

A contribution to the City of Montreal's consultation on families

Submitted to: Office de consultation publique de Montreal

Submitted by: The Family Caucus

Introducing The Family Caucus

The Family Caucus is a spontaneously created group of parents and parents-to-be living on the Plateau Mont Royal. We come from a range of disciplines and backgrounds and share a commitment to exploring and sharing good ideas about how to make the City of Montreal a better place for families of all shapes and sizes.

Whether we are raising infants or adolescents, we envision the City to be a place where all families can become healthier, safer, wiser and happier year after year. We wish to see initiatives that will make Montreal the best possible place to work, play, study and thrive, not for the short term but for the rest of our lives.

Our Process:

We convened a meeting in the living room of one of the members. After a quick review of the mandate given by the City to the *Office de consultation publique*, we brainstormed what we would like to see done to improve the City for families.

Our urban context is The Plateau, but we feel many of our comments can apply equally well to other boroughs and areas in the centre and near-centre of the City.

We hired a babysitter from the Montreal Childcare Collective, a network of Montreal volunteers initiated by QPIRG Concordia that provides free or very cheap daycare services to social justice oriented community groups so that residents can participate in community events, meetings and consultations. Each of us contributed 2\$, so the babysitter was paid a modest sum for her efforts. This freed up clear uninterrupted time to enable us to do our thinking and work.

(Obviously, if the City wants parents to participate, free or very affordable daycare should be provided at **ALL** city consultations, so that parents can participate meaningfully in these important debates, without sacrificing the quality of the experience for other citizens.)

The ideas brainstormed were typed up and circulated among the participants and other friends who could not come that night, and, after four major revisions, a final version was approved.

This document is submitted in the hope that our observations and suggestions can be seriously considered by the *Office de consultation publique*.

Thank you for your time.

HOUSING

Simplify access to existing social and community housing:

The City should make the process of finding social and community housing clearer and simpler for families.

For example, the City could organise and centralize one list of all the available permanently affordable, non-profit housing providers, so that families can easily find the apartments that they can afford to live in. Our city has an astonishing array of non-profit housing providers, including the units owned and managed by the SHDM and its partner non-profits, the HLMs, housing cooperatives, and other non-profit housing units, not to mention all the special needs apartments. A website with information on all these options should be built and updated, to enable residents to quickly locate and apply to be on these waiting lists.

Alternatively, the City could work towards making a single centralized waiting list, as is slowly being done for daycares (CPE) with the Guichet Unique: (www.enfancefamille.org).

Better rent controls:

If the City is serious about attracting and keeping families in the City core, it should lobby Quebec to further strengthen rent controls to maintain inner city affordability, which is quickly eroding. Given that more than 65% of City residents rent, the highest ratio by far in the major cities of Canada, Montreal must make this the cornerstone of its family policy. Families typically have higher costs and lower revenues, and rent increases can make inner city living ever more difficult.

Permanently affordable homeownership:

Many families with school age children are leaving the central areas for the opportunities to buy in the suburbs. If the City is serious about keeping these families in the City centre, then it must maintain a large stock of good quality, permanently affordable homeownership units, comparable in price per square foot to those available in the suburbs, to enable families who wish to, to invest in their own homes.

The SHDM's initiative, *Accès-condo* is an interesting example, but ultimately, this model does not address the growing cost of inner city homeownership.

One of the oldest and best examples of permanently affordable homeownership in North America is found in Burlington, not one hour from Montreal, and this model should be seriously studied by Montreal's city planners and housing experts, as well as the Groupes de ressources techniques, responsible for developing non-profit housing in Montreal (GRTs).

LOCAL SERVICES

Daycares with flexible hours that reflect our real needs:

We need daycares that reflect our *real working lives*.

Many Montreal families do not work 9-5. The number of contract workers and flex-time workers has skyrocketed in the last decade. This is particularly true on the Plateau, but is a Canada-wide phenomenon. We should have publicly funded daycares that reflect this pattern of life.

Montreal should take a lead in explaining this reality to the Governments of Quebec and Canada and in making it happen on the ground.

This could be done by funding a new network of halte-garderies that fit our working lives, or adding some flexibility to the existing daycare network (CPE).

Local and Organic Mini-Markets:

Studies have shown that the food value of industrially produced fruits and vegetables is significantly reduced (Pawlick, 2006). Families, especially with young and very young children, are increasingly concerned about pesticides and genetically modified foods. Our City should recognize this concern, by actively multiplying the food choices in the inner city.

The City should work in concert with Equiterre and local farmers in the 100 km perimeter around the island to supply the inner city with local and certified organic fruits and vegetables, building on the community supported agriculture model. In partnership with many local coffee shops and locally owned shops, farmers should be selling local produce in a multiplicity of locations in the inner city (for example, the Coop la Maison Verte on Sherbrooke Street West sponsors a local farmer who sells produce on certain days, in addition to a normal Community Supported Agriculture farmer).

The current city markets, such as Atwater and Jean Talon, are too far away to make them a practical choice for many inner city residents. **Local grocery stores do not identify or properly market local produce** and certified organic produce needs to be more accessible.

More ways and means to allow parents to work, play and shop in the City:

Effectively, we need to multiply the public, private and non-profit response to parents needs for different kinds of quality temporary childcare. Shopping malls and big-box stores have found ways to accommodate parents by providing different kinds of supports (play areas for kids, halte-garderies, etc).

The City should take a leadership role in encouraging the private and non-profit sectors to provide responses to this need. Notable examples include the Café Touski on Ontario East, the Maman-Bébé et Café on Sherbrooke Street West and Les Ateliers Populaires, to name but three.

Also, the private sector should be strongly encouraged to provide comfortable areas for parents to feed their children and change their diapers, and private spaces for mothers to nurse their children.

TRANSPORTATION

The City must improve access to buses and particularly the Metro system for parents with strollers.

This effort would also substantially benefit aging empty-nesters whose kids have left home: population projections suggest that one in four Montreal residents will be over the age of 65, in the next 10-15 years.

CIRCULATION

Speed limits:

The City police should do a better job enforcing the existing speed limits by actually giving out tickets to speeders, and enforcing penalties for cars that do not stop at crosswalks, especially next to parks.

The City should immediately introduce 30kph limits on sleepy residential streets (roughly 70% of streets) and seriously consider reducing the speed on all but the most essential transit routes inside the City.

While many drivers will consider exceeding this speed limit, they will 'speed' at 50kmh, rather than at 70kpm. Many others will respect the law, making our streets safer.

Pollution controls:

The city should introduce zero emission vehicles into its bus and working vehicle fleet at the earliest possible opportunity.

The idling bylaw:

The idling bylaw is an excellent initiative.

However, the City should launch a proper education program for this bylaw, it should be more rigorously enforced.

This bylaw should also be enforced for all public vehicles, such as police cars and fire engines, as well as private trucks, taxis and indeed all working vehicles found in the City.

Most specifically, the City's own heavy vehicles should also be required to abide by this bylaw, especially during the next few years when the City will be undertaking a massive renovation to its public infrastructure. The sound pollution and engine emissions make these working areas **EXTREMELY** disagreeable for families and all residents.

Citizen and Community Group participation to discourage bad behaviours and encourage good ones:

Citizens and families can become part of the solution in City efforts to make the air cleaner for its downtown residents. For example, they can become part of an awareness campaign that would encourage the purchase of a smaller car over that of an SUV as well as helping to bring awareness to the very serious issue of idling.

More effective ways to slow the traffic:

Silent policemen (speed bumps) are not the most effective way to slow cars, especially with the proliferation of SUVs and other oversized vehicles that are designed to take bumps at high speeds. European cities have found many innovative ways to slow traffic (such as abutments or street parking patterns that force cars to zigzag, automated camera speed tracking, violently coloured city pavement, etc). One example of an innovative approach is Dutch traffic designer Hans Monderman's idea of "shared space".

The City has shown remarkably little interest in slowing traffic, and this makes families afraid for their children.

Special and vigorous attention should be paid to high speed vehicles around parks and schools where children are present. Indeed, drivers should be told by a variety of measures to be careful all the time, because kids could be playing anywhere.

MORE COMMUNITY EVENTS, BOTH SPONTANEOUS AND ORGANISED**Close the streets more often for citizen organised events:**

Citizen groups can apply to the City for a permit to close their street for a special event during the summer, such as a block party (example of Waverly). This practice should be officially encouraged by the City, by promoting street parties, publishing a recipe book of good ideas for citizen's groups, and even providing a modest subsidy (\$500-\$1000 per event). Some City staff time could be devoted to supporting citizen initiatives of this nature.

Such an approach would have several benefits:

- pedestrian appropriation of the streets (reduced traffic),
- getting to know neighbours (improved sense of urban security),
- breaking social isolation (especially for older and fragile resident populations).

Rotating street closures during the summer months:

The City should initiate a pilot project to test the following idea, which, if successful, could be systematically applied across the City. The details can be worked out, but the core idea is as follows:

Take any group of three quiet residential streets on the Plateau, a city block wide. On a rotating basis, one of the three streets is closed to car traffic, the second one is narrowed to allow for additional sideways street parking, and the third street is left as normal. In year two, the second street is closed, the third is narrowed for additional street parking and the last street is left normal, and so on. Of course, emergency vehicles would always have access.

This system would have several benefits:

- Families and kids would get uncluttered access to a vast piece of public space, on a rotating basis, for random street activities, such as street hockey, volleyball, tag, etc.
- Street closures reduce traffic and would be part of the ongoing effort to restore a balance between the pedestrian and the car on city streets
- Citizens would get used to sideways parking, a habit that can have positive repercussions on how we use our city streets.

Note : Many European cities have installed ‘smart bars’ for temporarily closing streets to traffic and this kind of measure should be systematically introduced in the City, as streets are renovated during this next wave of infrastructure work.

City—Community Group co-organised festivals:

There should be two major festivals in the large parks organised every year, reflecting ancient practices of cultures the world over. The arrival of spring and the harvest are quasi-universal celebrations, but every culture has its own ways and rituals of marking these events. The City of Montreal, truly a metropolis with over 140 mother tongues and over 100 distinct and strongly organised cultural groups, should initiate a Major Festival to celebrate all the different ways in which people mark the occasion. This would not only be a major inner city event for families, it would also enable us all to better know the many cultures around us and be a step towards greater cultural harmony as well as celebrating difference.

Thank you for considering our comments.

The members of The Family Caucus are:

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Selected Bibliography:

Food quality:

Periodically, the United States Department of Agriculture publishes a set of tables, generally referred to as food tables... The most recent set of tables (is) posted on the USDA website for 2002. Comparing the figures in it with those ... published in 1963, shows that 100 grams of today's average red, ripe whole tomato contain 22.7 percent less protein than a tomato would have if purchased...in the year President John Kennedy was murdered in Dallas....100 grams of today's fresh tomato contain 30,7 percent less Vitamin A and 16,9% less Vitamin C than its 1963 counterpart....and 61,5 percent less calcium.

Pawlick, Thomas F.: [The End of Food](#), Barricade Books, 2006.

Hans Monderman:

One of the principles ... is that road rules strip motorists of the ability to be considerate. Monderman is quoted as saying: "We're losing our capacity for socially responsible behaviour ... The greater the number of prescriptions, the more people's sense of personal responsibility dwindles." ^[2] Another source attributes the following to Monderman: "When you don't exactly know who has right of way, you tend to seek eye contact with other road users... You automatically reduce your speed, you have contact with other people and you take greater care." In the same report the mayor of Bohmte, a town implementing such a scheme, is quoted as saying "We don't want the cars alone to have precedence, we want to try and make the area pleasant for everybody."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shared_space.

Permanently Affordable Homeownership:

The Burlington Community Land Trust assists families with affordable home ownership principally by using the dual-ownership model common to most community land trusts. The trust typically buys and renovates existing homes. It then sells the house at an affordable rate to an income-eligible homebuyer, while leasing the land at a nominal rate on long-term basis to the homebuyer.

The sale of a house is subject to an agreement that protects the affordability of a house whenever it is resold. In order to keep housing affordable for future owners, the owner must agree to sell the house for no more than the original purchase price plus only 25% of the increase in value. Building owners enter into long-term ground lease agreements with BCLT which include resale provisions designed to maintain affordability for future users.

BCLT also helps in this home purchase by providing downpayment assistance. Grants can range between \$6,000 (US) and \$24,000 (US) based on the availability of funds and homebuyer's income.

<http://caledonia.org.uk/socialland/homeownership.htm>

Guichet Unique for daycares: One Number to Call, Many Waiting Lists:

Since 2000, this "Guichet unique", now named Cooperative enfancefamille.org (since October 2003) has given direct access, either by phone or Internet, to the waiting lists of participating childcare centers located in ... Montreal. This referral service creates helps centralize the supply and demand.

www.enfancefamille.org

Montreal Childcare Collective

The Montreal Childcare Collective is a group of volunteers who provide childcare at social justice oriented events and meetings. We also organize free or affordable kids day camps and activities specifically geared towards non-status and aboriginal children. We believe that providing non-authoritarian quality childcare is an important way that we can work in solidarity with other social justice groups in Montreal and with individual families in our community. (childcarecollective@riseup.net - 514-848-7583)