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Revitalisation de l'ouest du centre-ville
Quartier des grands jardins
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Mémoire du
Royal Montreal Curling Club

Overview

This document is a summary of the position of the Royal Montreal Curling Club concerning the plans of the Ville Marie Borough for the western sector of Montreal's downtown core. As one of the long time residents of this area, the Club is a wholehearted supporter of the Borough's efforts to revitalize the area and in general, we applaud the preliminary plans that have been put forward.

While we support this initiative, we do have some issues over the selection of the site for a proposed new park included in this plan, as it would seriously affect the operation of our Club. Furthermore, we have strong reservations that a park situated in such close proximity to our facility satisfies the stated major objectives of this initiative.

Background

The Royal Montreal Curling Club has been in existence since before Canadian Confederation, having been founded 1807, and continues today as the oldest sporting club in North America. Its history and contribution to the sport of curling in North America have been recognized by the Royal Caledonia Curling Society of Scotland, The Canadian Curling Association, and various curling associations and clubs throughout Europe, Canada and the United States. The Club has been declared a Historic National Institution by the Historic Sites & Monument Board of Canada

Our physical facilities have existed at a number of downtown sites since the inauguration of the Club, but we have been at the existing location since 1889. The curling shed which was constructed at that time and continues to be presently in use was built in the style of the famous Victoria Arena (where the Montreal Maroons later played hockey), on a frame of laminated wood in arched girders, permitting a large free space without pillars. It is the only known example of this type of structure still in existence, and receives many visits from architects and engineers worldwide interested to examine the facility and study the style and construction technique that was followed. It is truly regarded as a living architectural museum, being one of the earliest intact examples of a large open space used for sporting activities. That said,

the Club recognizes that the exterior of the building could be improved and would be willing to review options and costs with Heritage Quebec.

The historical written and pictorial archives of our Club are extensive, dating back over 200 years. Our records, files and photos serve as a valuable data base that is sourced regularly by historians, authors and individual followers of the sport of curling and of Montreal. For example, the archivist for the Canadian Olympic committee sourced much of the historical information for the Curling display at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics from our Club, and visitors to the permanent Olympic museum in Vancouver will recognize many historical photographs and written material that was sourced from the archives at RMCC.

Over the last 30 years, many curling Clubs in downtown Montreal and Westmount have closed their doors. Royal Montreal has not only remained open but has seen a growing membership in recent years. Its historic facility has been well maintained and upgraded, without public financial support, thanks to the volunteer efforts and generosity of our members. The members not only enjoy the Club, but they also feel a responsibility to carry forward a great Montreal tradition and a piece of our shared history. It a heritage monument and, as nationally recognized Quebec curler Guy Hemmings has said, it is “truly a shrine of curling in Canada.”

Issues and Concerns

The elimination of the existing parking lot and its replacement by a new park in the area will adversely impact both our organization as well as the neighbourhood.

1. Impact on RMCC Club Members

Our organization is a strong supporter of the public transportation system with close proximity of a metro station and access to a variety of bus routes. This makes it possible for some members and outside groups using the Club to take good advantage of public transport. This is the case for most of our secondary school students, such as those from LaSalle College, who can walk from their school or use public transportation to reach our curling rink.

However, there is a large portion of our membership that uses the parking facility out of necessity and not just as a convenience. Out of town members and members residing in distant areas of the island have no option other than to drive in to access their Club.

More importantly, we have a significant number of older members (some with physical handicaps) who are actively involved in weekly non-curling events and who often require automobile transportation to and from the Club. As well, we offer a large number of evening functions throughout the year which do not lend themselves to use of bus or metro due to dress code or the late hour completion of these social and curling activities.

The elimination of the parking lot will seriously compromise the ability of many these members and their guests to continue to enjoy use of the Club.

2. Non-Montreal Curling Participants

RMCC holds a significant number of weekly and annual competitions (involving as many as 100+ participants) that attract curlers from outside the city, outside Quebec and often even outside the country. Accessible parking for these events has become increasingly scarce in recent years with the closure of many parking lots in the area. Elimination of the adjacent parking lot will have a devastating effect on future participation in these long standing traditional events. This will result in the loss of visitors to the city, and loss of revenue both to our Club as well as other merchants in the area.

3. Revenue

The negative impact described above on both members and guests to the Club will inevitably result in a damaging loss of revenue to the Club.

Reduction in membership which will certainly follow the loss of parking will impact membership fee revenues; reduced participation in Club events, particularly evening social activities will affect our income; and we will be challenged to maintain participation by out-of-city curlers in our curling competitions, as we already are having to manage their

frustrations at lack of adequate parking options when they attend our events.

At the present time, under arrangements with the owner of the parking lot beside our curling rink, we have access to a number of parking spaces for use by our members and visitors; this parking would disappear if the space is converted to a park. In addition two parking spaces in front of the Club have been utilized by staff, members and delivery vehicles for many years. This use has been on occasion contested by the City and successfully met by the argument of acquired rights and the inapplicability of the Borough By-law as written.

However, this cannot not satisfy the requirements of our members and guests, and the elimination of the adjacent parking lot will aggravate the existing lack of public parking in the immediate area, particularly on street, due to introduction of the bicycle route on the south side of de Maisonneuve Blvd. and the increase in dedicated resident parking spaces.

We are not being alarmist in saying that this change could very likely cause the closure of the Club and abandonment of this historic site.

4. External Access to Ice Shed

In addition to the portion of the lot owned by the Club, the Club also has a registered 8' wide servitude along the eastern portion of our building-an area that runs the length of the proposed park. This is an absolute necessity to permit access to the rear of the Club's curling shed for regular maintenance of our equipment. It would also be required to permit evacuation of the Curling facilities in an emergency and has been used by *Urgence Santé* to treat victims of injuries. Without this right of access, the Club could not continue to operate as a curling facility.

If the property is developed as a park, there are some serious safety issues to be addressed. While our sport is identified as a winter activity, the majority of our repair and maintenance requirements are during the off-season. This means that service vehicles and trucks will be traversing the park primarily in the daytime during the months of May through to September, at the same time that the proposed park would be experiencing the highest utilization by area residents, including children.

The city has been made aware of this situation, but is unable to advise whether or how this issue is to be handled to our mutual satisfaction.

5. Site Security

Currently, the parking lot has an attendant present daytime and evening for the months of September through May. As well, a towing service visits the location regularly in periods when the lot does not have an attendant physically present.

Although this does not represent a comprehensive security service, it is nevertheless some measure of discouragement to potential intruders. It should be noted that the lane that runs between Ste. Catherine and de Maisonneuve is currently home to many unsavory individuals and activities. There is reason to be concerned with safety and security for the property.

6. Impact on our Neighbours

There is extensive use of this parking lot by others in the immediate community and their guests and clients. This would include staff and patients at CLSC, area apartment residents, Concordia students, and area businesses including restaurants. However, these parties will probably be offering directly their perspective on the establishment of a park at this location, and are in a better position to present their views than we would be, so we mention this just in passing.

Proposed Creation of Green Space on de Maisonneuve and Project Objectives

The Special Planning Initiative for the *Quartier des grands jardins* identifies three major objectives:

- *to improve the quality of housing and services for citizens;*
- *to enhance the neighbourhood's heritage buildings and landscapes;*
and
- *to stimulate economic activity.*

From our perspective, it seems that the development of a park at the site as proposed fails to satisfy the latter two objectives:

1. The removal of the parking lot will likely result not only in the elimination of a unique and historic institution, but in the destruction of a heritage building, as recognized by the Government of Canada Historic Sites plaque on the front of the building. How can this be considered consistent with a stated objective “*to enhance the neighbourhood’s heritage buildings?*” Indeed, the destruction of the Club would be a loss for the neighbourhood, the city and province of Quebec, and would not go unnoticed or unappreciated outside our boundaries.
2. In terms of the objective of stimulating economic activity in the area, our Club’s operations are a contributor to the local economy. This contribution would be ended with the establishment of a green space at the intended location. The Club generates revenue and pays its taxes. In addition, participants at our events, members and non-members alike, spend money at local shops, restaurants and hotels. Given that some of the outside events involve more than 100 curlers, this represents a not insignificant revenue contribution to area merchants.

Summary

The Royal Montreal Curling Club is proud to be a resident of the *Quartier des grands jardins* and appreciates the effort that has gone into the proposal for the Special Planning Initiative for the area. We reiterate that the Club supports this initiative in general, and also supports the idea of developing a new green space.

It would be ironic that the one location that would bear the negative impact of the proposed new park would be a heritage property while so many establishments in the area that are under-utilized or of dubious social merit would continue unaffected. Surely a better location for the park can be found.

We regret that the Borough did not involve us earlier on in discussions concerning this park, but we remain open to co-operate and explore options that may exist that would meet our mutual goals and the stated objectives of the project.