

# Canada Lands at Ottawa Street

## Introduction;

The purpose of this brief is to question the need for mega projects in the Griffintown area and to offer affordable alternatives. My name is Harvey Lev and I am a long time (over 40 year business resident of this neighbourhood. The neighbourhood has a long history dating back to Montreal's settlement. The area we know as Griffintown was born in intrigue and a land scandal. It became home to many of the refugees of a harsh world and was the doorway to what became industrial Canada. The site of the proposed project is along the shores of the Lachine canal, the birthplace of Canadian industry and is recognized as an historical heritage park under the control of Parks Canada

## The issues

At the moment there are 3 mega projects on the table.

The Canada Lands project with a construction period of up to 12 years.

The now uncertain Devimco projects which have already been on the table for 4 years, where all development of properties by their rightful owners within the project area were frozen by the Ville de Montreal. We were not allowed to lease out our properties or to carry out meaningful repairs or improvements. During this time not one shovelful dug or any properties purchased by Devimco or , for infrastructure or for a tram and now that project is forecasted with another minimum 10 year construction schedule.

The the Cite du Havre project to demolish the Bonaventure Autoroute and construct high density housing along Nazareth and Duke streets, a project with a building schedule lasting into 2025 with a planned bus corridor that is estimated to run 1400 buses per day through the suburban streets of Griffintown.

As well as a number of medium size projects such as the Lowney's high density buildings that are in the middle of construction and a new project for a high density condo project at the corner of de la Montagne and Ottawa street which has been submitted to city hall for permits. All this construction in one small area is and has been making the area uninhabitable for the existing citizens who should have some right to peaceable enjoyment of their properties etc.

It seems that the length of time to completion is really out of whack. Jean Drapeau built Expo and the Metro simultaneously in much less time and both these projects were significantly more ambitious.

The commission should be aware that the vast majority of land owners have been in the area for a generation or more. Most of us have built our small business's and raised our families in relative peace and prosperity and helped to sustain the rich Montreal Economy. Some larger firms employed hundred's while the rest of us employed dozens.

The city encouraged the area to depopulate through zoning regulations and wilful neglect.

The need for high density construction is questionable. Montreal lost 25,000 residents in the last year. This coupled with the extensive construction boom in the city for condos and housing has all but saturated the market place. Devimco, Canada Lands, Cite du havre and the other high density projects already in construction and in planning for the Griffintown area exceed 12,000 units and this does not take into account all the many other projects around the core of Montreal.

At the moment the site is bounded by the canal to the southwest, a dog park to the east, a 240,000 square foot bus garage complex to the north and the derelict Lucky Luke horse barns and a somewhat neglected industrial building to the west, where the Reso's Auberge is to be built.

Building these projects as is will mean that the area will be over constructed for many years and that the surrounding 75% approx 9-10 million sq, feet will lie fallow leaving the sector with intermittant rich sites set amongst slums, hardly a good initiative.

The nearest Metro station is probably Lucien L'Allier at least a kilometre away. The proposed tram along Peel street is also approx. a kilometre away depending on which side of the site you are standing on and at least for the moment it is on hold as Devimco was supposed to pay for 35% of the tramway and is in default of it's commitment to the city . Poor public transit means more cars, not less. With no infrastructure to handle the traffic which is already a daily problem during evening rush hour this will cause unbearable traffic turmoil. This turmoil will increase dramatically when the Bonaventure demolition starts. Work is supposed to commence this spring. The highway will be replaced with a boulevard which by it's very nature will carry traffic in a slower manner. The traffic turmoil from the construction alone is scheduled to last until 2025. That is fifteen years before we will get back to a system that is capable of moving less cars than the existing highway. The Wellington bridge across the canal is 2 lanes wide and there are no other entrances or exits to the neighbourhood other than Notre Dame street which is a small commercial and residential street and is over trafficked on an on going basis.

Ottawa Street as well is the main conduit for the horse caleches on their way to Vieux Montreal and William Street is their route to return to the various stables along the way. How will the increased traffic affect this?

Montreal is a winter city so bicycles are a sweet idea but rather impractical as a solution.

There are few major thoroughfares to allow for traffic flow as the site is bounded on 3 sides by obstacles.

## site

The site has belonged in one form or another to the government of Canada or one of

various crown corporations for many year and as such really belongs to us.

The Canada post building is the only large building in Griffintown that is in top condition. It is a red brick single story building approx 25 years old with solar panels and it is surrounded by real green space which has become a defacto park to all of us in the vicinity, The idea of demolishing the building is a huge waste of public money.

The definition of demolishing something according to sustainable development standards is Orwellian doublespeak and is a misrepresentation of the process.

## restauration

With a minimum of investment the blue metal siding could be replaced with red brick and the building would fit into the historical architectural heritage of the site  
There is more than 12 million square feet of parking lots and underutilised or abandoned industrial buildings in the vicinity, even if Devimco and Canada post go ahead, this will leave 9 million square feet in this situation, hard to imagine selling high end condos in this situation, with a view over a derelict neighbourhood. and the necessity of government financed high density housing. Does Montreal really want or need any more Stalinist style housing as the True North- Jardins Windsor high density project that runs along Notre Dame between Peel and de la Montagne which by their very nature are not conducive for creating neighbourhoods, but seem instead to be places where the inhabitants do not use the streets around them for anything other than access to a parking garage.

## history & heritage

The Lachine Canal has an architectural heritage of red brick industrial buildings and once of sheds. I believe that no-one really wants to put the sheds back, but most of the new construction along the canal has respected the low rise and red brick industrial heritage.

While the concept of returning the 4 basins to their geographical state would be ideal, it is quite clear from the previous hearings that this would be both very expensive and technically very difficult if at all possible. The fact that the Peel street basin has been restored and re-opened and has lain not utilized since the work was completed 5

or 6 years ago and the existing sections of basins on the south side of the canal at Corticelli and Redpath give a clear understanding of the historical nature and original uses. It seems that a full restoration of the 4 smaller basins on the site would not be necessary, after all it is not possible to re-create the canal with it's original industries and with the boats and wharves that once were all along it's route.

There is and never has been a history of 20 story buildings along the park or anywhere else in the vicinity. (other than the True North- Jardins Windsor). The construction will change the skyline, through shadow and remove light and suburbanise the entire nature of the canal.

## potential uses

### 1) housing for seniors

One possible use could be affordable housing for seniors etc. built into the perimeter of the entire existing building. A 3<sup>rd</sup> floor could be added to the perimeter to increase the density. A community centre with a few restaurants, maybe a cinema and library and facilities for recreation i.e art classes, a gym dedicated to their needs could complete the use of the interior of the building. This would allow for outdoor access in a park setting during the nice months as well as access to facilities during the winter months . The surrounding land could be used as a sculpture park and for public walking spaces. The integration of seniors with the everyday younger users of the canal would add to the quality of life and place.

The area should be developed with the whole in mind. All construction should be

designed to encourage the entire sector to be redeveloped. The Canada Post, and other projects as they stand will create islands of prosperity amidst the ruins of a much larger neighbourhood of neglected industrial buildings and vacant parking lots, while removing one of the few brighter and greener space of the Canada Lands property. At the same time the new residents will not feel as if they live in a nice neighbourhood and will feel insecure in walking about. They will then use their cars to take them to more friendly environments to do their shopping and their entertainment. This basically will cause urban ghetto and will in the end serve no one other than a few developers who claim that they can only make money through density.

The city has proof of this, one only has to look at the streets surrounding St. Laurent and Mount Royal or the area along St. Catherine going east from Berri to Papineau. Both these areas are considered international success and have radically improved the lives of the citizens who live in the vicinity. Areas like Point St. Charles or St Henri are now being re-vitalized in the same manner and have become desired neighbourhoods, something unheard of 10 years ago.

All of these areas were in serious decline in recent history. The emigration has been reversed and they have become desired places to live.

2) This is an idea I proposed earlier this year to Canada Lands for the site, which was met with some enthusiasm from the head office and which was later presented to Mr Cavis and Mr Sylvester.

# International Centre hope, justice and humanity

(International centre for the encouragement of tolerance  
between peoples and conflict resolution)

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Introduction

Principles and purpose

The idea is the creation of a unique, multi-purposed international centre for

conflict resolution incorporating programs for solving international disputes, protection for refugees and political dissent. This would include an emphasis on education and knowledge.

Canada has an excellent reputation among the nations of the earth. We can offer a place of respect, dignity, honour, solidarity and peace, where various protagonists would be able to discuss the issues that concern them. We have no history of colonization (native history excepted) and none of aggression and we occupy a place of trust, hope and refuge among the peoples of the planet. Few other countries have our peace keeping history, respect and experience in the trouble spots of the world.

Montreal already has enormous infrastructure vis a vis this subject. We have succeeded where no-one else has. Montreal is the most successful and maybe the only truly bilingual city in the world. We have become home to some of the most devastated people on earth, who, have shown the ability to live, prosper and grow peaceably here, when unable to do so in their original homelands.

We have experience as a city for diplomats with such United Nations agencies as IATA and ICAO in residence in Montreal and a history of welcoming the world through the various cultural events during the year.

We are a city with a large knowledge base infrastructure and multicultural experience.

Economically, this could become a benefit to Montreal and Canada. In conjunction with the four Universities and the various communities (Native, English, French, Lebanese, Armenian, Italian, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Sri Lankan, Greek, Kurd, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Christian etc. etc.) Montreal could become a centre of knowledge and a place where peoples could come to discuss their issues in a positive environment and offer to the world a superlative centre of learning.

As humans we all share the need to breathe, to drink, to eat, to rest, and to have passion. This should be a place for strangers to become comfortable, to share experience and knowledge and to learn and develop trust and understanding and then be able to return to their homes with a different vision of what can be possible, what can be forgiven, what can be built.

## The facilities and events

Conference facilities

Libraries, cinema, and art exhibitions linked to the nature of the facility

Educational programs including several doctoral scholarships and exchange programs in conjunction with either the 4 Montreal universities and/or foreign institutions such as Harvard etc.

Facilities for artists, writers, and Sculptors etc.

Facilities for diplomatic corps

Facilities for N.G.O.s (Amnesty Intl, Medcins sans frontieres, Unra, Unesco)

Residences and facilities for the different users (hotels, restaurants, sevicees)

The creation of a Davos type meeting place for world leadership (not only politicians) to gather on an annual or continual basis to brainstorm - linked to the nature of the facility

The existing moth balled postal facility on Ottawa Street could be a good starting point. The building itself would easily lend itself to both an exhibition centre and a knowledge facility . The land surrounding could easily be turned into a sculpture park dedicated to the communities that have somehow survived the various genocides and turmoils of the world.(I.e. the holocaust memorial in Miami- <http://www.holocaustmmb.org/>) And works that represent hope for the future.

With the replacement of the blue metal siding with red brick, the building would fit into the architectural heritage of the neighbourhood, along the historic Lachine Canal in the neighbourhood of Griffintown, which was one of the welcoming points to the refugees and displaced peoples that have come to inhabit Canada, and would conform to the idea of recycling and re-using of our existing facilities. It would also provide a place where Canada could contribute something special to the Montreal, Canadian and world communities.

If other facilities would be required, there is an overabundance of abandoned and under utilized sites in the neighbourhood.

## The Economics

The site would require:

Residences, hotels, quality restaurants, conference centres as well as other support facilities and some educational facilities as well as a modern library and cinema facilities dedicated to the subject.

Large world institutions could be approached to participate into this project sharing their resources while benefiting from the publicity of being connected to this project.

Some possibilities;

Google, Microsoft (Gates Foundation), Apple, Swiss Bank Corp, The Welcome Foundation, an international legal group,

The creation of a cultural corridor to connect the area with Downtown and Vieux Montreal.

The organization would require a board of directors with international stature and experience.



# The economic & Social Spinoffs

The economic spinoffs would be extra-ordinary.

There would be jobs for academics, diplomats, chefs, janitors, etc.

This would have enormous economic benefits for one of Montreal's most undeveloped neighbourhoods and unite the downtown with Vieux Montreal without competition for the downtown commerce or the tourist based economy of Vieux Montreal. In fact it would create an entire new industry that would help to make Montreal a destination and be an addition to all the other modern motors of the local economy (education, tourism, commerce, culture).

The neighbourhood would gain with owner operated restaurants, services and small hotels, boutiques as well as other tourism based industries.

Residences and facilities for students and the newly employed.

Montreal's reputation in the world would be enhanced.

## Final Thoughts

There seems to be this idea that only Mega Projects have value, we have lost our ability to think in a creative manner, using ideas that are simple and that could have large benefits to the community. *“The simpler the image the vaster the dream” - Gaston Bachelard, The poetics of Space*

I believe that we can instill real value in our neighbourhood without going to extra-ordinarily expensive measures and make the city a more inviting and living place.

I take the liberty of listing a few here with the intention of stimulating ideas in others.

- 1) a skating link along the canal reaching from beyond Atwater market to the Peel basin .
- 2) The operation along the Canal of a horse drawn bus service/sleigh service as was in place in the eighteen hundreds that would carry residents and tourists between Atwater Market and the Vieux port-Vieux Montreal
- 3) The creation of a poet’s corner and speaker’s corner
- 4) The creation of a Ville de photo as opposed to the Mois de photo where the area would host outdoor photo exhibition an all year round basis such as is done at Atwater Market and McGill college during the summer.
- 5) Art walks and History walks in the area which is dotted with artist studios Other cities such as Toronto, New York and Boston have already done this with great success.
- 6) An easing of city regulations that would allow for the older warehouses to have greater leeway in what types of uses are allowed as well as a moratorium on charges for permit applications and an easing of restrictions. This would allow for the easy re-use and re-cycling of older industrial properties in a creative manner and would encourage owner operated restaurants, cafes, art galleries and ateliers, 2nd hand book shops and inexpensive incubator spaces for creative purposes.