

OFFICE DE CONSULTATION PUBLIQUE DE MONTRÉAL

MÉMOIRE

Special Planning Program – Quartier des Grands Jardins

BY: GREGORY DESTOUNIS

Madame/Sirs,

I write to you in regards to the urban plan which is being developed for my neighbourhood, with particular regards to the park which is planned to replace the parking lot at 1840 boul. deMaisonneuve ouest. I have been a resident of this neighbourhood for over 12 years, and feel that my insight may be of some assistance in assessing this idea to create a new park in the area.

Without mincing words, I will open with the declaration that I stand in complete opposition to the creation of a park as detailed in the Special Planning Program. Like all Montrealers, I enjoy green spaces and need no convincing as to the positive benefits they may bring to a community. However, inasmuch as green spaces can improve a neighbourhood, they can just as easily undermine the quality of life of residents if poorly implemented. Having spoken to dozens of nearby residents, people who know this area very well, I can confirm that there is unanimous opposition to the creation of this park. I don't believe that any of these people are opposed to parks in general, it's just that with their understanding of our neighbourhood the idea of this park borders on craziness.

The area around the proposed park all the way from rue Guy to rue Atwater is home to a large and fairly well established group of homeless, full time drunks and crack addicts. The situation borders on scary as these elements sometimes hang out in groups with a general disrespect for the police. When police are actually around to get involved, groups disperse only to reassemble moments later. I am a 6 foot male, and cannot always say that I feel safe when passing such groups. It is unusual to write these words, but the commissioners should know what type of green space is actually being proposed.

There is a lane at the rear of the proposed park. It is a commercial lane with a lot of vehicles passing each day. It is also a regular hangout of drunks coming from

any of the nearby bars, with a particularly consistent contribution from Bar Diana. I suppose if you could get rid of all of the bars in the area some of this problem would disappear. But, being a realist I don't see that happening either before or at any time after the construction of this park. It's quite obvious that what we'll be left with is a convenient hangout for all of these marginal characters.

While I would love to believe that families and others will win the fight for this territory, I have seen every single other green space in the area get taken over by these less-than-social residents. Till this day, I continue to avoid Cabot Square. But the proposed park is so much worse. It is between three buildings, two of which are incredibly long. It is on the commercial lane behind a bar. And there is a fairly hidden area behind the Ste Catherine building on the southwest corner of the park which is a regular site for crack smokers and other addicts who shoot needles. I can personally attest to these facts as my apartment is next door to the Diana Bar.

Having attended a couple of the public meetings conducted by the city, I now know of two new things that make the prospect of this park even more negative. On one night a Ms Andrea Carroll who seems to be involved with the aboriginal community made some stark comments about the new park and it got me thinking as well. If this city is going to put millions of dollars into "cleaning up" Cabot Square, where is the transient aboriginal population going to go? This is a serious question as this street population swells with each new spring and the influence is felt until late autumn. It's obvious to anyone that they will move to this new park, better sheltered from the eyes of the police and other residents. Ms Carroll said as much herself. When confronted, the city planners looked as if they had never considered this most serious issue. The non-answers provided by the urban planning department made me want to scream. But I am writing this letter instead, and I hope that the commissioners understand that these issues cannot be ignored.

Secondly, the owner of the parking lot mentioned something about a lane which runs down the side of the curling club building. If this is true, and it seems to be because there is a large service door towards the rear of the building, then the proposed park will in fact be bordered by two lanes and three buildings. What type of park is this? The park was long and ridiculously narrow without the lane. If we take away another 8 or 10 feet we are left with a long ribbon of land. Social problems combined with a completely insecure park complemented by an area fully hidden from sight, all situated at the rear exit of a notorious bar. I am completely shocked if this is the best idea our planners could come up with. I have never written to a public body before, but this plan is so incredibly wrong and it's happening in my back yard.

A park can be a great thing for a neighbourhood, or it can drive it further downward. Everything about this park screams that a social problem is going to explode and the quality of life of nearby residents will be negatively impacted for many years. This site has been poorly selected. Stranger still, the city planners admitted that it was the only one they looked at.

With such heaviness behind us I will lighten your mood with a joke:

A man is looking under a street light. He is approached by another man who asks the first what he is looking for.

"My keys", says the first man.

"Did you lose them here?" asks the second man.

"No, but the light is better over here."

I hope and plead that the commissioners will visit the area and get a better sense of the park that is being proposed in the SPP. It may seem like one of the few vacant areas to place a park, but it most certainly is not the right one.

Hoping for sanity,

I remain,

Yours truly,

Gregory Destounis