

## **Société du Havre de Montréal's (SHM) Quartier Bonaventure**

Memorandum submitted to OCPM for Public Consultation on 7 January 2010

It is vain to talk of the interest of the community, without understanding what is the interest of the individual.

--Jeremy Bentham in An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation

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### **Introduction**

My name is Judith Bauer. Attracted by the unique character, rich history, and superb location I purchased a home and moved to the neighbourhood in 2004. I am a member of both the Committee for the Sustainable Redevelopment of Griffintown (CSRG) and the Chambre Immobilière Griffinoise. I am on the board of the Griffintown Horse Palace Foundation and co-organizer of the Griffintown Corridor Culturel.

I care about the manner in which this sensitive area is redeveloped not only because this is my neighbourhood but also because this is *my* city.

## **Democracy**

The proposed bus corridor is a 5-minute walk from the Bonaventure metro station, a 5-minute walk to McGill Street in Vieux Montréal, and a 10-minute walk to the corner of Peel & Ste-Catherine Streets and it is obvious to me that what this neighbourhood becomes will affect not only those like me who live and work here but every Montrealer who lives or works in the neighbouring areas. Although it is what developers and city planners (or the lack thereof) seem consistently to do, I do not believe it is possible to reconfigure our city in a sustainable and economically viable way by giving the green light to megaprojects that are developed in isolation. Why are these proposals presented without the context of neighbouring projects that have been approved or proposed? Why is there no coherent plan between them all? Why are we, the citizens who live and work here, not consulted about our needs and wishes for our community and our city prior to the long and costly development of such megaproposals? We are here every day. We see the advantages and disadvantages of the area, we experience firsthand what works and what doesn't, we have an insider's view of how the various neighbourhoods integrate and could be further integrated to improve quality of life and economic health for all concerned. Why not ask us first?! Of course the developers and

the municipality have their experts and may believe they know better but if I hire an expert to assist with remodeling my home, I first would expect them to ask me what I want, what is important to me, and second to offer proposals and solutions. Why was the community not asked about what they want for this area prior to being presented with a project that has on several occasions been described by M. Rainville as "cannée"? Why was Mme Isabelle Hudon, the president of the Conseil d'administration de la Société du Havre de Montréal, quoted in a 17 September 2009 press release from the SHM as saying:

*Toute étude additionnelle qui pourrait être requise à ce stade concernant le corridor Dalhousie ne servirait qu'à obtenir un niveau de raffinement des études antérieures sans remettre en question la pertinence de ce corridor.<sup>1</sup>*

If the project the SHM has presented to us is already 'in the can' and new input only to be used for 'refining' what has already been decided, what is the true value of these public consultations to the citizens and organizations participating?

## **Concerns**

I am in favour of lowering the Bonaventure Expressway north of Peel Basin and improving public transport so as to reduce the number of private vehicles circulating but there are aspects of the Société du Havre de Montréal's (SHM) Quartier Bonaventure proposal which raise serious concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> Isabelle Hudon. **La Ville de Montréal donne le feu vert à la Société du Havre de Montréal - Le corridor Dalhousie fait désormais partie intégrante du projet de réaménagement de l'autoroute Bonaventure**; Press release 17.09.2009.

My concerns center around the proposed designated bus lane, the Dalhousie Corridor, and the plan to redevelop the liberated lands by constructing a row of high-density towers between the new boulevards.

### ***The Dalhousie Corridor***

#### **Cost**

By all estimates the cost of the proposed bus lane is exorbitant, particularly considering it is but a temporary solution selected based on incomplete and flawed studies.<sup>2</sup> I fail to understand why serious consideration is being given to such a costly venture when other alternatives exist, such as Peel Street, a tramway on the Victoria Bridge, or bus lanes on the new boulevards themselves.

I also question the wisdom of spending between \$86 and \$119 million on a temporary fix rather than investing it in a durable long-term solution. Given that one of the aims of the SHM, the Ville de Montréal, and the local community is to revitalize this area, it would seem that choosing a different transport solution and diverting the monies saved into economic and cultural development in and around the area would be a more promising approach.

#### **Heritage**

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<sup>2</sup> For an analysis see the memorandum submitted to the OCPM by CSRG; 7.01.2010, pp 4-8.

Dalhousie is a narrow dead-end cobblestoned street that is 37 m wide from sidewalk to sidewalk, including the sidewalks! To the east of Dalhousie is the CN viaduct, to the west is the New City Gas complex, formerly *Montreal, Light, Heat and Power*, with its historically and architecturally significant buildings dating to the 1850s. A number of organizations and individuals have already expressed concern about the future of these buildings, including Montreal's own Conseil du Patrimoine, Phyllis Lambert of the CCA, Heritage Montreal and Caroline Andrieux of the Darling Foundry.

The proposed Dalhousie Bus Corridor requires that a tunnel be pushed through the CN viaduct adjacent to one of these remarkable buildings.

The construction of this tunnel and the subsequent running of 1400+ buses/day seriously threaten the integrity of this building. The SHM's response to this threat has been to propose a series of support pillars alongside the building, thereby blocking the stone facade, entrances and windows. There have been and continue to be any number of interesting proposals for the revitalization of this historical site, including an Arts Centre, a farmer's market, a Contemporary Art Museum, a Maison de la Culture, an Arts and Music Centre, and a luxury hotel. The building of the tunnel, the supports for the building, and the subsequent heavy flow of bus traffic would seriously undermine efforts to revitalize this property.

## **Pollution**

For reasons of health and safety relating to respiratory illnesses, *Environment Canada* and the *Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs* state that levels of particulate pollution should not exceed  $30\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . At the OCPM hearings in December, the Ville de Montréal confirmed that as a result of the bus corridor the levels of particulate pollution would increase on the west side of the viaduct from the current level of  $29\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  to  $37\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . This issue of air quality must be addressed if this area is to become a desirable home to the many thousands of new residents expected to move here when the projects under construction and being planned are realized.

## **Barriers and New Construction**

The SHM has repeatedly referred to the raised highway as a barrier between Griffintown to the west and the Faubourgs des Recollets (formerly Griffintown) to the east. The reality is that the current configuration does not represent a barrier to those wishing travel by foot, bicycle or car between Griffintown and the Faubourg des Recollets. It is true that the elevated highway creates a visual barrier but so does the CN viaduct and there is no plan to remove that. Not only that but if the SHM is serious in saying they wish to eliminate a perceived barrier between the areas east and west of the highway, they should re-examine the effect that a designated bus corridor with over 1400 buses a day will have on the mobility and safety of

pedestrians and vehicles wishing to cross from one area to the other.

Furthermore, the addition between the new boulevards of high-density buildings with heights exceeding those of the surroundings threatens to create an additional visual barrier that will exacerbate the separation of the two areas rather than reunite them. If the SHM sincerely wishes to renew the link between these historically significant areas, they should “bonify” their project by redeveloping the liberated land at a scale and density consistent with the historical and current surroundings.

It is also questionable whether there is sufficient demand for such high-density construction when last year alone saw 25,000 residents move off island, much construction is already planned or in process (e.g. the Lowney buildings and the Canada Lands project at 1500 Ottawa), and other projects have already stalled for lack of demand and financing (e.g. Devimco’s Projet Griffintown and 701 University). Will this project make economic sense if the proposed high-density buildings remain empty?

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

### ***Back to the Drawing Board***

I recommend that the proposal for leveling the Bonaventure Expressway be redrawn to take into consideration the criticisms expressed in this memorandum regarding health and safety, preservation of heritage, and a renewal of the link between the areas to the east and west of the existing highway. I would like to see the

issues raised by my fellow citizens and concerned organizations likewise addressed in a revamped proposal.

I am also aware that many of the citizens and organizations submitting memoranda are proposing alternative transport solutions and proposals for redeveloping this district into a livable, sustainable and vibrant community; for example, the CSRG's suggestion that St-Paul Street be favoured as a transit link between Vieux Montréal and a reanimated Haymarket Square Park.<sup>3</sup> I would like to see these alternatives and proposals given serious consideration and, if they are dismissed, I would like to see studies supporting that decision. More than that, I would like to see the developers and the Ville de Montréal actively solicit the opinions and recommendations of the community prior to retabling this project or presenting any other. In other words, I would like to see the citizens and community treated as partners in the redevelopment of our neighbourhood rather than as opponents. I want a sustainable, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use neighbourhood that is economically strong and redeveloped with a mind to long-term solutions rather than temporary fixes. I believe the way to achieve this is through collaboration, a genuine and ongoing consultation process, or pre-consultation if you will. We live here and our experiences, opinions and ideas can be useful in developing successful plans for the area that do not engender vociferous opposition as has happened here and with the previous Projet Griffintown.

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<sup>3</sup> Memorandum submitted to the OCPM by CSRG; 7.01.2010, pp 17-21.