise St. Jacques.
11. That the city of Montreal and the Sud-Ouest and CdN/ NDG boroughs collaborate with each other and other relevant stakeholders to bring this project to fruition.

E. Pollution and Environmental Concerns

Coop la Maison Verte shares the concerns expressed by others presenting to the Commission about pollution and environmental issues, particularly in the St. Raymond area. We anticipate that these will get worse with the added influx of thousands more vehicles per day. We are not aware of any specific studies that have been done to address this concern. Local businesses, such as roofing, have many residents keeping their windows closed in warm weather. Often the longer term impact of such factors is not considered seriously until health problems start to surface, often when it is too late for the individuals concerned.

Recommendations:

12. That appropriate agencies such as the DSP or the Ministry of Environment be mandated to carry out the necessary studies to assess the impact of the current pollution and environmental issues, as well as those anticipated with the change in the community with the establishment of the MUHC and the associated vehicular traffic.
13. That a preventative approach, rather than a “wait and see” orientation, be taken to be proactive with respect to these issues.
14. That local businesses that are incompatible with the nearby residential sectors be moved to more appropriate locations, with financial compensation to support them in doing so.

F. Urban Agriculture

NDG has been a highly recognized pioneer in the field of urban agriculture. Action Communiterre, the non-profit organization that provides leadership to the network of collective gardens in NDG, has sparked the creation of such gardens across the city of Montreal and indeed in other parts of the country due to prizes by Centraide and other Canadian organizations. Sales of plant seedlings at the Coop have been increasing exponentially over the last several years, with workshops related to urban agriculture being highly attended. In multiple ways, NDG residents have been acting in ways that express their commitment to urban agriculture. Coop la Maison Verte supports the recommendations of other individuals and organizations who have presented to the Commission on this topic.

Recommendations

15. That proposals put forward in other briefs on this subject be recommended for implementation in the St. Raymond and broader NDG community.
16. That recommendations arising from the consultation held last year on Urban Agriculture and not yet implemented be reviewed and incorporated in this report of the Commission.
17. That the MUHC hospital grounds include a collective garden to add to the existing network.