



PPU Griffintown

**Analyse pour l'Office de consultation
publique de Montréal**

Presenté par le Comité pour le sain
redéveloppement de Griffintown

Le 11 décembre, 2012

**Analysis for the Office de Consultaion
Publique de Montréal**

Presented by the Committee for the
Sustainable Redevelopment of Griffintown

December 11th, 2012

The Committee for the Sustainable Redevelopment of Griffintown and its Mission

The Committee for the Sustainable Redevelopment of Griffintown (CSRG) is a community organisation whose members live, work and/or own property in Griffintown. The CSRG's mission is to promote the redevelopment of Griffintown based on:

- respect for the neighbourhood's history, drawing upon it for inspiration
- respect of the existing and historically significant street grid
- respect for the architecture and construction materials specific to the neighbourhood
- respect for the environment and use of sustainable practices
- reasonable density at a human scale
- durable development for the new century

The CSRG promotes local projects and endeavours such as the Griffintown Cultural Corridor and the Griffintown Horse Palace Foundation.

The CSRG maintains the website **www.griffintown.org**

OCPM Secteur Griffintown 2012 Consultations to Today's PPU

In February 2012, the CSRG submitted and presented a brief entitled “Secteur Griffintown” to the OCPM. In that brief, among other things, we argued that short-term gains were driving a shortsighted development of the sector and recommended that measures be implemented to counter this practice.

We are pleased to remark that the resulting Griffintown PPU, subject to the present consultation, is of much higher quality than the recent Peel-Wellington and Quartier Bonaventure PPU's. Moreover, it is clear that the Griffintown PPU addresses many of the recommendations from the Secteur Griffintown report. In this respect, we commend the participants of the previous consultation, the OCPM and all those involved in drafting the Griffintown PPU.

However, a PPU is but one ingredient in the development of a neighbourhood and a community. Following the Secteur Griffintown consultation, both the City and the Borough continued to support *projets à la pièce* despite clear recommendations to the contrary, even in the face of popular opposition. A PPU is only as strong as those responsible for its implementation. Unfortunately, the CSRG has reason to believe that those responsible for its implementation continue to focus on short-term gains, as we will argue in the following sections.

Urban Planners and Market Forces vs. Organic Development

At the OCPM conference of January 20th, 2012, Kenneth Greenberg established the following key points in his presentation on redevelopment:

- the public sector is responsible for guiding development, not promoters
- it is imperative to build real neighbourhoods, not just condos
- redevelopment should not proceed as isolated projects, but rather as a music of their ensemble
- redevelopment requires flexibility to permit evolution and feedback

Addressing these points and the need to curb the existing boom-bust development cycle, at the public question period of November 20th, 2012, Jeffrey Dungen, spokesperson for the CSRG asked what measures had been taken to encourage organic redevelopment of the neighbourhood. To this, Luc Gagnon, head of the Direction du développement économique et urbain (DDEU) urban planning division, replied:

Je pense qu'on va s'entendre qu'une croissance organique, c'est la nature qui la décide généralement. Puis évidemment, dans le cas de la construction, la nature n'est pas tellement présente, c'est plutôt les forces du marché qui sont là.¹

Mr. Gagnon appears to dismiss the possibility of organic growth, suggesting that market forces dictate the pace of construction. He proceeds to say:

La Ville n'a aucun contrôle sur le rythme de développement du territoire. Dans la mesure où le zonage donne des droits de développement, un propriétaire – vous, par exemple, vous avez un terrain, vous pouvez déposer une demande de permis et pouvoir

¹ Transcription de l'audience publique sur le PPU Griffintown, 20 novembre, 2012, p. 92

*construire.*²

Incredibly, Mr. Gagnon argues that the City is powerless to control the rhythm of development, an essential part of Mr. Greenberg's recommendations. The CSRG invites readers to recall that over the four decades leading up to the Peel-Wellington PPU, the City and its urban planners successfully controlled the rhythm of development, to one of stagnation, through zoning policies. The City has the power to again control this rhythm today via the zoning policies of the Griffintown PPU.

Instead, the DDÉU chooses not to use the tools available to them. This hands-off approach to urban planning allows promoters to guide development, results in condos instead of neighbourhoods, and lacks harmony and a mechanism to permit evolution and feedback. As we will argue in the next section, this represents urban planning for “business as usual”.

Urban Planning for “Business as Usual”

At the the public question period of November 20th, 2012, the president of the consultation, Irène Cinq-Mars, followed up Mr. Dungen's question by asking:

Je me rends compte que souvent, sous-jacent à plusieurs des questions, une des préoccupations c'est qu'en ayant recours à des échanges arrondissements - promoteurs via les projets particuliers, par exemple, qu'on multiplie les amendements. On pourrait multiplier certains amendements au règlement. Peut-être que j'ai mal compris? Est-ce que vous auriez pu changer directement le plan dans le PPU ou c'est la [seule] façon de procéder?³

Mr. Gagnon responded by indicating that this is the manner in which the City normally proceeds. In a follow-up question, Mr. Gagnon stated:

Chaque projet particulier fait l'objet d'une consultation publique par l'arrondissement. Et je ne me trompe pas en disant que chaque projet particulier est également susceptible d'approbation référendaire aussi.

In other words, the urban plan allows promoters and politicians to continue the practice of *projets à la pièce*. And while it is true that every special project is subject to public consultation and allows the possibility of a referendum, in reality, the odds are firmly stacked in favour of the promoters and the politicians. Consider the Lowney Phase 8 special project discussed in our “Secteur Griffintown” brief or the recent Le Canal special project discussed on our website⁴. Despite tireless efforts by citizens to improve unpopular aspects of these projects, they were nonetheless authorised with only token refinements.

The Griffintown PPU and the attitude of the urban planners of the DDÉU clearly indicates that all intentions are to continue business as usual. In the next section we discuss the results of this practice.

2 Transcription de l'audience publique sur le PPU Griffintown, 20 novembre, 2012, p. 92

3 Transcription de l'audience publique sur le PPU Griffintown, 20 novembre, 2012, p. 94

4 <http://griffintown.org/projects/sonoco/>

Building Condos, not Neighbourhoods

What have market forces and *projets à la pièce* produced together in less than five years? Condos. A bubble of over seven thousand condos in the sector, with even more planned. Condos strongly biased toward a single-bedroom configuration. Condos that would not look out of place in Brossard, Laval or almost any North American city.

A neighbourhood has an identity. Griffintown's identity is being erased by rampant, cookie-cutter development. How can Griffintown expect to emerge as a viable neighbourhood?

In the next section, we argue that Griffintown has a unique culture, rooted in its history, which defines its identity as a neighbourhood.

Griffintown: a Different Kind of Community

Imagine 19th century Griffintown. It boasts innovation. It is the birthplace of the industrial revolution in Canada and it grows around its novel, planned street grid. It is mired in scandal. The land on which it exists had been usurped by Mary Griffin, and the few rights of its workers are left in the hands of their industrialist patrons. Griffintown is a place where survival is assured only by the strength of its citizen community.

The theme of innovation, scandal and survival is core to Griffintown's history and, in fact, defines its culture.

Imagine Griffintown in 2007. Innovators occupy and repurpose its ageing industrial structures, transforming them into businesses, art spaces and the first condo projects. Scandal arrives in the form of the Peel-Wellington PPU, designed to suit a single promoter and exempt from OCPM consultation. Facing expropriations and an unpopular project, the need to survive manifests itself in a community of property and business owners, artists and gentrifiers working together to combat this threat.

The CSRG itself emerged from this community, formed in the innovation, scandal and survival central to Griffintown culture. Put another way, community exists in Griffintown not because it is a “safe” place to live and work, but rather, precisely the opposite!

Griffintown is a unique neighbourhood with a rich history and culture that defines its identity. And this identity must be preserved in order for Griffintown to remain a viable neighbourhood, rather than a run-of-the-mill, undifferentiated residential redevelopment project. In the following section we discuss how this may be achieved by leveraging the current hands-off approach to redevelopment.

Hands-Off Development as an Identity

Taking advantage of the fact that the City prefers a hands-off approach to redevelopment, we recommend that the entire sector be zoned for mixed usage, without any restrictions. There should be no artificial barriers to new developments aside from the proposed maximum height restrictions

(minimum heights could be abolished). Any developer would have the ability to develop their property as they see fit, so long as the maximum heights are respected. Any owner would have the ability to repurpose their building as they see fit. In other words, redevelopment would be completely open and free from political and municipal meddling through special projects and other means.

The reasoning behind this recommendation is simple: it allows for maximum innovation, favours no single promoter or property owner, and ensures that Griffintown never feels predictable or “safe”. It echoes the history of the neighbourhood where factories, commerces, homes and even farms coexisted. It encourages the growth of a community out of a necessity to survive.

For instance, imagine the extreme example where an intrepid owner decides to convert their property into a hog farm. One would expect this to face community opposition, and the community would have take it upon themselves to find a resolution. Citizen participation in the Peel-Wellington, Bassins du Havre, Quartier Bonaventure and Secteur Griffintown projects has clearly demonstrated this capacity. In fact, since the time of the Peel-Wellington PPU, the defining characteristics of Griffintown are all products of its community: Cultural Corridor, New City Gas and Nuit Blanche, Horse Palace preservation, etc.

Historically, Griffintown culture has been defined by innovation, scandal and survival. This created a neighbourhood with a strong identity and community in the 19th century. 21st century Griffintown can rekindle this strong identity and community through development of this same culture. A Griffintown defined by Griffintowners is an authentic neighbourhood with a vibrant community.

Critique of the PPU with Respect to the CSRG Mission

This section discusses conflicts between the PPU and the CSRG's mission, presented in the first section of this brief.

Haymarket Square and Quartier Bonaventure

In order to promote East-West links with Quartier Bonaventure and Old Montreal, and in respect of the history of the neighbourhood, the proposed park bordered by William, Ann, Ottawa and Dalhousie streets should be relocated to the former Haymarket Square site bordered by St-Paul, de l'Inspecteur, William and Duke streets. Additional details may be found in the brief presented by the CSRG to the OCPM at the Quartier Bonaventure consultations.

Dalhousie Street

To respect the historically-significant street grid, Dalhousie Street must respect its original orientation between Ottawa and William Streets, and must not extend beyond William Street. Moreover, a proposed alternative to the existing bus corridor in Griffintown may be found in the brief presented by the CSRG to the OCPM at the Quartier Bonaventure consultations.

Conclusions

The Griffintown PPU addresses many of the OCPM recommendations from the Secteur Griffintown report. However, the City of Montreal, its politicians and its urban planners remain committed to hands-off market-force development, and a “business as usual” approach to special projects. As a result, the sector will continue its boom-bust cycle of banal monoculture condo development, toxic to the creation of a neighbourhood and community. Griffintown is defined by a culture of innovation, scandal and survival. Community and neighbourhood identity have historically flourished from this culture.

Recommendations

Given that the City of Montreal, its politicians and its urban planners have consistently shown their commitment to a hands-off approach to redevelopment, the Committee for the Sustainable Redevelopment of Griffintown recommends that this approach be leveraged to permit unrestricted, innovative redevelopment of the sector. Namely, the CSRG recommends all zoning restrictions to be lifted, with the exception of those governing maximum building heights. This will eliminate any barriers to organic redevelopment, restore Griffintown's unique culture of innovation, scandal and survival, and allow its growing community to reestablish the neighbourhood's identity and effectively manage its future.

The CSRG also recommends revisiting the planning of the Griffintown PPU in conjunction with that of the adjoining Quartier Bonaventure, namely with respect to the recreation of the Haymarket Square park, maintenance of the historic trace of Dalhousie Street and the establishment of a long term solution to the problem of a bus corridor in an urban residential sector.