

**Les Habitations Communautaires NDG
and
Les Habitations Sherbrooke Forest**

BRIEF FOR THE PUBLIC HEARINGS ON BENNY FARM

Les Habitations Communautaires NDG and Les Habitations Sherbrooke Forest are two affiliated community-housing organizations existing for over ten years. They have been instrumental in providing affordable housing to the west end of the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce neighbourhood. Les Habitations Sherbrooke Forest manages 525 rental housing units, including 455 units for the city's para-municipal agency, the Société d'habitation et de développement. The other 70 units were developed and are owned by its sister organization, Les Habitations Communautaires NDG.

Our organizations are members of the Housing Committee of the NDG Community Council and participated fully in its discussions. We therefore fully endorse the brief presented by that organization. We also endorse the environmental considerations submitted as an appendix to that brief.

We particularly draw the Commission's attention to the following points:

1) Institutional zoning: It would be a mistake to rush an institutional zoning change for a recreation centre when no specific project exists. It is important that the community have a say in the eventual design of such a project. Any zoning change for this purpose should therefore be put on hold.

2) The need for housing for moderate income families: There is a serious shortage of such housing in NDG. Three-bedroom and four-bedroom units are being priced out of reach by the speculative real estate boom, not only for low-income families but for working families. Projects that can deliver rental or home-ownership units on a non-profit basis are therefore important.

3) Permanent affordability: Any affordable home-ownership formula must ensure that the units stay affordable in the long term. There is little point giving a windfall to the first buyer and then allowing the speculative market to price the housing out of reach a few years later. We have seen such speculative booms in the mid-1970s, the early 1980s, the late 1980s and the past 3 years, resulting in a 300% increase in property values over a period of approximately 30 years on the small properties we have tracked. Several permanent affordability formulas are addressed in the NDG Community Council Housing Committee brief. We favour a formula that would cap the resale price based on a combination of the Consumer Price Index and the owner's investment in improvements. Sellers would benefit from this increase, plus their accumulated equity.

4) Environmental considerations: Any new construction should conform to the Model National Energy Code. We take the liberty of quoting the 12 points appended to the NDG Community Council Housing Committee brief.

“Many environmental considerations could be incorporated into the overall redevelopment as well as into individual projects without any significant modification to the proposed master plan. Though not in any way exhaustive, we would suggest that the following list of twelve environmental guidelines would represent a significant improvement to the project.

Improved energy efficiency for all buildings on the site including

- The development of alternative approaches to energy supply and distribution including community energy systems such as district cooling, heating and co-generation systems
- The adoption of appropriate minimal performance requirements for building envelope and building systems such as CBIP (Commercial Building Incentive Program of Natural Resources Canada), Novoclimat, Model National Energy Code etc.
- The specification of energy efficient heating and ventilation systems, lighting, appliances and equipment
- The use of passive design principles maximizing solar gain, natural ventilation and natural daylighting.

Energy substitution including

- The use of renewable energy sources that minimize the production of greenhouse gases such as geothermal and solar.
- The use of active solar design such as preheating of fresh air supply using perforated solar wall panels and heating of domestic hot water (such as the local energy supplier Heliotech that provides solar heated water at a cost that will not exceed the cost of electrically heated water).

Sustainable domestic, storm and waste water management including

- The reduction of water use through specification of water efficient plumbing fixtures and appliances as well as the design of drought-resistant landscaping and water efficient irrigation systems
- The reduction of dependence on storm sewer systems with maximum on-site retention of run-off, natural drainage and irrigation as well as the incorporation of green roof surfaces.

Material waste management including

- The establishment of waste management guidelines for demolition, renovation and new construction including the salvage of materials from buildings to be demolished for re-use in new construction and renovation
- The adoption of flexible design solutions that reduce material and resource demand as well as prolonging the life of buildings.

Green building products including

- The use of building products that have minimal impact on the environment (in terms of low embodied energy and certified environmental performance) and on

building occupants during their full life cycle - particularly low VOC (volatile organic compounds) content

- The use of building products that are resource efficient (renewable, salvaged recycled and low maintenance materials) and energy efficient (locally available and with minimal operational energy requirements)

These guidelines would represent an obligation on behalf of Canada Lands to ensure that the redevelopment is environmentally sound, as well as being socially equitable, affordable, economically feasible, architecturally coherent, integrated with the surrounding neighbourhood and providing an attractive landscape. Environmental guidelines could be included in the additional architectural guidelines set out by Canada Lands as well as being incorporated into various aspects of site development (infrastructure, site preparation, landscaping etc).

It is generally acknowledged that the most expensive response to environmental issues is to do nothing. The recently published study, The Costs and Financial Benefits of Green Building (A Report to California's Sustainable Building Task Force, October 2003) states that

While the environmental and human health benefits of green building have been widely recognized, this comprehensive report confirms that minimal increases in upfront construction costs of 0 - 2% to support green design will result in life cycle savings of 20% of total construction costs – more than ten times the initial investment.

The twelve guidelines we have suggested could be respected either without any additional cost or at a small additional cost that could either be paid by existing subsidy programmes or financed over five to ten years and repaid out of savings on energy or other operational costs. Quite apart from saving the planet, the implementation of these guidelines would result in considerable energy and water savings, better air quality, lower maintenance costs, better quality construction and greater comfort for the residents.”

5) HCNDG project: Finally, we should note that HCNDG has completed a business plan for renovation and construction of private non-profit units on the Benny Farm site, which we will be submitting to Canada Lands. Here is a brief summary of this plan:

“This Business Plan proposes that Les Habitations Communautaires purchase and develop three properties on the Benny Farm site:

- 24 existing units at the southwestern corner of Monkland Avenue and Cavendish Boulevard will be developed as homeownership properties;
- 16 new construction units on the east side of Cavendish Boulevard will be built as rental units with the right to buy in ten years; and
- 30 units of rental housing to be renovated on a contiguous property on the east side of Cavendish Boulevard .

Total development costs are: for the 24-unit building at Monkland and Cavendish - \$2,985,179 (3,767,292 including potential additional costs such as asbestos removal and enlarging of ground floor apartments); for the 30 unit existing property - \$3,337,662 (\$3,829,662 including certain potential costs such as asbestos removal); and for the contiguous 16 units on the east side of Cavendish - \$2,188,210.

To ensure affordability the municipal renovation subsidy program is used for the two existing properties and the affordable rental housing subsidies are used for the new units.

The Eco-village components of the business plan are contingent on subsidies from a variety of sources. Les Habitations Communautaires NDG will ensure that the housing developments respect environmental principles. It will set standards for energy efficiency, geothermal heating, water, waste management, air quality and materials (waste and non-toxic). It intends to make partnerships to ensure sustainable development and attract equity grant investments with Gaz Métropolitain, RISQ, the Fond d'action québécois pour le développement durable and the CDEC Côte-des-Neiges and Notre Dame-de-Grâce.

Les Habitations Communautaires NDG and Les Habitations Sherbrooke Forest will create a fund of \$432,000, of which \$240,000 is generated from the sale of the Cavendish-Monkland homes by charging a premium of \$10,000 per unit, and \$192,000 is the developer's grant from the City of Montreal for the 16 units of new affordable housing. \$300,000 of the fund will be used as an equity contribution to make the rents more affordable in the 16 unit new construction project. \$132,000 will be used as a liquidity reserve so that Les Habitations Communautaires NDG can exercise options to purchase up to five of the homeownership units simultaneously in order to protect the resale conditions.

The rents are based on the subsidy requirements for renovations and affordable rental housing. These rents were tested against studies produced by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and a special survey of adjacent rental properties conducted by Les Habitations Sherbrooke Forest.”