

April 17, 2008

Louise Roy, President  
Office de consultation publique de Montréal  
1550, rue Metcalfe Bureau 1414  
Montréal, Québec H3A 1X6

Re: Mount Royal Protection and Enhancement Plan (Draft), January 2008

Dear Ms. Roy:

The National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP) is pleased to provide comments to the Office de Consultation Publique de Montreal about the Mount Royal Protection and Enhancement Plan (Draft), January 2008.

In 2002, NAOP issued a Declaration on Mount Royal, which the Quebec Government's Ministry of Culture and Communications has cited as a primary reference regarding the park in *Les valeurs et les patrimoines du mont Royal* (Quebec Gouvernement, Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, Direction du Patrimoine, p. 10). The NAOP Declaration emphasizes the importance of the Olmsted concept for Montreal's mountain park, recognizes the quality of ongoing preservation and restoration work and suggests that other areas on the mountain would benefit from a similar approach. It also supported extending park pathways into the surrounding urban neighborhoods and through neighboring institutional properties to expand the park and improve access to the diverse natural and cultural resources in the spirit of Olmsted.

We hope the 2002 Declaration and the enclosed comments will provide a beneficial perspective to public discussions about the Mount Royal Protection and Enhancement Plan.

Best regards,

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NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION *for*  
OLMSTED  
PARKS

Comments by the National Association for Olmsted Parks on the  
**Mount Royal Protection and Enhancement Plan, Draft, January 2008**  
Submitted to the Office de Consultation Publique de Montréal

April 17, 2008

### **Background on the National Association for Olmsted Parks**

The National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP), established in 1980, is a coalition of design and preservation professionals, historic property and park managers, scholars, municipal officials, citizen activists and representatives of numerous Olmsted organizations.

NAOP is the principle national organization dedicated to the preservation, restoration and maintenance of historic parks and landscapes throughout North America, focusing primarily on preserving the fragile legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted and the firm founded by his sons.

The park and landscape design work of Olmsted and his firm reflect a vision of community and society as relevant today as it was in the second half of the 19th century — a commitment to visually compelling and accessible green space that restores and nurtures the bodies and spirits of all people, regardless of their economic circumstances.

Recognizing the potential for parks and landscapes in creating more liveable communities, and aware of the threat to the landscape legacy throughout North America, a group of concerned and passionate individuals came together to form NAOP in 1980 in Buffalo, NY. Since that time, NAOP has taken a leadership role in raising awareness of the importance of the historic landscape design legacy among public officials and community leaders, and among professionals and academics throughout the world of landscape design — all of whom exert enormous authority over the fate of parks and landscapes. NAOP has encouraged scholarship and published key reference materials, developed and sustained local park restoration efforts, and provided technical and historical information to ongoing preservation efforts.

Today, some notable Olmsted parks are restored or are in the process of restoration; strong community groups exist in a number of urban areas to advocate and preserve Olmsted parks and landscapes; a body of Olmsted

documents and information is readily available to scholars, park advocates and park managers; and Olmsted's historic home and office at Fairsted in Brookline, Massachusetts, is a public resource administered by the United States of America National Park Service.

NAOP's work focused on the areas of advocacy, research, education, communications, and building organizational capacity.

**Advocacy** is conducted on behalf of significant historic landscapes and the organizations working to protect them;

**Research** on the work of Frederick Law Olmsted and his firm, both to increase accessibility of their plans and correspondence and to establish the extent of actual construction of Olmsted designs and ascertain their present condition and their level of current endangerment;

**Education** to expand public understanding of the significance of historic parks and landscapes and instill the importance of land planning among the next generation of landscape architects and the cultural heritage field;

**Communications** to mobilize constituents and to share the broadest array of information that will enable park supporters to increase their effectiveness; and

**Organizational capacity** to develop NAOP as an effective national organization for the field of historic parks and landscapes.

NAOP has become a strong and mobilized membership organization that has wielded tremendous influence and nurtured a generation of park advocates and academics.

### **Past involvement of NAOP on Mount Royal, Montreal**

In September 2002 the National Association for Olmsted Parks board signed a declaration on Mount Royal to endorse restoration and protection of the Olmsted-designed park. It recognized the importance of the park to the city of Montreal and to the Olmsted heritage of built landscapes throughout North America. It stated, "Olmsted's concept for the park is one of his most significant achievements....His concept of creating a series of landscape poems along a winding road that gradually ascends the mountain is still relevant today and should remain as the structuring element and guiding principle for the park and some areas adjacent to it."

The declaration outlined NAOP's support for

- respecting Olmsted's original design intentions and aesthetic principles when re-landscaping open space parkland and carrying out forestry work;
- seeking to integrate existing structures and constructed features into the Olmsted landscape;

- improving public access to the mountain from adjacent areas, both urban and institutional;
- sharing with the public the knowledge acquired through research and hands-on experience as a vital part of developing a deeper understanding of this unique Olmsted legacy.

### **Mount Royal Protection and Enhancement Plan**

Sixteen years after the previous Mount Royal Protection and Enhancement Plan, we applaud the continued efforts by the city and its partners to restore the park and enhance the links between the mountain and the city. We also salute the commitment of the citizens of Montreal to protect this great public work of landscape architecture. The public hearings about the Draft of the Mount Royal Protection and Enhancement Plan provide a great opportunity to highlight the issues related to the park and to the whole mountain.

The final version of Mount Royal Protection and Enhancement Plan could be a very useful tool to remind your citizens about the importance of historic parks and landscapes to the health of great cities. It could also be the time to make a commitment to establish goals and objectives to pursue quality work on Mount Royal Park and on the Mountain. As your public and private agencies, along with your citizens, invest in the future of Mount Royal, we encourage you to develop programs and policies that recognize the historic significance of the park, protect and enhance its natural and designed elements, and make the Mountain an accessible and welcoming place for all to enjoy.

As Olmsted scholar Charles E. Beveridge has written:

“Olmsted believed that it was the purpose of his art to affect emotions. This was especially evident in his park design, where he created passages of scenery in which the visitor would become immersed, experiencing the restorative action of the landscape by what Olmsted termed and “unconscious” process. To achieve this result, he subordinated all elements of the design to the single purpose of making the landscape experience most profound. Olmsted always sought to look beyond the current taste and fashion and to base his designs on fundamental principles of human psychology.

As Olmsted expressed it, the term “scenery” does not apply to any field of vision in which all that is to be seen is clear and well defined in outline. It must contain either “considerable complexity of light and shadow near the eye, or obscurity of detail further away.” These qualities were essential for the unconscious action of scenery on the psyche. They were also a crucial element of his designs as a training ground for aesthetic sensibility.

The quality of “delicacy,” which involved variety, intricacy, and fine gradation of texture, tint, and tone, was fundamental to Olmsted’s artistic and civilizing purpose. The final test of civilization, he taught, was this delicacy, shown by “the willingness of the people to expend study and labor with reference to delicate distinctions in matters of form and color.”<sup>1</sup>

Frederick Law Olmsted and his firm drew plans for more than 700 public parks, parkways and recreation areas, though not all were built. He considered Mount Royal a grander natural canvas than Central Park and the best opportunity that had ever been presented to develop a great urban park. We hope that you will continue to provide thoughtful stewardship of this masterpiece.

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<sup>1</sup> Beveridge, Charles E. *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* [2000] McGraw-Hill, New York.

To be sent to

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