

BRIEF PRESENTED TO THE *OFFICE DE CONSULTATION PUBLIQUE DE MONTREAL*

IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

ON THE

*“ECOQUARTIER” LACHINE EST*

BY

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I live in LaSalle, near the river and the LaSalle train station, 1.8 kilometers by road from the proposed Lachine East development, and closer as the crow flies. I expect to be greatly affected by this development if it goes ahead, from the point of view of my ability to get around to points near and far, and my ability to make use of and enjoy my neighbourhood. I expect the same to be true for most others in western LaSalle.

I am stunned that this massive development is being considered for this enclaved location, both for what I think it will do to Lachine, and for the fact that little consideration seems to have been given to how it will fit in with its neighbours in the region.

I propose to first update some still relevant material from my brief presented before the 2019 OCPM commission on the future of Lachine East, specifically about how this project and one in LaSalle relate to each other with regards to use of the transport infrastructure and some comments about their status as Transit Oriented Developments (TODs) and will then continue with other issues with Lachine East.

Since 2011, several large and dense developments have been proposed by the LaSalle borough for the low height/low density area around the LaSalle train station, which they named “Le Quartier de la gare LaSalle” (QDLGL). The areas the borough wishes to develop are two or three hundred meters from my home, i.e., only about two kilometers from the Lachine East development. Citizens’ petitions against the plan led to the withdrawal of the initial zoning change for the whole sector sought by the LaSalle borough, in November 2011; a first 750-unit “Wanklyn Project” was withdrawn by the borough in July 2012 after many more citizens signed a register than were needed to trigger a referendum; and a second 786-unit “Wanklyn’s Block” project was withdrawn by the borough in July 2016 following a recommendation to that effect by the *Office de consultation publique de Montréal*, which found, among other things, that there was not enough public transit to justify the 786 units proposed. The OCPM’s report on *Le Projet de l’îlot Wanklyn* ([http://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/ocpm.qc.ca/files/pdf/P78/rapport-ilot-wanklyn\\_1.pdf](http://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/ocpm.qc.ca/files/pdf/P78/rapport-ilot-wanklyn_1.pdf)) contains a great deal of information that is also relevant to the Lachine East sector. I also refer you to my brief submitted to the OCPM in the context of that consultation for

details of the reasons for citizens' involvement and protest of these large developments in this particular location, the incredible difficulties with public transit in the area (see p.1 of that brief for a sampling as well as p.5 on) which basically force everyone to drive, and other information much of which directly applies to the Lachine East area (<http://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/ocpm.qc.ca/files/pdf/P78/8a9.pdf>).

LaSalle is still working to develop this area. The borough's plans for the QDLGL had gradually increased to 2124 units by 2015 (see p. 113 of <http://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/ocpm.qc.ca/files/pdf/P78/4e1.pdf> )My best estimate is now for 2300 units with the addition of the Seagram's and Diageo sites mentioned by the previous mayor at the April 2019 LaSalle borough council meeting, although it does seem that every project proposed now is getting bigger, taller and denser, just like Lachine East. A few years ago the 174-unit Highlands project was built near the LaSalle train station with the citizens' approval. Two other projects have been approved by the borough for construction on Clément street near the entrance to Hwy 20/138, in conditions that some citizens found inadequate. The three projects total about 564 units so far for the QDLGL. The sector has recently been renamed LaSalle-Ouest (LaSalle-O) by the borough and a public consultation process organized by the borough is currently taking place, we're told to consult the citizens on what they would like to see in the area (as suggested by the OCPM in its 2016 report), but, again, some citizens have concerns about how the consultation is unfolding.

Apart from Lachine East and the QDLGL development zones being practically on top of each other, they are both served by the same Candiac commuter train line with very limited departures and number of passenger spaces and the two stations are only a couple of kilometers apart on the rail track. It should be noted that the future developments also largely share the same points of access to the road network. Both are located within a few hundred meters of the congested areas at the Airlie, Clément and Dollard entrances and exits to the Mercier Bridge and highways 20 and 138 in the St.Pierre interchange, in a sector that is also filled with natural and man-made barriers to mobility such as the St. Lawrence River, the Lachine Canal, the highways just named, the entrance ramp to the Mercier Bridge, the Canadian Pacific train tracks, offshoots of the same to serve local industry etc.. The Jenkins site, for example is located about 600 meters from the St.Pierre Street entrance to Highway 20 West. This is one of the entrances that, pre-pandemic, I used to take every day as a commuter coming from the Quartier de la gare LaSalle and heading downtown. It is likely to be used by all the commuters from the Lachine East site dissatisfied with the service on the train line, as well as routinely by people from the western part of LaSalle (There are only two ways to access Highway 20 from LaSalle, which is cut off from the highway by the Lachine Canal: either by the Airlie/Clement /St.Pierre Boulevard entrances at the St.Pierre Interchange, or at the Angrignon interchange several kilometers to the east). This area is already quite congested, and will be much more so with thousands of additional commuters which these developments will produce, in spite of their stated intention to do otherwise.

It is my opinion that because of the proximity of the two future developments, their shared geography and common points of access to the transport infrastructure their impact on residents needs to be considered together and that is what I shall do in the next section.

Looking now at the number of residential units being considered for the two developments, plans for Lachine East had started at 3800 units, oscillated between 4,000 and 5,000 units prior to the 2019 consultation, and have now, incredibly, risen to 7,400 residential units. Adding the Lachine East and the Quartier de la Gare LaSalle projected units gives a total of about 9,700 units in this area, and I am not even including the several hundred units slated to be built at the mother house of the Soeurs de Ste. Anne convent nearby or the *Transit Oriented Development* (TOD) planned for the Montreal West train station.

Given that the occupancy rate in both Lachine and LaSalle is about 2.2 persons per housing unit, we can potentially expect an influx of about 21,340 people and thousands of cars into this crucial and already congested area.

According to the *Communauté Métropolitaine de Montréal's Plan Métropolitain d'aménagement et de développement (PMAD)*, the greater Montreal's land use and development plan, these two developments are supposed to be Transit Oriented Developments (TODs) and are slated to have an obligatory minimum average density of 80 units per hectare. At the questions and answers session, the city urbanist confirmed that the average density of the Lachine East development would be no less than 220 units per hectare, way, way too much for this enclaved area.

The PMAD defines a TOD as a “medium to high density development situated at a walking distance from a major point of access to the public transit system, offering housing, job opportunities and commercial activity, designed for the pedestrian but not excluding the automobile” (my translation). The idea is that people will have opportunities to reside, work and shop in their neighbourhoods, reducing the need to travel, and that when they do need to travel they will use public transit, rather than their cars, thus reducing road congestion and greenhouse gas emissions. This then theoretically justifies higher densities than normal.

In their report on the second Wanklyn project, the OCPM's commissioners found that the principal axis of transport around which the entire TOD neighbourhood was to gravitate was “non-existent at the time of writing”, the date of its future implantation “more than uncertain”, and concluded that the LaSalle station on the Candiac line “does not therefore constitute a real mass transit alternative” (p.35).

It seems to me that the transit should be in place before the high-density neighbourhood is built since it is the whole justification for the higher than normal density and is what makes living in a high-density neighbourhood possible.

In the case of these two developments, the LaSalle and du Canal train stations on the Candiac train line are the justification for the TOD designation, as can be seen in Annex B (p.8) of the CMM's Bylaw No. 2018.73 ([https://cmm.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2018-73\\_R\\_modifiant\\_PMAD.pdf](https://cmm.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2018-73_R_modifiant_PMAD.pdf)). The area around the next station on the line, Montreal West, is also designated as a TOD.

However, I do not believe that the du Canal and LaSalle train stations are “a major point of access to the public transit system” as required in the TOD definition above. The case has already been made for the LaSalle station in the OCPM's Wanklyn's Block report cited above.

The train service at the du Canal station in Lachine is the same limited one as at the LaSalle station, since both are on the Candiatic train line: seven departures towards downtown from the du Canal station between 6:18 and 9:14 a.m., one about every half hour, and seven returns from downtown leaving Lucien L'Allier station between 3:35 and 6:20 p.m., also about one every half hour, and only two other departures daily towards downtown, at 10:54 a.m. and 1:44 p.m. (departure times all from the du Canal station) and two returns from downtown at 9:35 a.m. and 12:20 p.m. – much more limited than on the other commuter train lines in the Montreal area. There is no service in the evenings, on weekends, or on holidays. This train basically serves people going to work downtown from 9 to 5 weekdays. It offers nothing for people working other schedules, other places such as the West Island, the airport, boroughs and towns north of the Candiatic line, those going to medical appointments outside of rush hour or wanting to go downtown for entertainment.

Pre-pandemic, the rush hour trains already arrived fairly full from the south shore – it was commonly standing room only by the time the train reached the LaSalle station -- so how could one cram in thousands more people? The du Canal station is rudimentary; one must climb and descend 100 wooden steps to access the train platform from the parking lot, including on the days it is icy or snowing; it is not universally accessible; and is unsuitable for children. I cannot even imagine a young parent trying to haul a couple of toddlers up those steps on an icy day, and yet, the city is forever claiming that these developments will attract young families. And, most of all, the station is **temporary**, scheduled to exist for only another five years, since it was built for the purpose of alleviating traffic during the reconstruction of the Turcot Interchange.

There has never been any increase in the service on that line since a slight improvement in 2011, at the start of the continuing construction on the Mercier Bridge. Trains were not added even on the weekends when the Turcot interchange was being demolished. During the discussions and consultations about the first Wanklyn project we were told that the Canadian Pacific does not wish to add commuter trains on the Candiatic train line because commercial traffic is much more profitable for them. The national railroads are federally regulated, which means that Canadian Pacific, which owns the Candiatic line track, is not obliged to even talk to the city or the province. So I would like to nip in the bud the various hopeful comments made during the information and question and answer sessions to the effect that maybe CP would increase the number of trains. It's not going to happen and it is wrong to pretend otherwise, unless a person has proof of such an offer.

The OCPM commissioners concluded in their report on the Wanklyn's Block Project that it was not a TOD and that there was neither enough public transit nor local mix of uses offered to justify the 786 units of the Wanklyn project. They recommended that the borough not adopt the bylaw changes making the project possible and the borough subsequently withdrew the project.

Incredibly, with a total of 9,700 units in the area we are now talking about allowing the construction of over twelve times as many units as were rejected for the second Wanklyn Project as too many without any change to the transit facilities except the addition of a **temporary** station. In any case, for adequate transport it is not enough to have a train station,

even a permanent one – one must also have enough trains transporting people, which clearly is not the case here.

With respect to a possible tram line or similar along Victoria, I'll believe it when I see it (we all know how often the same projects are announced and not built), and, as explained above, a TOD should have the transit in place before the building starts.

I notice that the CIMA+ study on traffic mobility in the area and impact of the projected development on congestion is strictly limited to the Lachine East area. But this is actually even a regional issue: these developments will affect not only people within and close by the development, but those in Lachine and LaSalle more broadly, as well as people coming to or transiting through the area by Highways 20 and 138 and the Mercier Bridge from the West Island, the south shore, downtown, the airport and so on. It seems to me that there should be a study of the impact on the whole region.

The CIMA+ 2017 traffic study shows that the Lachine East area was already congested five years ago, that there are several bus lines, but the buses are often stuck in traffic, making them an inefficient way to get around, and the study offers few solutions aside from tinkering a little with traffic lights and intersections. It basically admits that not much can be done to significantly improve traffic flow. Therefore, I found the suggestions in the text that maybe the reconstruction of the St. Pierre interchange might solve some of the mobility problems unwarranted unless the author has some proof of such a possibility.

I shall also mention that sometimes in the summer of 2019 my husband and I were unable to get out of our house by car because of traffic, to the point that I have become concerned about ambulances and firetrucks being able to reach the area in an emergency. To go to points west we must either go by Highway 20 west or, when that is blocked, by du Musée avenue and the waterfront on Saint-Joseph Boulevard, and sometimes those were already blocked so that my husband missed two sporting competitions and an awards dinner, giving up and returning home after advancing one block in twenty minutes, the time it usually takes us to get to Baie d'Urfé where these events take place. It is unimaginable to think of several thousand cars pouring into this area on a regular basis. After all, we can't go into the river!

It is urgent that we recognize that this project is completely unrealistic at these densities. It is almost as if those who wrote the PMAD assumed that every commuter rail station was automatically a major point of access to the public transit network, and called it appropriate for a TOD, without looking at the actual situation on the ground in terms of public transit available or barriers to mobility. In my opinion, the TOD designations for these two developments are a mistake that needs to be urgently corrected. Another similar case was the Musto project in Ahuntsic-Cartierville, the subject of another OCPM consultation which likewise found that it just wasn't a major entrance to the public transit network because of limited service on the line.

It is ironic that both TODs and "eco-neighbourhoods" are defined firstly as being based on public transit and active transport and yet that is precisely what is not present in these two projects. The Lachine East "eco-neighbourhood" in truth does not have the public transit and active transit is just not a realistic way for people to get around year-round, with children, with a sofa, through snow (although it works quite well on ice), etc. . So, they will inevitable buy cars and

there will be battles over parking in the streets outside of the so-called “eco-neighbourhood”, making life miserable for existing residents. Canada is not Europe in the winter.

I wonder how many people can conceptualize just how big a development 9,700 units would represent. I notice that the 174 condos authorized for the Jenkins site were to be housed in three ten-story towers, averaging 58 units per tower. Were 9,700 units to be built on the exact same model as what was projected for the Jenkins site, we would be looking at 167 ten-story towers in this area of LaSalle and Lachine – and this at the edge of the national park of the historic Lachine Canal. I notice that the only drawing of a possible version of the entire Lachine East development (p.31 of the PPU) is an aerial view, which makes the buildings look smaller and less imposing than when one is walking among them.

As alarming as this unrealistic density is for road congestion, parking problems and the security of residents, one can also legitimately wonder about the effects of such urbanization and densification on the very nature of the neighbourhood. My husband and I and other people who live in LaSalle (at least according to a number of the briefs and presentations regarding the second Wanklyn project presented to the OCPM) and likely many in Lachine did not move there to live cheek-by-jowl with downtown-style skyscrapers, to be in their shadow, be subject to the winds that tend to swirl around them (and will all the more so with our warming climate), to deal with the depersonalization commonly resulting from such constructions or to have them be our skyline while their denizens enjoy panoramic views of the river, the canal and downtown resulting from towers being allowed in the midst of a low-height neighbourhood (as touted in a Quartier de la gare LaSalle maps) and the promoter enjoys the profits that come from building towers where one can guarantee not only that there will be views but that there will not be future development obstructing them because of the low height of what has already been built. What will be the effects on *Vieux Lachine*, our parks, marina (oops! already gone!), fishing areas, cycling paths, flora and fauna when they are invaded by thousands of people who risk destroying the very reasons for which they bought property in the area. It seems to me that the foot traffic alone could be enough to destroy the vegetation in the parks.

I am particularly concerned about the brown snake, one variant of which exists only in the greater Montreal area ([https://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/ocpm.qc.ca/files/pdf/P%20101/7.29\\_societe\\_dhistoire\\_naturelle\\_de\\_la\\_vallee\\_du\\_saint-laurent.pdf](https://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/ocpm.qc.ca/files/pdf/P%20101/7.29_societe_dhistoire_naturelle_de_la_vallee_du_saint-laurent.pdf)) When I read this EcoMuseum document about the snake which needs continuous wild pathways to survive, and see that the development means to interrupt the northern shore of the canal park in several spots in order to allow residents to access the canal and I see that the little brown snake has lost 21% of its habitat in a period of ten years due mostly to real estate development, I’m concerned that it will not survive long.

In publicity handed out at a 2016 open house, the promoter of the VillaNova development sings the praises of *Vieux Lachine*, and the other features I have just mentioned and includes pictures of the same, and yet this is precisely what is in danger of disappearing with the influx of the thousands of new residents.

The fifteen story towers are hardly “human scale” as the text of the PPU claims, just the contrary. And what to say of the peculiar idea of pushing the tallest towers to the outside edges of the development in order to keep the middle of the development most “human scaled” while

pushing the least human scaled and ugliest towers on the unsuspecting neighbours of the development? Very unneighbourly!

I also don't see what is "ecological" about mostly asphalted spaces with little trees marching in straight lines accompanied by manicured squares of lawn. This is exactly the sort of environment that the little brown snake cannot survive. We used to see rabbits, foxes, etc. along the Lachine canal path, but no more...I would like to see some wild nature.

There is so much more that could be said about this development, but I'll have to stop here for the moment.

Thank you for your invaluable work!

Sonja Susnjar