

Royal Victoria Hospital Public Consultation Memoir

Presented By the Students' Society of McGill University

Updated as of 2021-11-11





Office of the Vice-President (External Affairs) | Bureau du Vice-Président (Affaires Extérieures)

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Located on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, traditional territories

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Land Acknowledgement

SSMU Official Land Acknowledgment (with translation)

The SSMU acknowledges that McGill University is situated on the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee nations.

The SSMU recognizes and respects these nations as the true and constant custodians of the lands and waters on which we meet today.

Further, the SSMU commits to and respects the traditional laws and customs of these territories.

Kí:ken SSMU, thonehtáhkwen tsi Haudenosaunee tánon' Anishinaabe raotinakerahsera'ón:we tsi nón:we niitienawa'áhston ne McGill Ionterihwaienstákhwa? Ó:ni' tsi iah nonwén:ton tehonahká:wen ne raotinakeráhsra?'

Ronwatién:tere's tánon' ratirihwakweniénstha' ne SSMU tsi Okwehón:we rontonhontsanónhnhha' tánon' tehatirihwáhsnie' tsi kaniatarahrónnion; tsi nón:we ne ón:wa' wenhniserá:te ionkwatkenníson?'

Ratirihwahní:rats ne SSMU tsi enhatirihwakwénienste tsi nihotirihò:ten tánon' tsi nihotiianerenhserò:ten ne kén:'en kanakerahseraké:ron?'

Further acknowledgment (SSMU & Royal Victoria site)

We recognize that Canada is a settler-colonial state and that to resist colonialism and other manifestations of oppression, we must first address our complicity in the continuous colonial process. We recognize that decolonization and reconciliation is not simply a value to strive toward, but that it involves material repatriation and the giving back of Indigenous land and life. As such, we would like to recognize the SSMU and McGill University's involvement in the colonization of Indigenous lands and peoples.

Throughout this memoir and the recommendations we put forth, the SSMU acknowledges and heavily considers that the Royal Victoria Hospital site is unceded kanien'kehá:ka territory.

We see this acknowledgement as a first step in fulfilling our constant responsibility to Indigenous Peoples and the land on which we exist.

Content Warning

Sensitive topics that will be addressed in this brief include colonialism and genocide, the existence of and investigation into mass graves, poverty, and homelessness.



Letter from the Students' Society of McGill University

To whom it may concern:

It is a great privilege that the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) presents the Office de Consultation Publique de Montréal with this memoir regarding the future of the Royal Victoria Hospital site.

The SSMU is the officially recognized representative of the undergraduate student body of McGill University's downtown campus. Tasked with representing, advocating for, and acting as the official voice of over 24,000 students, the SSMU actively works to 'improve the quality and accessibility of educational resources, provide outstanding services, and promote social, cultural, and personal opportunities'. The Society is further committed to demonstrating leadership in matters of human rights, social justice and environmental protection, and to groups, programs, and activities that are devoted to the well-being of disadvantaged groups.

Liaison between students and the McGill administration, the SSMU also serves as a community advocate, focused on allyship and advocacy of all forms, supporting and leading local & global initiatives, as well as taking part in community organizations. Said advocacy revolves around topics such as affordable student housing, environmental & social sustainability and Indigenous equity.

[For more information and context on the SSMU's advocacy priorities, please view the SSMU's Position Book.]¹

As part of its commitment to a holistic movement toward decommodified and affordable student housing options², in tandem with community initiatives, the Society was a founding member of the 'Royal Vic for the Public' coalition. The coalition grew into a medium for its members to champion for the non-privatization of the Hospital site, while creating affordable student housing there.

Despite never having owned and operated the Royal Victoria Hospital site, its future is very important to the Society and its membership. Indeed, the Royal Victoria site is encompassed within the McGill community and can almost be qualified as a part of the 'McGill experience'. Not only has the Hospital fulfilled its purpose of healing by treating generations of students until it was decommissioned, but it remains the beautiful view of close to 1000 students every year who have lived in the university residences surrounding the site, walking past it every day. Connected to our university's campus, we would like to see the site benefit the vast majority of the students and the local community, while preserving as much (if not the entirety) of the historical architectural design that constitutes it.

As such, the SSMU will be presenting, in tandem with the contents of this memoir, its recommendations for the Royal Victoria Hospital site in a hearing with The Office de Consultation Publique de Montréal on November 11, 2021.

Sincerely,

Sacha Delouvrier (he/him/il)

Vice-President (External Affairs)

external@ssmu.ca

¹ The Students' Society of McGill University. *SSMU Positions Manual*. PDF file. April 8, 2021.

² "SSMU Plans Manual: Affordable Student Housing Plan." Students' Society of McGill University, February 13, 2020.



Introduction

The Royal Victoria site, located adjacent to the downtown campus of McGill University, is a former hospital which was recently granted to McGill University. McGill plans to renovate the site completely, privatizing it and creating laboratories, research facilities, and classrooms. However, this site has great historical significance for multiple communities in Montréal, including but not limited to the Indigenous communities, the local unhoused population, the impoverished community, and the community of Milton-Parc residents nearby. This site was originally created as a place for healing, and we as the SSMU wish to continue to allow Royal Victoria to serve the entire Montréal community publicly, rather than allowing it to be privatized.

Our goal with this brief is to detail different ways in which the Royal Victoria site can be used to serve different populations nearby. These include, but are not limited to, affordable student housing for McGill University (and potentially other) students, public community spaces that meet the needs of all community members, and temporary housing as well as important resources for the unhoused population of Milton-Parc and Greater Montréal.

Background and History of the Royal Victoria Hospital

The Royal Victoria Hospital, originally built to be a place of healing, is located on the Southern side of Mont Royal, and was established in 1893 by Lords Mount Stephan and Mount Strathcona.³ Modelled after the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh, its design originally consisted of two wards [without subdivisions] joined to a central administration room by bridges, in order to maximize fresh air and light and minimize spread of disease. The Royal Victoria Hospital quickly built a reputation as an outstanding teaching medical institution, embodying itself as both monumental and vernacular. Numerous modifications, including the Nurses' Home and Ross Memorial Pavilion, were effectuated throughout the past century to further establish its purpose as a site of help and healing, void of distinction based on ethnicity or creed.⁴

The Royal Victoria Hospital merged with 4 other Montréal hospitals in 1997, forming the McGill University Health Centre and beginning its affiliation to McGill.⁵ However, in 2015, three of the

³ Annmarie Adams, "Royal Victoria Hospital," The Canadian Encyclopedia, January 28, 2009.

⁴ Consultations obtained from the Royal Vic for the Public.

⁵ "History and Milestones," McGill University Health Centre.



founding hospitals (including the Royal Victoria Hospital) relocated to the newly constructed super-hospital in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) at the Glen site. While it remains a heritage edifice, the former Royal Victoria Hospital site, occupying 1.4 million square feet of public land, lies idly under the supervision of the Société Québécoise des Infrastructures (SQI).⁶ This same year, the government of Quebec contributed \$4 million CAD in support of a feasibility study that they allowed McGill to carry out to create an extension of their downtown campus.⁷ By June 2018, McGill obtained authorization to develop a proposal regarding a significant portion of the former site, along with a \$37 million CAD grant from the provincial government to conduct an Opportunity Study. Since 2015, while no firm actions have been taken on the site, the old Royal Victoria Hospital has served the Greater Montréal community, particularly by providing help to individuals facing housing crises. During this time, McGill University launched their “New Vic Project”, a proposal outlining the portion of the Royal Victoria Hospital site they hope to possess, and the few things they intend to do with the space (see Appendix 1). The question of the site’s future still remains in the air, pending the public hearings conducted by the OCPM, and the final decision on what will happen to the historical Montréal landmark.

SSMU’s Involvement: Coalitions & Consultations

Advocating on Behalf of the Community: A Montréal-Wide Coalition

Royal Vic for the Public, co-founded by the SSMU, is a Montréal-wide coalition which advocates for keeping the Royal Victoria public rather than allowing McGill to privatize the site. They specifically advocate this with the goal of keeping this space devoted to serving the community. In 2020, an open letter which was signed by over 55 community organizations was released, condemning the decision of intent to give a significant portion of the site to McGill University, without the consultation of neighborhood residents, civil society, the National Assembly, or Indigenous leaders of these territories. After this decision was announced, the Société Québécoise des Infrastructures (SQI) provided McGill with \$4 million CAD for a feasibility study and the promotion of said study.⁸ The study translated into what is now known as McGill’s ‘New Vic’ project, a plan to expand their downtown campus into academic facilities, laboratories for sustainability research and policy, and green spaces. \$37 million CAD was additionally provided by the government for design plans.⁹

⁶ Consultations obtained from the Royal Vic for the Public.

⁷ “Project Timeline and Milestones - The New Vic Project.” The New Vic.

⁸ Doug Sweet. “Quebec Supports Feasibility Study for McGill's Royal Vic Project.” McGill Reporter, March 17, 2015.

⁹ “Quebec to Give McGill the Old Royal Vic Site, plus \$37M for Design Plan | CBC News.” CBC news. CBC/Radio Canada, June 23, 2018.



An Inclusive and Representative Consultation Process

While the biggest public coalition on the Royal Victoria Hospital site did not receive any funding from the government to conduct such studies and develop a plan exploring alternatives to McGill's 'New Vic' project, it focused on public consultations.

The overall scope of the consultations conducted included a much more diverse and large sample of individuals surveyed than any other consultation initiatives. Encompassing a wide array of people, provided by the diversity of the founders of the coalition, not only were McGill students and local community members surveyed alike, but extensive Indigenous consultation was done with Indigenous student groups on and off McGill campus (such as the Indigenous Students' Alliance, the Mohawk Mothers, and more).

It was found that the community discouraged repurposing the space into private enterprises or government offices, while encouraging the use of the site in favor of the community's well being, including services such as daycare services, a community pool, Indigenous projects and governance, community workshops, social housing, and more.¹⁰ These results resonate with the overall ideas presented by Royal Vic for the Public, demonstrating the interest from the public in keeping this site open to public activities. Furthermore, with that in mind, "Our Royal Vic" partnered with C.U.R.E. (Community University Research Exchange) to conduct more extensive consultations as described previously. This time, the questionnaire and flyering (amongst other initiatives to reach as many people as possible), was focused on more in depth institutional knowledge about the site. The scope of the consultation was focused around the idea of preserving the Hospital site's legacy of healing: "This can include social housing, community spaces, education and schooling, the social economy, and resources for the health of our city, especially for those with urgent needs like the elderly. This must be a project that inspires the democratic participation of the community in building something truly original."¹¹

¹⁰ "Our Royal Vic - CCMP-Mpcc.com," n.d.

¹¹ Coalition Le Royal Vic pour le bien public. "Le Site De L'hôpital Royal Victoria Doit Servir Le Bien Commun." Le Journal de Montréal, n.d.



In an effort to continue our support of the coalition, the SSMU aided and participated in many events to promote the campaign and survey, as well as several protests (financially supported by the Society), resulting in several hundred responses all indicating that the site would be best used as a community benefiting space, and a vast majority of individuals expressing the wish to have some form of social housing (88% of people, with most of them mentioning or referring to affordable student housing), and specifically affordable student housing (65% mentioned affordable student housing specifically).¹²

The Importance of the Royal Victoria Hospital site: the McGill Student Body

To McGill students, the site is not only a solution to dire obstacles faced regarding housing, but it is also an opportunity to preserve beautiful heritage while pursuing efforts to reconcile with local Indigenous communities.

According to a study conducted by UTILE (L'Unité de travail pour l'implantation de logement étudiant), the only social economy enterprise that specializes in student housing across Quebec, 40,000 students throughout Quebec are in dire financial need, despite financial aid such as grants or loans.¹³ This crisis is clearly reflected in the Milton-Parc area, adjacent to McGill University. Milton-Parc is a dense neighborhood which includes a large population of students along with other demographics of residents. However, the current price of housing in the Milton Parc area is often inflated in relation to surrounding areas, making it too expensive for many students to be able to afford. This has forced them to live in other areas of Montréal, often far away from campus. Furthermore, exploitative landlords in this area are rampant, with many charging exorbitant prices for apartments that are small and often maintained improperly. The SSMU has persistently been attempting to address this crisis with the Affordable Student Housing Committee through collaboration with community partners to advocate for students in need.

McGill University's residence availabilities are already extremely limited; its housing expenses, including excessively priced meal plans, are extortionate relative to the surrounding area. McGill University's housing options are also very limited and inaccessible due to price: a single-room at RVC residence is \$1,402/month, \$1,243/month at Gardner, Molson and McConnell Hall, \$1,450/month at Douglas Hall, \$1,625/month at New Residence Hall, \$1,638/month at La Citadelle, \$1,548/month in Carrefour Sherbrooke, and \$1,121/month at Solin Hall (several metro stations away). All of these

¹² "Our Royal Vic - CCMP-Mpcc.com," n.d.

¹³ "Data and Research." UTILE · Unité de travail pour l'implantation de logement étudiant, n.d.



residences, except Solin, also require over \$5,000 annually to be paid in the form of a monthly meal plan that is supposed to last students the year (but often does not), as rooms are not furnished with a kitchen. Residence leases also primarily end after first year for students, creating a situation where students are left to find housing on their own during the remainder of their studies. The few options for housing with McGill after first year are ultimately insubstantial in quantity and affordability. This creates a hostile environment for any past, current or prospective student surrounding housing insecurities; there have been multiple reported cases of students not being able to attend the university despite being accepted due to high living costs (specifically linked to the high rent average in Montréal: over \$1100 CAD average in Milton-Parc and downtown Montréal)¹⁴.

In a pre-pandemic study conducted by UTILE, 24% students indicated that their financial situation had a significant or severe effect on their likelihood to drop out of school, with one out of four surveyed individuals indicating that their housing situation was a source of significant or severe stress. The COVID-19 pandemic has had and continues to have a deleterious impact on many students, starting with heavy financial strain, making the struggle to find housing even more difficult. The circumstances caused by the pandemic have contributed to a high amount of job loss (and heightened job insecurity for youth demographics).¹⁵ Furthermore, students faced many more obstacles, including an increased amount of mental illness, loss of loved ones, and other faced difficulties. The pandemic highlighted the fragility of such expensive housing, especially for students, leading to many not renewing or breaking leases, choosing to live and study from their families' homes, couch-surfing, or moving to different, more affordable locations. Thus, the student population is desperate for affordable, sustainable, and safe student housing, making the need to use the Royal Victoria site as an opportunity to answer these difficulties more than apparent.

Looking at the Royal Victoria site through a cost-benefit lens, it is clear that more students would benefit greatly from the creation of housing rather than the installation of additional laboratories. Students consistently calling for more housing options to be made available to them underlines an opportunity to answer their needs by providing them with not only a place to live during their studies, but to create a community here and integrate it within Milton-Parc. This space has the potential to

¹⁴ Ezra Black. "New Report Reveals Montreal's Most to Least Expensive Neighbourhoods." MTL Blog, June 29, 2020.

¹⁵ Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. "Canadian Perspectives Survey Series 1: Impacts of Covid-19 on Job Security and Personal Finances, 2020." The Daily - , July 14, 2020.



become a multi-faceted project in a self-sustaining environment designed to fit the needs of both students and the community, thereby providing a shared area that can provide a multitude of resources and opportunities for the entire neighborhood, with both demographics benefiting one another. There are several ideas (to be further elaborated on in the recommendations section) concerning what can be included in this space to make it more than affordable student housing but a center for community unification while solving other problems heretofore mentioned, such as a convenience store (prioritizing student employment), or communal green spaces - also known as community greens - in which any community member could pitch in. Therefore, the creation of affordable student housing at Royal Victoria would allow for students to live more comfortably while creating a space that has the ability to foster stronger relationships between the students and other residents living in the Milton Parc area, with great potential for further development and evolution.

The Importance of the Royal Victoria Hospital site: Montréal's Indigenous Communities

The Royal Victoria site holds great importance to the Indigenous community in Montréal. The Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera, or Mohawk women (culturally known within the Mohawk people as the careholders of thequenondah (two mountains/mount royal)), has stated of the Royal Victoria site, "It's our land, it belongs to us. Even McGill does these acknowledgements all over and so does the city of Montréal."¹⁶ After discovering that the Royal Victoria Hospital site contains archeological remains from the original precolonial Iroquoian village, the Mohawk Peoples called for investigation of the Allan Memorial Institute "for potential unmarked graves and proof of atrocities committed during the MK-Ultra program, between 1954 and 1963."¹⁷

Recently, there is reason to believe that there are Indigenous people buried near or under the Royal Victoria site, and thus there has been a call from multiple Indigenous groups, including the Mohawk Mothers, to immediately halt construction and examine the land for unmarked graves or any other evidence of burials. Historically, the Royal Victoria site was used in the 1950s and 1960s for a variety of psychological experimentation. Dr. Ewan Cameron conducted medical testing there, including intensive shock therapy, and inflicted drug-induced comas. It is believed that the existence of these

¹⁶ "Allegations of Unmarked Graves at Montreal ... - Youtube.com," n.d.

¹⁷ The rotisken'raketeh of kahnawake, ohsweken/six nations of the grand river, akwesasne, and kanehsatake. *Public Consultation on the Former Royal Victoria Hospital*. PDF file. November 10, 2021.



graves is connected to this psychological experimentation.¹⁸ Specifically, the story of Indigenous youth being brought to the Royal Victoria Hospital for various kinds of medical testing has been corroborated by numerous survivors, with some stories being recorded well over a decade ago.¹⁹ Members of the Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera presented testimony on this issue on November 10th, 2021. With this information, it would be in the best interest of the Quebec Government to respect the beliefs and experiences of Indigenous individuals from Greater Montréal, and the experiences of those who may have been subjected to the aforementioned injustices. The construction on the site should thus be halted immediately in order for the land to be adequately and thoroughly examined.

The Royal Victoria site has also recently been a safe environment for the Indigenous unhoused population over the past several years. Privatizing this space would remove the availability of this space to provide resources to Indigenous communities in the Milton-Parc area, greatly harming them. Using this space for public good, however, would allow for opportunities such as housing, workshops, mental health services, Indigenous leadership meetings, and more to take place, making the Royal Victoria site a place of safety and comfort for Indigenous Peoples in this area.

Importance of the Royal Victoria Hospital site: the Milton Parc + Greater Montréal Community

Privatizing the Royal Victoria site would remove the possibility of utilizing this space for a number of potential public services. The Royal Victoria for the Public coalition's community consultations demonstrated that the most useful repurposing of the site would be for housing, including but not limited to: social housing, cooperative housing, transitional housing, shelter services, and/or affordable student housing.²⁰

The Milton-Parc community has not demonstrated the resources or space currently to handle the housing crisis in this area. This has led to an influx of a large unhoused population, and despite a combination of organizational and student-led efforts, such as the 'Open Door' and 'Mobilizing for

¹⁸ Olivia O'Malley. "Mohawk Mothers Demand Investigation into Potential Unmarked Graves at McGill University." Global News. Global News, October 20, 2021.

¹⁹ O'Malley, "Mohawk Mothers Demand Investigation".

²⁰ "Our Royal Vic - CCMP-Mpcc.com," n.d.



Milton Parc' (M4MP), this crisis is not able to be solved until more affordable housing is created for for all local, struggling individuals, including the homeless demographic.

The Royal Victoria site, specifically the Ross Pavillon, was used as a supplementary resource to provide housing to individuals for two consecutive winters (2018-2020), providing 80 beds in the first year, and 150 beds in the second year.²¹ Thousands of people have been able to access care and shelter through the Royal Victoria site, with over 1,500 individuals accessing the services in the winter of 2018-2019 alone.²² Going one step further, in August 2020, the site was converted into a COVID-19 care center, providing a space for individuals to stay while awaiting test results or to isolate if they tested positive but did not require hospitalization. According to Émilie Fortier of Old Brewery Mission, “This pandemic has brought into light not just the value, but the absolute necessity of multi-sectoral collaborations -- the City of Montréal, the public health system and other homeless-serving organizations must continue to work together to address the root causes of homelessness. While it isn't perfect, the Royal Vic initiative is a direct result of this”²³

In addition to housing, the Royal Victoria site was used as a place to provide unhoused individuals with services such as “individual counselling, psychosocial support and assistance to find affordable, permanent housing for residents”.²⁴ The initiatives created at this site were thus not only a form of temporary housing, but a way to provide individuals in the area with opportunities to seek help, find stability, and access services which are normally out of reach.

These initiatives have already benefited the community's safety and comfort, while using the site as a center for initiatives to help unhoused individuals. The pre-existing relationship between the Royal Victoria site and the Greater Montréal community goes back over 125 years. It first served the community and fulfilling its mandate as a place of healing through medicine, and kept healing the local community since by helping those in need. The precedent set by the success of these aforementioned smaller-scale initiatives show how much of a positive impact the Royal Victoria site

²¹ Sargeant, Tim. “Old Royal Victoria Hospital Opens for Second Consecutive Year as Temporary Homeless Shelter - Montreal.” Global News. Global News, December 2, 2019.

²² Daniel Sucar. Montreal Gazette. “Old Royal Victoria Building Sheltered 1,585 Homeless People This Winter: Report.” montrealgazette. Montreal Gazette, July 12, 2019.

²³ “New Temporary Centres to Accommodate Homeless Montrealers during the Pandemic.” Old Brewery Mission | Montréal, August 27, 2020.

²⁴ “New Temporary Centres to Accommodate Homeless Montrealers during the Pandemic.” Old Brewery Mission.



can have if the opportunity that it provides to cherish the history of the land on which it lies, and to better the quality of life for many local demographics. Utilizing the Royal Victoria site primarily for the use of classrooms and laboratories will strip the Greater Montréal community of its connection with its own history, and will deprive the community of the opportunity for reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, it would further strip the students and the Milton-Parc community (together comprising the vast majority of the most relevant demographics to the site) of existing resources, taking away vital space which has provided safety and access to public services that are necessary to address the housing crisis in Milton Parc and Greater Montréal. This demonstrates the integral role that Royal Victoria plays here, and the damages that will occur if this site becomes privatized.

The Community Actions and Relations Endeavour (C.A.R.E.) agreement, a project created between the SSMU and the Comité des Citoyen(ne)s de Milton-Parc (CCMP), and the Dean of Students of McGill University, outlines the goals to foster a healthy community relationship between students and Milton-Parc residents. There is thus an opportunity, through the Royal Victoria site, to improve this relationship for both students and other residents, including families who live in the area, contributing positively to the C.A.R.E. agreement and creating a better living environment for all those involved. Students and family would have a chance to live and be part of the same community while further respecting each other's paces of life. The new dynamic that would yield from such positive change would foster spaces in which individuals of all backgrounds could share resources and knowledge, working hand-in-hand to better their space, with a newfound positive set of interactions.

Empty Promises and Flawed Logic: McGill University's "New Vic Project"

Introduction & Background

In 2018 the Société Québécoise des Infrastructures (SQI) gave approval for McGill University to conduct a feasibility study on turning 15% of the Royal Victoria site land into an extension of the University's downtown campus. It is important to note that the portion selected for McGill to explore infrastructurally represents over a third of the total existing building space on the site. The original stipulation of that decision was that, pending the positive results of the feasibility study, McGill would develop an extension of its downtown campus, and receive a compensation of \$37 million CAD, including \$4 million for the study itself. McGill released the 'New Vic' project, detailing a 3000 daily user campus expansion focused on Sustainability Systems, with no current plans on what to do with the



resulting empty space on the existing part of the university's campus. The architectural details of their plan mostly included a proposition to build academic facilities (classrooms and laboratories) and some intangible plans for green spaces, as well as shared and public spaces.

Now, more than ever before, the repurposing of the Royal Victoria Hospital site is embedded within worsening ecological, housing, and financial crises and the systematic impacts of colonialism. If the 'New Vic' project is created as it stands it would be built at the expense of a substantial increase in the number of McGill students facing rent increases, worsening financial barriers, and predatory landlords (particularly in the Milton-Parc and Plateau areas).

While the 'New Vic' project is well constructed, the contents of the plans are inadequate to the expectations of the community and of McGill's own student body. McGill's commendable efforts to strive for excellence with this project, came at the expense of the relevance of their creation, and is representative of the university's disregard for community needs. Having conducted severely insufficient or uncompleted consultations, McGill's 'New Vic' only has a concrete explanation of the academic side of the plan. Noting that there are a few mentions of community and green spaces, the university wasn't capable of considering the positive change that it could affect within the community through the medium of this new project, failing to prioritize its own student body, and the communities that it affects everyday.

Denunciations made by the Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera (Mohawk Mothers) in their 2021 Public Consultation on the former Royal Victoria Hospital site²⁵, the 2017 AMUSE PHARE study²⁶, and the results from the "Our Royal Vic" community consultations²⁷, reveal that McGill University's proposal for the old Royal Victoria Hospital site does not meet the needs of the Greater Montréal and McGill communities. While it is unclear as to why crucial parts of McGill's development plan do not include efforts to meet basic community and student needs, it is the SSMU's position that McGill University's 'New Vic' Project inadequately addresses a number of issues and topics that are critical and time-sensitive. Furthermore, the decision for such a large portion of this historical site to go to the university without consultation, and without offering funding or support to other relevant

²⁵ The rotisken'raketeh of kahnawake, ohsweken/six nations of the grand river, akwesasne, and kanehsatake. *Public Consultation on the Former Royal Victoria Hospital*. PDF file. November 10, 2021.

²⁶ "Le Logement Étudiant Au Québec En 2017 - OCPM," n.d.

²⁷ "Our Royal Vic - CCMP-Mpcc.com," n.d.



stakeholders appears to be something that McGill took advantage of, and in no way tried to remedy, therefore creating an inequitable and non inclusive environment dating back to years before the site's control was officially given to the university.

Disrespecting the Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera: McGill's Perpetuation of Colonialism

On September 21, 2021, the SSMU released a statement publicizing and opposing McGill's lack of consultations, which the McGill Administration failed to adequately respond to. A pivotal excerpt from the statement reads:

Given McGill's blatant lack of consultation with students, the SSMU is skeptical that McGill has properly consulted Indigenous communities regarding this land grant and planned management of a portion of so-called Mount Royal. "Mount Royal" is the unceded territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation as well as a historic burial ground for the nation. Consultations with Indigenous communities are of utmost importance, especially in the context of a growing decolonial land back movement. The primary decision making power over the reoccupation of this land and its future projects should be the prerogative of relevant Indigenous communities.²⁸

As stated previously, the Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera (Mohawk Mothers) released a statement recently in which they condemned McGill's occupation of the Royal Victoria site, and called for the suspension of construction on the site in order to examine the land.²⁹ McGill has not spoken on this issue or other consequential claims such as the issue of McGill's complicity in the possible existence of mass unmarked graves on the site. As a result, the SSMU joins the Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera in condemning the institution's silence on such matters. We also affirm the lawfulness of the notice of seizure provided by the Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera. McGill should not have the authorization to develop plans until an Indigenous-led investigation is approved and completed. The repurposing of the territory should, equally, be undertaken only with the approval of members of the Nation, such as the Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera. This deference is owed, among other things, to the historic title of the nation, the importance of reinstating elements of traditional Indigenous law into our relations with the land, the need to right historical wrongdoings, and the needs of Montréal's Indigenous populations, which are disproportionately more pressing than those of non-Indigenous people.

²⁸ "Come Take the Streets: Royal Vic for All!," Students' Society of McGill University, n.d.

²⁹ The rotisken'raketeh of kahnawake, ohsweken/six nations of the grand river, akwesasne, and kanehsatake. *Public Consultation on the Former Royal Victoria Hospital*. PDF file. November 10, 2021.



A statement written by Cynthia Lee, McGill University's spokesperson, reads:

In 2016, McGill commissioned a study on the archeological potential of the Royal Victoria Hospital site. According to this study, it is unlikely that Indigenous remains will be found on the New Vic Project site. However, should this be the case, it will be made public immediately, the work will be suspended, and an archaeological officer of the Minister of Culture and Communications will be alerted.³⁰

There are several issues with the rhetoric used here; for one, there is no direct information about this study or how the University reached this conclusion. There are no pieces of factual evidence, and the general message of this statement is that there is no willingness to make an effort toward reconciliation. To show this effort, it is critical that McGill University acknowledge the violent history with which settler-colonialism inflicted on Indigenous peoples in Canada, respect the current needs and voices of Indigenous communities, and take immediate action when claims such as this one arise.

This issue more broadly demonstrates the lack of consultation of Indigenous Peoples on McGill's part, as they clearly have no interest in respecting or honoring the historical significance of land and sites such as this one, and have consistently ignored the pleas and demands of Indigenous communities, student groups, and community organizations.

McGill Demonstrates a Pattern of Disregard: A Lack of Meaningful Consultations

The "Our Royal Vic" project's community consultation was launched with the intent to better understand the needs and desires of the public when discussing the future of the Royal Victoria Hospital site. Results from the consultation showed that, when discussing a repurposing of the site, many were strongly opposed to private governance and/or government uses, and instead believed projects should focus on community development and affordable housing. Questionnaire responses highlighted both a strong desire and need for social, cooperative, and transitional housing, shelter services, affordable student housing, community co-ops, green spaces, student or community run gardens, health and social services, and community gathering spaces.

McGill's land grant, equating a third of the heritage site, is a significant move for the McGill and Montréal community, and therefore, should carry the burden of immense consultation with students, community members, and designated external bodies. However, evidence of such consultations is

³⁰ "Allegations of Unmarked Graves at Montreal ... - Youtube.com," n.d.



scarce. In 2020, an open letter signed by more than 60 community organizations, including SSMU, condemned the Quebec government's decision to give a significant portion of the site to McGill university; a decision made "without any consultation with civil society or local citizens, and without debate in the National Assembly".³¹

Though McGill insists that there was a process of consultation with the community, upon SSMU's request, they were unable to provide a formal analysis of any consultations conducted by their administration. In fact, the SSMU - who serves as the liaison between the McGill undergraduate student body and the McGill administration - was not consulted for the New Vic project in any genuine or substantial capacity. Furthermore, published in a 2017 McGill Senate report, wherein the university's plans were already roughly outlined, McGill's depiction of "dialogue and engagement" was coordinating with obscure institutional bodies, namely: "the Principal's RVH task force, RVH working groups, and senior administrators".³²

In the "Our Royal Vic" community consultations, it should also be noted that a significant portion of respondents asked that McGill not be entrusted with the site or that the amount of potential funding McGill would receive for any project undertaken be significantly reduced. These responses illustrate a deep distrust in McGill to host socially responsible projects, and the university has thus far failed to prove that its plans for the site respond to community needs.

Environmental and Sustainability Concerns: McGill Continues to Avoid Divestment

As a result of highly concentrated living areas, heat clusters have arisen in certain areas of Montréal. McGill University claims that the New Vic project is supporting the environment, through the creation of items such as a climate change research laboratory. However, McGill has not even taken steps to divest yet, showing that they are not truly committed to making feasible and sustainable change in this sector. Divestment in this context is the act of removing all investments from fossil fuel companies. McGill University continues to invest in the fossil fuel industry, refusing to address the climate crisis directly by divesting and pivoting investments towards the renewable energy industry. McGill has an endowment fund which totals \$1.67 billion. Data (see Appendix 2) demonstrates that a large portion of this endowment goes towards the oil and gas industry, while only 0.38% of McGill's investments are

³¹ "Come Take the Streets: Royal Vic for All!," Students' Society of McGill University, n.d.

³² "Come Take the Streets: Royal Vic for All!," Students' Society of McGill University, n.d.



directed towards the Fossil Free Fund, created in 2017 as a method of demonstrating McGill's commitment to the environment.³³ As shown, McGill is not truly dedicated to creating systemic change in the context of climate change.

Given the current state of many buildings and classrooms on the McGill campus, with many needing serious renovations and upgrading, an expansion of the campus into the Royal Victoria site does not make financial or infrastructural sense. It is unnecessary to develop additional classrooms and lab space, when there is no clear evidence McGill University requires this land. It is clear that utilising the Royal Victoria site to merely expand McGill University's downtown campus would be a colossal disservice to the current and future students of McGill, and those residing in the Milton Parc community and Greater Montréal area.

Amending McGill University's "New Vic Project" Plan: Calls to Action

It is critical that any future plans McGill may release regarding the Royal Victoria Hospital site take into account the aforementioned concerns, pleas, and demands made by McGill students, Indigenous community members, and residents of the Milton Parc and Greater Montréal communities. McGill's plan should reflect an appreciation of, and respect for, existing consultations pertaining to community needs and visions for the Royal Victoria Hospital site. As such, regardless of the outcome of the OCPM's consultations, the SSMU strongly urges for measures to be taken by McGill University prior to them furthering any plans on their "New Vic Project", and particularly in the case that they should receive an opportunity to work on the Royal Victoria Site project.

As first steps toward the implementation and maintenance of stronger collaborative and ethical efforts, the SSMU encourages the OCPM to keep in mind the following recommendations regarding the "New Vic Project", and urges McGill University to adapt their current "New Vic Project" plan to include:

1. A tangible and substantive proposal for the Royal Victoria site, including:
 - a. The construction of affordable or cooperative student housing,
 - b. The creation and maintenance of intensive ecology projects aimed at integrating community-based planning and development initiatives, such as a student-run community garden,
 - c. The development and/or improvement of initiatives, services, and infrastructure, including but not limited to:

³³ "Divestment at McGill." Divest McGill, n.d.



- i. The development of community-based support networks and resources, such as shelter services and transitional housing, affordable cooperative housing, and mental health services,
 - ii. The implementation of community-centered spaces for learning and research,
 - iii. Personal/career development and student employment opportunities,
 - iv. the expansion or reallocation of student and community services, such as the McGill Student Wellness Hub or First Peoples' House;
 2. Community-sector partnerships and/or control over the site, providing for:
 - a. Democratic and collaborative development and management efforts,
 - b. An equal representation in voices heard, including but not limited to:
 - i. McGill and surrounding areas' Indigenous communities,
 - ii. The Milton Parc and Greater Montréal communities,
 - iii. Members of the McGill Faculty and McGill University employees,
 - iv. Student representatives, with a special focus on student residents,
 - v. Royal Victoria Hospital site employees and personnel,
 - c. A shared governance over the site's projects and initiatives with ensured community and student representation and input;
 3. A clear outline regarding how McGill intends to financially, and otherwise, maintain the Royal Victoria Hospital site in addition to its existing downtown campus, paying special attention to how McGill plans to:
 - a. Ensure their faculty members do not become overwhelmed with the increased workloads that may come with the addition of more classrooms and lab spaces,
 - b. Adequately fund the much-needed renovations to buildings on the downtown campus, in addition to any costs that will be incurred during the development of their "New Vic Project", and associated with services and maintenance of the Royal Victoria Hospital site,
 - c. Utilize the space on the downtown campus that would be made available by the shift in students attending classes and labs, and conducting research at the Royal Victoria Hospital site;
 4. A concerted and noticeable commitment to improved sustainability efforts, which:
 - a. Provides a consistent and reliable depiction of possible demolition plans for the current infrastructure situated on the Royal Victoria Hospital site,
 - b. Publicizes information pertaining to McGill's:
 - i. Past disposal protocols for construction projects similar in size or scope to the Royal Victoria Hospital site,
 - ii. Intended protocols for the "New Vic Project", specifically relating to the disposal of material waste and any demolished infrastructure,
 - iii. And intentions for the disposal of any materials or infrastructure to demolish or remove during the project's conception;
 - c. Addresses how the university plans on executing their "New Vic Project" while preserving the sanctity and architectural integrity of surrounding heritage sites,
 - d. Demonstrates significant and meaningful divestment efforts;
 5. A complete denunciation of private enterprises in favour of cooperative businesses and initiatives.



SSMU's View: Recommendations for the Royal Victoria Hospital Site

Preface

The following points will include our suggestions for how to transform the opportunity that we have with the current site of the Royal Victoria decommissioned hospital, to pursue efforts of reconciliation with the Haudenosaunee confederacy, while highlighting the historical significance and architectural value of this unceded land. These recommendations are focused towards the goal of using the Royal Victoria Hospital site to better serve Indigenous communities and individuals in the McGill, Milton Parc, and Greater Montréal area, of all demographics. What is being put forth is the result of long months of work and effort, looking at all the possible routes we could go to achieve this goal, and staying in line with the wants and needs expressed to us by Indigenous actors and citizens of the community.

Moreover, it is important for us to reaffirm our commitment towards reconciliation with Indigenous communities in Montréal. As such, if our recommendations were to be selected, including the Mohawk Peoples in the development process, specifically to respect and honor the unceded territories on which the Royal Victoria Hospital site is located, would be of the utmost importance to the Society.

Finally, we wish to highlight the memoir submitted by the rotisken'raketeh of Kahnawake, Ohsweken/six nations of the Grand River, Akwesasne, and Kanehsatake, on behalf of the Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera (Mohawk Mothers), to the OCPM during this consultation period. We would urge you to consider how each recommendation that you read from any potential stakeholder, works towards respecting the information and concerns set forth by the Mohawk Nation.

[For more information and context, please view the official brief by the Mohawk Peoples.]³⁴.

Recommendations

The SSMU would like to urge the OCPM to consider the following list as recommended uses of the Royal Victoria Hospital site, keeping in mind that this is designed to highlight potential for development and evolution overtime, to best accommodate community and student needs.

**The SSMU remains open to running these recommendations internally or externally in tandem with any other selected projects, including but not limited to McGill University's 'New Vic Project.'*

³⁴ The rotisken'raketeh of Kahnawake, Ohsweken/six nations of the Grand River, Akwesasne, and Kanehsatake. *Public Consultation on the Former Royal Victoria Hospital*. PDF file. November 10, 2021.



The SSMU presents the following recommendations for the repurposing of the old site of the Royal Victoria Hospital into a multi-faceted community project:

1. **Development of affordable student housing** on a portion of the site to ensure accessibility for all students and alleviate financial strain, specifically:
 - a. Committing to the affordability aspect of the project by controlling the rent of the said affordable student housing units to be set to (at least) 10-15% lower than local market value,
 - b. Prioritizing the housing of students in need, who suffer from severe financial strain, or would benefit from the resources available on the site,
 - c. Ensuring that specific amounts of units in the affordable student housing development plan go towards the housing of individuals from minority or underrepresented groups of people, such as but not limited to members of the following communities:
 - i. BIPOC
 - ii. LGBTQIA2+
 - iii. Indigenous Peoples, specifically First Nations & Mohawk Peoples
 - d. Exploring the development opportunities for shelter services, transitional housing, and cooperative housing (as outlined in the results of our consultations),
 - e. Sharing the governance of the site's infrastructures, projects, initiatives, and events in a cooperative fashion including representatives from the SSMU, Mohawk Nation (and other Indigenous communities present at McGill), and site management services,
 - f. If needed, transferring the site's ownership into a land trust to ensure that no portion is ever sold off on the private market,
 - g. Including other spaces geared towards expansion and solving some of the obstacles presented in this memoir in a cooperative-style environment;
2. **Build a cooperatively-run, on-site grocery store**, market and/or dépanneur-styled store in the area of the site, strengthening the Milton-Parc community's economy and expanding accessibility to food in the area, specifically:
 - a. Prioritizing employment of students, and more so the students living in the affordable student housing units development, to:
 - i. Provide employed individuals with a new and steady source of income,
 - ii. Give the opportunity for students to gain work experience,
 - b. Aiding McGill students and local community members in solidifying food affordability and security due to the (if built) cheaper cost of living in the development,
 - c. Providing geographically accessible groceries to help alleviate mobility challenges faced by some disabled individuals or those who lack appropriate means of transportation,
 - d. Rejecting of private enterprise in favour of cooperative businesses;



3. Creating a space on the site/ development specifically to **raise awareness, and reconcile Montréal's Indigenous communities with the Milton-Parc citizens and inhabitants of the development**, with the provision that it be led by Montréal's Indigenous community:
 - a. Building a "Centre for Academic and Community Indigenous Scholarship" based-off of the one successfully implemented by the University of British Columbia (the *X̱wi7x̱wa* Library)³⁵,
 - b. Provide a space specifically for the Mohawk Mothers, in order to:
 - i. Support and have a chance to take part in their advocacy and mobilization initiatives,
 - ii. Provide and receive Indigenous consultations,
 - iii. Sharing of Indigenous cultural, awareness, and mobilization resources,
 - c. Giving space to Indigenous groups, specifically geared towards the creation of learning, teaching, and research opportunities, such as:
 - i. Indigenous language and cooking programs,
 - ii. Traditional food growth and medicine preparation;
4. **Growth of intensive ecology projects** that integrate elements of community-based planning and development, including:
 - a. Green houses,
 - b. Student-run gardens,
 - c. Other green spaces that open onto the Mont Royal to be used as leisure areas;
5. Dedicating spaces to expand and **develop on-site branches of services offered by the SSMU and McGill University** to expand the outreach and visibility of these said services beyond the existing downtown campus, and revamping their internal logistics to further benefit members of the local Milton-Parc community, specifically: **All of the services mentioned below can be found online on the SSMU and McGill's respective websites, or by googling the names of the service.*
 - a. SSMU Services:
 - i. Representation
 1. Black Students' Network (BSN)
 2. Arab Student Network
 3. Muslim Students' Association (MSA)
 4. Queer McGill
 5. Union for Gender Empowerment (UGE)
 - ii. Support & Wellness Resources
 1. Sexual Assault Center of the McGill Students' Society (SACOMSS)
 2. Peer Support Center (PSC)
 3. McGill Students' Nightline
 4. Midnight Kitchen (provides affordable and accessible food options)
 5. Eating Disorder Resource and Support Centre (EDRSC)
 - iii. Safety
 1. McGill Students' Emergency Response Team (MSERT)
 2. Drivesafe
 3. Walksafe

³⁵ "*X̱wi7x̱wa* Library." *X̱wi7x̱wa* Library | *X̱wi7x̱wa* Library, n.d. <https://xwi7xwa.library.ubc.ca/>.



- iv. Social Services
 - 1. TVM: Student Television at McGill
 - 2. SSMU Musicians Collective
- b. McGill University Services:
 - i. Representation
 - 1. First Peoples' House
 - 2. Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (MORSL)
 - 3. International Student Services
 - ii. Health
 - 1. Student Wellness Hub (branch would improve accessibility to STD testing, mental health diagnosis, support, and treatment, general doctor appointments, and referrals)
 - iii. Academic & Life Advising
 - 1. Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD)
 - 2. Scholarships and Student Aid
 - 3. Career Planning Services (CaPS)
 - 4. Tutorial Services
 - c. Other relevant extensions:
 - i. Advocacy
 - 1. CKUT Radio 90.3 FM (local Milton-Parc/ McGill campus community radio based on campus)
 - 2. Quebec Public Research Interest Group (QPIRG)
 - 3. Legal Information Clinic at McGill (LICM - offers legal information to anyone - not restricted to enrolled students)
 - ii. Representation
 - 1. Implementation of a 'Know Your Rights' office for students to inquire about their rights as students (academic, speech, and more),
 - 2. The McGill Chavurah (creation of inclusive spaces for Jewish individuals)
 - iii. Infrastructure
 - 1. SSMU's Plate Club (free dishwasher rental service that could be implemented in the affordable housing development)
 - 2. The Flat Bike Collective (encouraging environment-friendly and sustainable transportation)
 - iv. Recreation
 - 1. SSMU's McGill Students Outdoors Club
 - 2. Branches of McGill recreational activities to promote physical activity



Concluding Remarks

If McGill's "New Vic Project" is approved, the new site would serve 3,000 active daily users, including students, professors, and other staff. However, according to "New Vic Project" executives, this would only free up the spaces currently used in other buildings on the downtown campus, as McGill is not currently seeing a major influx in students who attend the university. This project is then allowing for a continual of empty, unused spaces on campus. Instead of creating this new space, McGill could focus on restoring and renovating the current spaces that do exist on the downtown campus, rather than privatizing a site which has so much potential to be utilized for public good.

Additionally, McGill is already at capacity to maintain their current buildings on the downtown campus, with a shortage of both personnel and funds causing these maintenance issues. This brings about doubt regarding whether McGill will have the ability to properly maintain the Royal Vic Project. Despite the current funding from the government and outside investments for this project, McGill has clearly shown that they do not properly keep up with building reparation and/or restoration, making it difficult to imagine that there will be a concerted effort to maintain the Royal Victoria site in the coming years.

McGill has not delineated a specific plan to accommodate concerns from faculty and staff regarding increased workload, as the space will require additional staff and personnel to be hired. No budget for these accommodations has been presented, and when also considering factors such as the pandemic, the project has the possibility to cause large amounts of unnecessary stress on faculty members who will need to take on extra tasks and a larger workload.

Another factor which needs to be taken into consideration is the environmental impact of the creation of the New Vic Project. The large-scale construction plan has the potential to be very damaging to both the air and land quality; for example, construction releases greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane into the air, and causes the destabilization of soil, leading to erosion. As well, despite claims that McGill will use this site as a research hub for environmental sustainability and addressing climate change, there is no public Environmental Impact Statement of the construction project, no information on the effects of the building development process, and no reference to how they will ameliorate or offset these impacts. This is also connected to the impact of the construction on the



potential impacts on Indigenous communities, as related back to the statement made by the Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera (Mohawk Mothers) that there is evidence of suspected unmarked graves at the Royal Victoria site as well as in certain parts of the downtown McGill campus. McGill's silence on this matter, and their refusal to investigate this claim, calls into question the evidence they have that this site does not exist. To put this into perspective, this is akin to the idea of a house possessing illegal goods that is never officially investigated. For example, picture a scenario in which a person has illegal guns in their house, and this is reported to police. Police then get a warrant to search the home, but never actually search it based on the word of the owner, who says he does not possess any illegal guns. Police believe this and allow the person to return to the house, with no search ever being conducted. If we allow the Royal Victoria site, or the metaphorical house, to never be searched based on the word of a multi-billion dollar institution with financial stake in the house, how can we expect to ever know what truly exists in the house? Further, who is McGill to strip Indigenous communities of their right to know the truth?

Instead of focusing on creating this idealistic space, McGill should focus their efforts on ameliorating issues that currently exist within the student body, the Indigenous community, and the Milton-Parc and Greater Montréal community. Incoming and existing students need to have safe, comfortable, and affordable housing, increased employment opportunities, adequate mental and physical health services, and improved resources for education and learning. The Royal Victoria site presents an opportunity to provide students with affordable housing that is integrated within the community of Milton-Parc. This also allows for the potential expansion of student services, giving students more necessary resources.

Further, given the history of the Royal Victoria site and the significance it holds within the Indigenous community, it is necessary to properly examine the land before any construction continues. The benefits already provided to the Indigenous community, such as safe housing, and public services such as healthcare, demonstrate that this site should continue to be utilized publicly to cater to the Indigenous population in Milton-Parc.

Moreover, the Milton-Parc community has shown that overall, they are in favor of keeping the Royal Victoria site public as opposed to privatizing it. Creating community spaces within the site would allow



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Located on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, traditional territories

the Milton-Parc community to better integrate with student housing, and a multitude of community opportunities would revitalize the entire neighborhood.

C'est avec honneur et privilège que nous soumettons ce mémoire à l'Office de Consultation Publique de Montréal. Avoir l'opportunité de produire un tel document et d'influencer le futur d'un site avec un héritage si puissant et historiquement considérable. J'espère que vous trouverez de la valeur dans ce mémoire, et l'Association Étudiante de l'Université McGill reste à votre disposition pour plus de discussions et fournir quelconque réponses aux questions que vous pourriez avoir.



Appendix 1

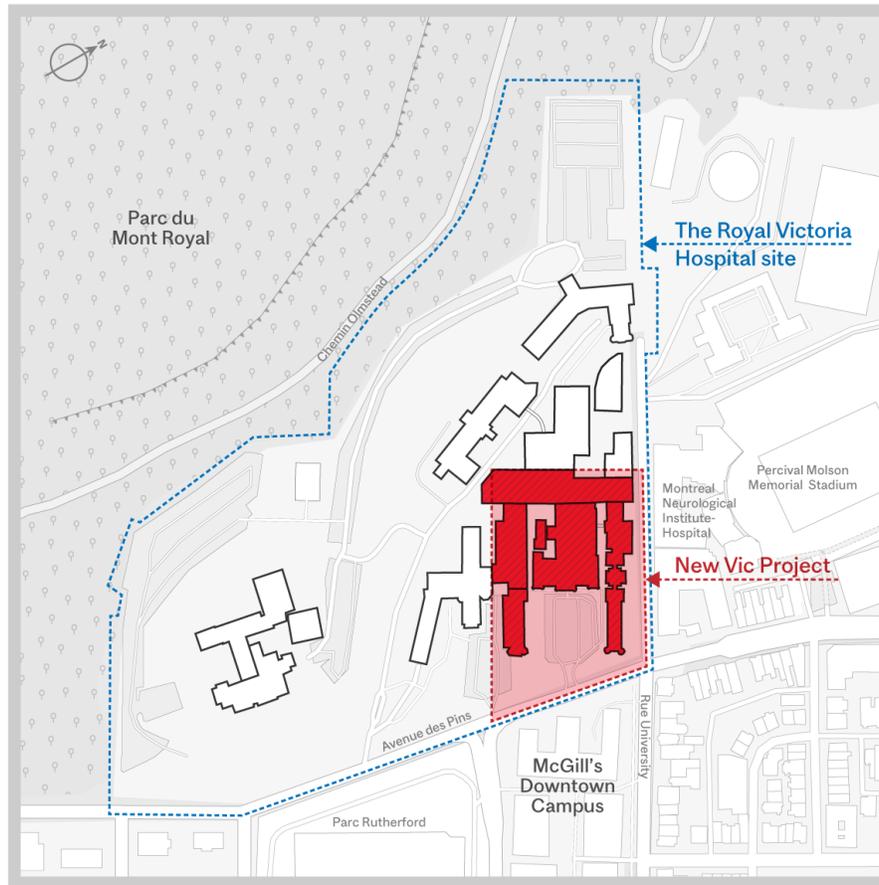


Image: depiction of the land in question when referring to McGill University’s “New Vic Project”.³⁶

³⁶ “The Transformation of the RVH Site - the New Vic Project.” The New Vic, n.d. <https://newvic.mcgill.ca/the-site/>.



Appendix 2

Investment total by category and asset origin

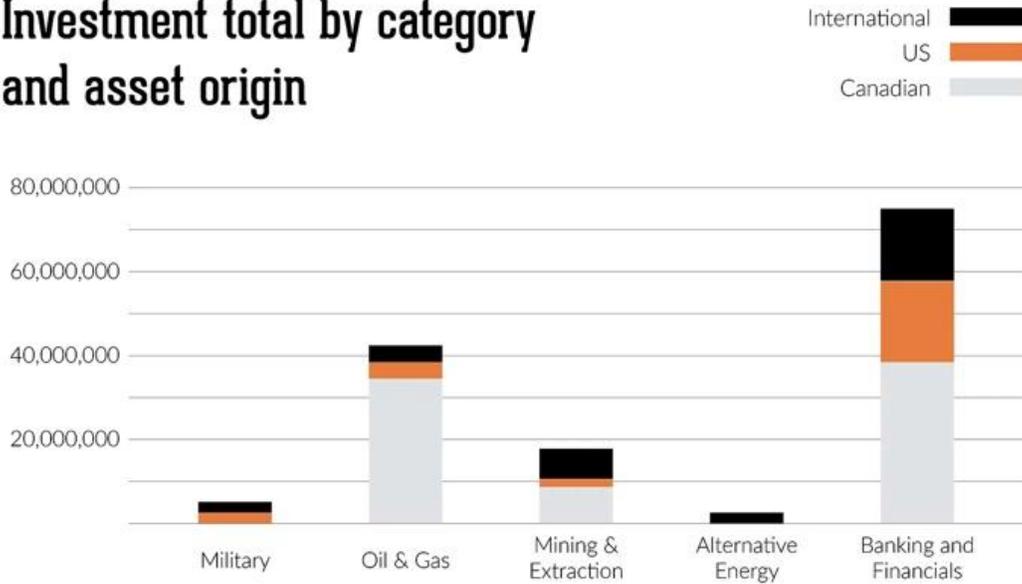


Image: Graphic shows the investment total by category and asset origin, observing the United States, Canada, and international states.³⁷

³⁷ “Divestment at McGill.” Divest McGill, n.d.



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