

2180 **M. ROBERT LIBMAN :**

Plaisir, merci.

2185 **LE PRÉSIDENT :**

Alors, la commission va prendre une pause et on revient à 15 h 5.

PAUSE ET REPRISE

2190 **LE PRÉSIDENT :**

La commission va reprendre ses activités en appelant madame Susan Fitch. Bonjour, Madame.

2195 **Mme SUSAN FITCH :**

Good afternoon.

2200 **LE PRÉSIDENT :**

Good afternoon, Madame.

Mme SUSAN FITCH :

2205 My name is Susan Fitch and I am a member of the Project Genesis housing rights an anti-poverty committees and I serve as Chair of social and environmental concerns at the Unitarian Church of Montréal.

2210 I would like to tell you why I believe the City of Montréal has a moral and ethical responsibility to take the leadership to ensure that 2 500 social housing units are built at Blue Bonnets.

2215 First of all, one of the main obstacle often cited to the construction of social housing is a lack of availability of land in a large highly developed cities such as ours. But the City of Montréal already owns Blue Bonnets.

2220 Our city, therefore now has a huge opportunity, a unique opportunity. So what is the most important thing for us to do with this land? The most important thing? We have a big problem right here in our borough.

Côte-des-Neiges-NDG is the poorest borough in the City of Montréal. It has the highest number of residents living in serious live crippling poverty. Living far below the poverty line. And Blue Bonnets is located in Côte-des-Neiges-NDG.

2225 Blue Bonnets is also surrounded by the wealthier communities of Hampstead, Côte-Saint-Luc and the town of Mount-Royal.

2230 My great concern is that Blue Bonnets will merely be considered a fresh plot of available land to be appropriated by the developers, in order to build condos for many of the prosperous residents of these wealthy communities, who now wish to downsize.

2235 There are those who did not wish to have social housing built in their neighbourhood because they fear it will bring crime or lower the value of their property. They say: « not in my backyard ».

Well, we the residents of Côte-des-Neiges, say that Blue Bonnets is in our backyard. If we do not build enough social housing there, for the poorest of our poor, then where are we going to build it?

2240 Secondly, most of the immigrants who come to Canada come to Québec. And most of the immigrants who come to Québec, come to Montréal and to Côte-des-Neiges. Our borough is home to more immigrants and more visible minorities than anywhere else in Montréal.

2245 Many come here in poverty hoping to start a new life and contribute to their new society. But after they get here, they face paying far more than half their income on rent, for what is often going to be older, badly maintained, inadequately heated, mold or vermin infested housing.

2250 And when these new residents apply for descent social housing, they are put on a waiting list of more than 2 000 in need ahead of them. They can wait for up to five years for descent affordable housing.

How can we expect our poorest residents to succeed? To pull themselves up and improve their lives while living under such conditions?

2255 This is a serious social justice and public health issue. Montréal's international reputation is now at stake as we decide how much social housing we want to build at Blue Bonnets.

Other countries have found ways to treat their vulnerable citizens much better when it comes to housing.

2260 Is this current desperate situation the picture of Montréal that we want to send out to the world?

2265 Thirdly, in Côte-des-Neiges, we have an increasing problem with homelessness. Every day now in Montréal we our homeless spending their days on our city streets in all weathers. Many even sleeping outside.

We know it is possible to transform the lives of the homeless if we can offer them decent housing. These are not throw away people. With the rest of our poor, there are our mentally ill

2270 who deserve our support, our respect, they are pensioners, our working poor, our fulltime care givers, our fulltime students, our volunteer workers.

2275 If my landlord decides to renovate my apartment and make my rent unaffordable, I can become one of those homeless people tomorrow. So can a large percentage of the residents of this city.

2280 Fourthly, we should not forget that housing, decent housing, is a basic human right as stated in the United Nation's charter on human rights. I often think of an elderly friend who died while on the waiting list for social housing. He was forced to move out of his apartment when his landlord decided to do major renovations, and never found another decent place to live.

2285 Is this how we want to treat our elders living in poverty? Social housing changes people's lives. Can you imagine children living in a crowded mold infested or bed bug infested apartment trying to concentrate to do their homework or trying to be comfortable enough to get a decent night sleep?

2285 Can you imagine the daily stress and anxiety experienced by the parents of these children?

2290 When Blue Bonnets, I remember when Blue Bonnets was a thriving successful race track and horse racing then was one of the most popular sports in the world. And people flocked to the track bringing their dreams with them for a better future. They placed their bets hoping for that one lucky chance, that opportunity to change their lives.

2295 So, I am hoping now that in this consultation process we will have the foresightedness and in the situation, the courage required to act, to give thousands of people the chance to change their lives and become healthy, fulfilled, fully engaged contributing members of our society.

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By allowing the current situation of inadequate housing to continue, we are creating social isolation and we are setting people up for failure.

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Lastly, what is my dream for Blue Bonnets? It is a construction of enough new social housing units to house all the poorest residents of Côte-des-Neiges. 2 500 units located in an integrated community where the poor are no longer forced to live in isolation.

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I dream of Blue Bonnets becoming a green environmentally conscious sustainable community, with community centers serving residents of all ages, with programs to meet their needs and facilitate their life goals.

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If we think outside the box at Blue Bonnets, we can do the right thing.

For a large portion of my adult life, concerns citizens had been asking for, demonstrating for, reasoning for and begging for the construction of an adequate number of social housing units at Blue Bonnets.

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All we are asking for is to meet the genuine urgent needs of the residents of Côte-des-Neiges. But this goal has, for decades, been allusive.

Again, I repeat; it is a conventional wisdom, it is a taught that regular people do not want to have social housing built nearby. They say: « not in my backyard ».

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Well, as residents of Côte-des-Neiges, we can say: « Blue Bonnets is in our backyard ». If we do not build enough social housing at Blue Bonnets, 2 500 units, then where are we going to build it?

And this concludes my presentation.

LE PRÉSIDENT :

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Thank you very much, Madame.

Mme SUSAN FITCH :

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Thank you.

LA COMMISSAIRE :

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We understand very well the desire of people to be living under good conditions. Could you explain to us how, in your knowledge and in your experience in Côte-des-Neiges, how these network of people are supporting each other and how it would help people connecting with each other and build this sense of belonging to that new site if they were to move there?

Mme SUSAN FITCH :

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Well, I must say the first thought that comes to mind is at the meetings I have attended at many different groups in Côte-des-Neiges, at the Woman Center, at the two Côte-des-Neiges libraries, at Project Genesis, the Housing rights committee and the poverty committee, and our board and at the CDC organisation and I have covered many groups in Côte-des-Neiges for CKAT Radio and... it would be such a... the first thought that comes to mind is that it would be such an incredible slap in the face not to be included. Because Côte-des-Neiges is very, it's a very unique place, it's a place where we all get along, where we do already support each other at all these different organisations.

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I have a photo going back years ago of myself with friends at Côte-des-Neiges, and I am almost the only white face in the picture and we are all getting along and there is not thought that we don't. And so, we just want to bring this cohesion that we already have to Blue Bonnets and the problem is that many of us are suffering so greatly in poverty, it's just as simple as that. Even

2360 myself, I am one of the people who is much better off, but I have lived on incredible stress living
in poverty. It has tampered my energy level and everything I do and I am one of the lucky ones, I
have accomplished certain things in my life. But there are many, there are so many untapped
resources. I can tell you about a friend who is wonderful at developing photographs and I could
go on and on. Another lady is a wonderful translator. She just needs this lift up just enough to be
able to start working, to be able to have some peace, to have just that much more physical
2365 support, should I say, in this way.

So, I mean, to me, I don't know. I understand all this issues. I think quite well that this has
to be, social housing has to be supported by the other more successful forms of housing, but
honestly, why not do this, why not build what we need here. For the reasons I stated, I think it is in
2370 the end a more unethical responsibility that over rise other considerations. I hope I have
answered.

LA COMMISSION :

2375 Yes, you did. Thank you.

LE COMMISSAIRE :

2380 Yes I have a question. We have had a few presentation from Group Genesis, we have
another one, another group coming on later this afternoon. And you always refer to this 2 500
objective. What would be the distribution of this 2 500 housings. Would it be, in terms of families
and elderly people. How would you distribute that? In terms of the need in Côte-des-Neiges
sector?

2385 **Mme SUSAN FITCH :**

Well, there are others more, perhaps better able to answer that question, but from my
own experience, the people I know, it's a, a very large proportion would be elderly people, but a

2390 very significant number of families... I would say perhaps a third of people, no I would say more
like half the people would be in the 0 to 49 range and about half above that. And ideally, you
know in housing, many of us who are older individuals, we dislike the trend to warehouse, to
segregate by age. The more, the ages can be spread together in a community and in the housing
units, the better. You know, people can argue that older people like quiet, but I know in my
Adventist Church people love the most when everybody, all the ages are together and annoying
2395 each other in good ways. Mixing up and learning from each other.

And that is what we want to do. We want Blue Bonnets to be a place where we take all
our good fellowship from our desperately poor neighbourhoods where the housing is really falling
apart and there is water leaking through the ceiling and bring it here. And think of what we could
2400 do? You know, the good place that, we could send out a message to the world and other cities
would imitate what we are doing. And if I can do anything, what so ever, I mean, I can bring you a
hundred people tomorrow who would want to help you to make this happen in a good way.

And our group has its own forum, it's had its own architect, people can answer your
2405 questions much better than I. But I hope I gave you some sense from my vision, from my place of
looking.

LE COMMISSAIRE :

2410 Thank you.

LE PRÉSIDENT :

2415 Thank you very much, madame. La commission appelle, je ne sais pas si on l'appelle
comme ça, le Centre éducatif. En tout cas, les gens qui construisent des écoles. Alors, seront
présents monsieur Robert Gendron, monsieur David Genesse et madame Joëlle Naud. Excusez
l'appellation, mais on n'a pas corrigé.