

MEMOIR REGARDING THE
"CADRE DE RÉVISION DES HAUTEURS ET DENSITÉS DU CENTRE-VILLE"

CITY OF MONTRÉAL, BOROUGH OF VILLE-MARIE

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1- DOCUMENT SUMMARY

As presented by the borough of Ville-Marie, the document under review aims to revise the heights and densities allocated for several of Montréal's downtown sectors. The section of the presentation document entitled "Interventions" clearly identifies the intended modifications that the borough wishes to implement.

In summary, the borough intends to reduce buildings heights in the northern part of downtown, due in part to the fact that developable land is few and far between, as well as the numerous historical buildings that exist. In addition, the proposed intervention is meant to reinforce the existing buildings heights that are present and to sustain the visibility of Mont-Royal.¹

The western sector of downtown sees, for the most part, an increase in building heights, in essence, to help create a transition, or flow, between the shorter buildings to the west and the skyscrapers found within the centre. As for the southern sector, which incorporates Griffintown, modifications have been proposed to both increase heights for areas closer to the downtown core and decrease buildings heights for areas further towards the Lachine Canal. Similarly to the modifications proposed in the western sector, the modifications brought forward in the southern sector help to create a transition between the City's core and its lower boundary which is primarily composed of less dense and tall buildings. Finally, a mixture of lower and higher building heights is proposed within the eastern sector, depending on the difficulties of development for certain landsites (higher buildings heights proposed) as well as the preservation of views (lower building heights proposed).²

2 – OUR POSITION TOWARDS THE PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

As advocates for development, (Group name) is in *favour* of the plan that has been brought forward by the borough of Ville-Marie in regards to modifying the heights and densities within the Planning Program for downtown Montréal and its surroundings.

We strongly believe that modifications to the Planning Program, which allow for the advancement of our central core, were long overdue. A Planning Program that has not been modified in twenty years, as stated in the presentation document, does not allow for a city to evolve, but restrains it from its maximum potential. In other words, if a city's core is limited in regards to its density and building height, it will also be limited in its economic growth, dynamism, vitality and competitiveness in relation to other large metropolises such as New York, Toronto, Chicago, etc...

2.1 – ALTERNATIVE MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

¹ Ville de Montréal, arrondissement de Ville-Marie. Cadre de révision de hauteurs et densités du centre-ville. Juin 2011. Pg. 28.

² Ibid. Pg. 34, 38, 42.

The boom of the automobile, that we have witnessed since the second half of the 20th century has recently seen a decline, especially for trips towards and within the central business district and its surroundings.

As specified in the presentation document, two-thirds (66%) of all trips towards downtown are made through public transportation. In addition, more than half of all trips made within downtown and its surroundings are made on foot or by bicycle. The City of Montréal is to be commended on the attention it has placed on improving public transit, as well as implementing the BIXI program that has seen great success since its arrival in the city.³

As a result, Montréal has seen a 6.6% drop in automobile trips towards the downtown core. Speculation can be made that the reason for this lies in the fact that public transit in the City has improved, but also for the fact that the price of fuel and parking within the downtown core has increased in the last few years.⁴

This shift in transportation choice has given way for an important question to be posed; is it absolutely necessary for the borough of Ville-Marie to keep the excessive amount of above-ground parking lots? These parking lots are often an eye sore for the city, especially when located next to or within proximity to a prestigious building. In addition, the spaces are often in prime locations and have great development potential.

An important factor to note when considering these locations or any other possible site for development is cost and profitability. In order for developers and property owners to offset the construction costs, they must have a project that is relatively dense in relation to the square footage of land that it possesses. A low density project on a prime piece of land has very little chance to be profitable.

2.2 – ECONOMY

A city's status in relation to other national and international cities is strongly related to its economic position. A city that strengthens its economic position has the ability to further attract local and foreign investor, which will in turn boost the economy even further.

In today's society, a city has to offer something quite enticing to attract local and foreign investors. This often involves the potential to build bigger and better buildings. Unfortunately, Montréal in relation to other major cities around the world has some of the most restrictive laws and regulations around. As a result, construction projects are often limited despite their mass appeal.

The proposed modifications to the Planning Program will allow for a certain flexibility regarding building height and density that was unavailable in the past. As a result, the City will be well on its way to achieving its goal of increasing commercial and office square footage, as well as increasing the number of residential units.

³ Ibid. Pg.20.

⁴ Ibid.

An increased number of residents mean an increased market for commercial establishments and a larger pool of candidates for future businesses and corporations. The more goods and services that are available to residents, the better their quality of life.

2.3 – DYNAMIC, VIBRANT AND ANIMATED CITY

The key to a dynamic and vibrant city is to have a mixity of uses whereby residential and commercial spaces cohabitate to form an animated city. Although Montréal is well known for having an animated downtown, there will always be room to grow and improve.

With the proposed modifications to the Planning Program, the sectors in which the building heights have been increased will see an increase in the number of residents as well as the number of commercial establishments. An increased number of residents and commercial establishments lead to an increase in street life.

In addition, with an increase in construction, we are also likely to see an increased number of public spaces, whether they be supplied directly by the developer or by the city through their park fund. A mixity of uses, including public spaces is what brings people together and onto the street. If not for this mixity, the downtown core would be just like any other suburb, where people travel in and travel out at the end of the day. On the other hand, with lower densities, and fewer residents, the downtown core would have a difficult time being sustainable and profitable.

3 – ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

3.1 – NORTHERN SECTOR

As mentioned in the above summary, the northern sector subject to the proposed interventions will see the Planning Program decrease buildings heights. The sector affected, which is steps away from the base of Mont-Royal is covered largely by Collège de Montréal, north of Sherbrooke Street, as well as several historical sites along the same street.

With the exception of several tall buildings, figure 1 shows that the area, which is predominantly residential, is home to many low rise apartment buildings, and even several single family dwellings.

The reduction in building height will help in preserving the quality of life for the citizens that reside in the area, as they will be ensured that they will not be over powered by buildings twice their size. In addition, as the sector is in close proximity to the mountain, lower building heights in the area will ensure that views towards and from the mountain will not be affected.

Figure 1 – Medium to low density residential development in proximity to Mont-Royal



Source: Bing

3.2 – WESTERN SECTOR

For the most part, the western sector is subject to an increase in building heights, with building heights becoming progressively higher towards the core.

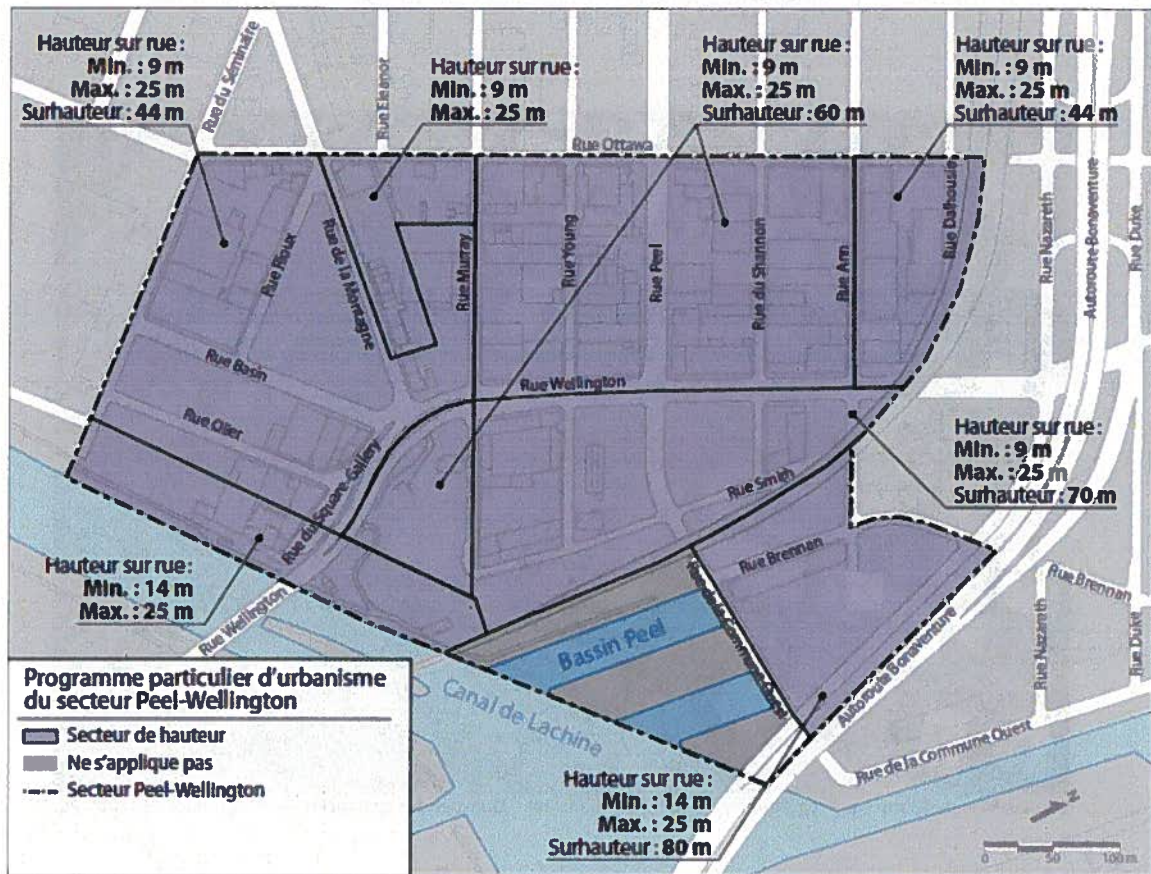
Despite the fact that a large part of this sector is comprised of buildings under 10 stories, we believe that this area which will see an increase in building height from 25 to 35 metres could have been augmented even further. The reasoning behind this is due to the fact that the zones surrounding the one in question are subject to buildings heights of 65 meters and above.

In this case, building heights can be regulated by the specific construction by-law and not restricted by the Planning Program.

3.3 – SOUTHERN SECTOR

In the southern sector, we see a mixture of increased and decreased buildings heights, especially in and around Old-Montréal. As the majority of the buildings within this sector have a relatively low building height with the exception of the Tour de la Bourse and the buildings adjacent to Square Victoria, it is with good intentions that a reduction in building heights has been proposed. In contrast, one intervention that has not been put forward is to increase the permitted building heights north of the sector known as District Griffin. District Griffin, which is subject to the Peel-Wellington Special Planning Program allows for building heights greater than what is currently the case for area bordering the Bonaventure expressway.

Figure 2 – PPU Peel-Wellington Construction Heights



Source: Ville de Montréal. Programme particulier d'urbanisme – Griffintown secteur Peel-Wellington. avril 2008. Pg. 38.

3.4 - EASTERN SECTOR

The eastern sector which proposes a significant number of modifications to individual lots has successfully preserved views towards the mountain from City Hall. In addition, the interventions that have been planned will help integrate future projects with several new projects that are forthcoming such as, the 2-22 and the Maison du développement durable to name a few.

With the recent redevelopment of Quartier des spectacle and Place de Festivals, planning instruments such as the Special Planning Program established for Secteur Place des Arts, can be fulfilled to its maximum potential. What has been an unstructured sector for many years will finally be able to breathe new life through animated streets, public spaces, an increase in commercial activity at street level and new places to live.

Figure 3 – Planned and proposed projects



Source: Ville de Montréal. Programme particulier d'urbanisme – Quartier des spectacles – secteur Place des Arts. Pg. 32.

4 – CONCLUSION

I would like to commend the borough of Ville-Marie on its proposed interventions to the densities and building heights within downtown. We believe that the intended modifications are a step in the right direction and will aid in the growth of the downtown core.

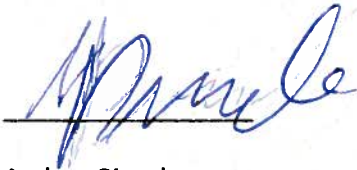
Not only will the proposed changes reinforce the city as being dynamic, animated and diverse, but they will help Montréal as a metropolis compete with the other great cities around the world.

As cities grow, less land becomes available for its future development. As is the case with any downtown core, its limited size does not allow for suburban type development. Limited landsite and sky high real estate costs dictate that in order for a project to be profitable and sustainable, it must take advantage of its area by building higher and being denser.

In addition, the proposed document serves to protect Montréal's landscape and heritage by ensuring that views towards Mont-Royal and historical buildings around downtown are not overshadowed.

The intended interventions provide an equilibrium between the need to build and the need to preserve, ensuring a smooth transition in what is to be Montréal's future.

On behalf of (Group name), we would like to thank the City of Montréal and the borough of Ville-Marie for putting forth such a proposal and for identifying the constraints and restrictions that the City has faced over that past decades in regards to the development of the downtown core.



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