

Griffintown: Developing Culture

Building community: an arts and heritage corridor in southwest Montreal



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We are actually powerfully influenced by our surroundings, our immediate context, and the personalities of those around us.... In the end, Tipping Points are a reaffirmation of the potential for change and the power of intelligent action.

— *Malcolm Gladwell, The Tipping Point*

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Why:

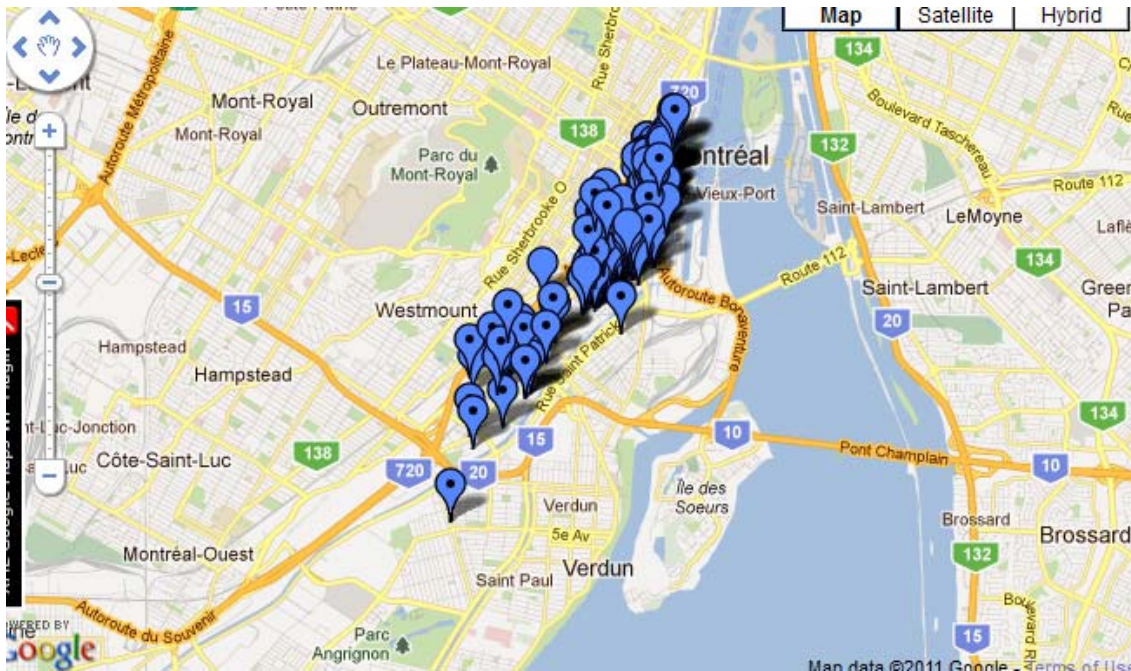
Only rarely in the history of a city are there moments when it is possible to re-examine its values and redraw its image in a powerful and public way. This is such a moment.

In light of proposed redevelopment plans for Griffintown, the Bassins du Nouveau Havre, District Griffin, ETS, the Old Port, and the Bonaventure expressway in the south-central heart of Montreal, we have a unique opportunity to look at what can and should be saved from Montreal's historic past, and for what purposes — how best to use our legacy to shape the character and enhance the future of our city.

What:

We propose the establishment of a "cultural corridor". This Cultural Corridor can be situated geographically as well as conceptually. Geographically, the Corridor extends along the east-west axis of the southwest section of our city through Old Montreal, Griffintown, Little Burgundy, and Saint-Henri. The idea of a cultural corridor in this part of the city is not new. In 2005, the painter André Paradis commissioned a study by the firm Schème Consultants in which Ottawa Street is identified as a suitable artery for establishing art studios and lofts as well as commercial creative enterprises. At the same time, Caroline Andrieux, founder and director of the Darling Foundry, led a project to create a booklet imagining artistic enterprises the length of Ottawa Street. Also inspired by Ottawa Street in Griffintown, in 2008, we proposed a cultural corridor that extends along an east-west between Old Montreal and areas west of the Atwater Market.

To know more about the geography of the Corridor, consult [the Cultural Corridor map](#) and website.



Conceptually, the Cultural Corridor imagines what the future of this area could be in the best of all possible worlds. The idea began with Griffintown and the community's desire to renew this old suburb's link with Old Montreal to the east but has grown to include the cultural offerings, heritage and communities to the west. An integral aspect of this concept is that it is mutable and open source, or a wikiconcept if you will. We posit that the cultural corridor will continue to develop organically through the actions of individuals, businesspeople, companies, academics, developers, politicians, curators, cultural organizations, professional artists, non-professional artists and citizens. It is a collection of ideas dreamed up by Montrealers who love their city and wish to see something special happen here.

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The aim is to adapt and valorize existing sites of architectural and historic significance for the purposes of everything from community cultural events to private galleries, economuseums, arts cafés, owner-operated restaurants, an art school, artists' studios, a Centre for the Encouragement of Tolerance between Peoples, a Maison de la Culture, a Design Centre, parks and a potential new home for a satellite of the National Gallery and/or the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

The concept could also include a calèche taxi and/or shuttle that runs the length of the corridor. Other transportation expansions that have been proposed for the sector include the Société du Havre's bus station and expanded bus corridor for the South Shore commuters, a tramway line, and a possible rail hub.

Where:

This document focuses largely on Griffintown and ways of strengthening its links with Old Montreal to the east, and Little Burgundy and St. Henri to the west.

Based on feedback from presentations and discussions with various groups and individuals, including the Regroupement économique et social du Sud-Ouest (**RESO**), the Société du Havre de Montréal, the Canada Lands Company Limited, Parks Canada, the Committee for the Sustainable Redevelopment of Griffintown (**CSRG**), ETS, museum and art directors, architects, urbanists and neighbours, the proposal has been expanded since it was first presented in 2008. One elaboration is the extension of the carriage route to run alongside the Lachine Canal west toward Atwater Market and Centre St-Ambroise, utilizing the old rail bed for the purpose. Existing sites of interest throughout the proposed corridor are in the process of being catalogued and their functions as well as cultural and/or heritage value documented in order to be included within the proposed corridor. Potential sites must also be identified and the owners, tenants, neighbours, and others who know and use them asked for ideas as to how best to valorize them to fit within an arts and heritage corridor.

How:

The Cultural Corridor proposal is not a definite plan, but rather a concept, a collection of ideas dreamed up by Montrealers who love

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their city and want to see something special happen here. The aim is to initiate a conversation and encourage all who wish to participate in creating a vision of what this important area of the city could become as it redevelops. By redefining in our minds what this sector of our city is and could be, we can create a new reality. Making change does not require megaprojects. If one property owner or one small developer chooses to build upon or redevelop a site for a cultural or heritage purpose, then we have one more such site in the district. If another does so, we have two, and so on, and so on. If the idea of the south-western sector of our city as an arts and heritage corridor takes hold, then tourism will become an economic engine for the area and more developers, business people and artists will be encouraged to relocate here and bring their own dreams to add to a collective vision. As well, existing property owners will likely choose to redevelop their own properties and businesses within such a context.



The Darling Foundry 7 September 2011

Some sites already in existence include a number of small galleries, music venues, and the [Darling Foundry](#) , a visual arts centre at the eastern end of Ottawa Street, the [Montreal Art Centre](#), [Division Gallery](#), [Espace Griffintown](#), the [Rodier building](#), the [Griffintown Horse Palace](#), [New City Gas](#), and [Saint-Ann's Park](#). For more information on the built heritage in Griffintown, [see the virtual tour](#) of Griffintown created by the renowned Montreal artist G. Scott MacLeod. In addition, the [Société du Havre's plan](#) to convert the Bonaventure into a

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boulevard includes an emphasis on visual art and apparently they plan to put out a call for international proposals to install a monumental artwork at the bottom of the new boulevard. Their vision is of a spectacular gateway welcoming visitors to our city.



St. Ann's Park

Some key sites & possibilities



Alanah Heffez, photographe

Griffintown Horse Palace

Intersection of Ottawa and Eleanor Streets

The [Griffintown Horse Palace](#) is a set of buildings that includes a mid-19th century brick house, an old inn for travelers, and stables that have been in continuous use since the mid-1800s. In 2007, efforts began to form a charitable organisation to protect this significant reminder of times past. In 2009, the [Griffintown Horse Palace Foundation](#) acquired official charitable status and began its efforts to acquire the site.

The Foundation's mission is twofold: primarily, it is to preserve the buildings and function of the Horse Palace, and secondarily, to establish a cultural and historical centre whose purposes could include, but need not be limited to: an historical and educational museum with exhibits and activities focusing on the history of Griffintown, the working-class experience, the Irish diaspora, the industrial revolution and the urban horse.



ben soo, photographe

The Griffintown Horse Palace is currently for sale and its owners, Leo and Huguette Leonard, have recently moved to a retirement residence. To date, the Foundation has been unable to raise sufficient money to purchase the property at the asking price of 1.5 million dollars and the property is [now being sold as three lots](#) – a situation which does not bode well for its preservation.

Maison de la Culture

Montreal's network of [Maisons de la Culture](#) provides access to cultural events for citizens across the city and, in some cases, include facilities such as libraries and exhibit rooms. There are Maisons de la Culture located throughout the city, and as this neighbourhood redevelops, there is sure to be demand for such a venue here. The primary mission of a Maison de la Culture is to encourage local community to open up to its cultural surrounding by providing its members with various artistic events and exhibits. This primary

mission could further be combined to include a community centre function aimed at providing space for members to hold workshops, concerts and other events.



New City Gas-Shauna Jannsen, photographe

There is no Maison de la culture in Griffintown yet, but with thousands of new condominiums planned or under construction this is the right time to plan a multifunctional community and cultural centre. Several potential sites exist: the New City Gas buildings located at [956 Ottawa Street](#) et [141 Ann Street](#) would be ideal, the Bassins du Havre project is not yet built and so could be adapted and, of course, there are a number of other sites that, being vacant or underutilized, are ready for redevelopment.

The New City Gas complex

141 Ann St; 950 Ottawa St; 956 Ottawa St.

In the middle of the 19th century, New City Gas became the flame that lit Montreal's industrial revolution. Modern Montreal literally began at New City Gas.

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Well-situated, the complex is close to downtown, Old Montreal, and the Lachine Canal. It was built between 1859 and 1861 to provide Montreal with gas for lighting street lamps.

In 1901, the **New City Gas Company of Montreal** fused with **Royal Electric Co.** to become **Montreal Light, Heat, & Power Consolidated**, which in turn, once nationalized in 1944, became the cornerstone of **Hydro-Quebec**. It is worth noting that William Molson was instrumental in the beginnings of this company whose launch saw Montreal go from 5 watts of power to 100 watts overnight, surely a pivotal point for the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in Canada.

William Molson adjusted himself to the new capitalist structures. He saw that a leading entrepreneur would no longer be a technician, who personally owned the means of production and administered an undertaking. It would from then on be too vast for individual or family ownership. Its large number of employees, and the complexity of the problems involved in organizing the work of factory and office, would no longer permit an entrepreneur to see to all the details of its daily running. The law would then adapt itself to the new economic structures and the joint-stock, limited liability company would appear. In 1847, the names of William and his brother Thomas Molson appear among the first group of shareholders of the New City Gas Company.

There are three buildings of interest. One is the Gazometer building at [141, rue Ann](#), with its cathedral style, stone buttresses and curving brick wall, constructed by architect John Ostell.



New City Gas, Gazomètre – 141 Ann - ben soo, photographe Interior

In 2008, we proposed the site as an alternate to the **Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal's (MAC)** proposed satellite in Silo No.5 and we invited the then Executive Director of the MAC, Marc Mayer, to tour the buildings. Mr. Mayer responded very positively to the beauty, light, size and flexibility of the interior space of this site and, for a few minutes, we all imagined it as Montreal's Tate Modern. A few months later, Mr. Mayer relocated to become Director of the **National Gallery of Canada** in Ottawa and [the MAC has still not figured out its expansion plans](#). The MAC's current location near Place des Arts is in the middle of the new Quartier des Spectacles and is now often inaccessible and remains inadequate to display the museum's substantial collection. Perhaps it is time to revisit New City Gas as a potential location for a MAC satellite, or even for a Quebec satellite of the [National Gallery of Canada](#)?

Like the Gazometer, the second building, at [950, rue Ottawa](#) has floors that were added later and so could provide large spaces for art installations and performances. It is a large beautiful building and, being closer to Ottawa Street, has added potential for spectacular views of the city. Parts of this building's wall and foundations are thought to be from a seventeenth-century fort and, with the railway leading into Central Station going right past, it is in a position to be noticed and attract visitors. The building is currently under renovation to become a performance space.

The third building, [956, rue Ottawa](#), is a more recent, early-twentieth century factory. It is a big, solid and fine building that could easily be adapted to a future use, such as artist studios, gallery space or an art school, just to suggest a few.



New City Gas- 950 &956 Ottawa-ben soo, photographie

In addition to its historical and architectural significance, the New City Gas has a recent history of supporting and showcasing contemporary and local artists by hosting performances and exhibitions, including the [Griffintown: Developing Culture](#) event in 2010 and 2011, by renting out studios, and with the **ART en majuscule** gallery that occupied part of the site until 2005.

Another proposal for the New City Gas complex is a ***Centre for Hope, Justice and Humanity***: *an international centre for the encouragement of tolerance between peoples and conflict resolution.*

The idea is to create a unique, international centre for conflict resolution that incorporates programs aimed at solving international disputes, offering protection for refugees and allowing 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 can come to discuss the issues that

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concern them. We occupy a place of trust, hope and refuge among the peoples of the planet. Few other countries have our peacekeeping history, respect and experience in the trouble spots of the world.

Montreal already has enormous credentials on this score. We have succeeded where nobody 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 live, prosper and grow peaceably here when unable to do so in their original homelands.

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

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

Economically such an institution would be a benefit to Montreal and Canada. In conjunction with the four universities and the various communities (Native, French, English, Lebanese, Armenian, Italian, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Sri Lankan, Greek, Kurd, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Christian etcetera) Montreal could become a centre of knowledge, a place where peoples come to discuss their issues in a positive environment

Griffintown, which has been one of the welcoming points for the refugees and displaced peoples who have come to inhabit Canada, is ideally situated adjacent to both downtown and Old Montreal, and the New City Gas Company on Ottawa street would be a good starting point for this project.

The historical buildings themselves could be repurposed as exhibition centres and knowledge facilities. On its own or in conjunction with adjacent underutilized properties, the surrounding land could be turned into a sculpture park dedicated to the communities that have somehow survived the various genocides and turmoils of the world (e.g. the Holocaust memorial in Miami - <http://www.holocaustmmb.org/>).

The proximity to Central Station, the underground city, the Bonaventure, Downtown, and Old Montreal would facilitate access between the new facilities and already existing facilities and

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infrastructure.

If other facilities were to be required, there is an abundance of underutilized sites in the neighbourhood.

This would provide a place where Canada could contribute something special to the Montreal, Canadian and world communities.

Bassins du Havre



1500 Ottawa

This site, until recently occupied by the former Canada Post building, is in the process of being prepared to make way for the [Bassins du Havre](#), combining high-end, family and low-cost housing, commercial spaces, an international youth hostel and the Cité des Artistes, a complex of affordable residential artists' studios.



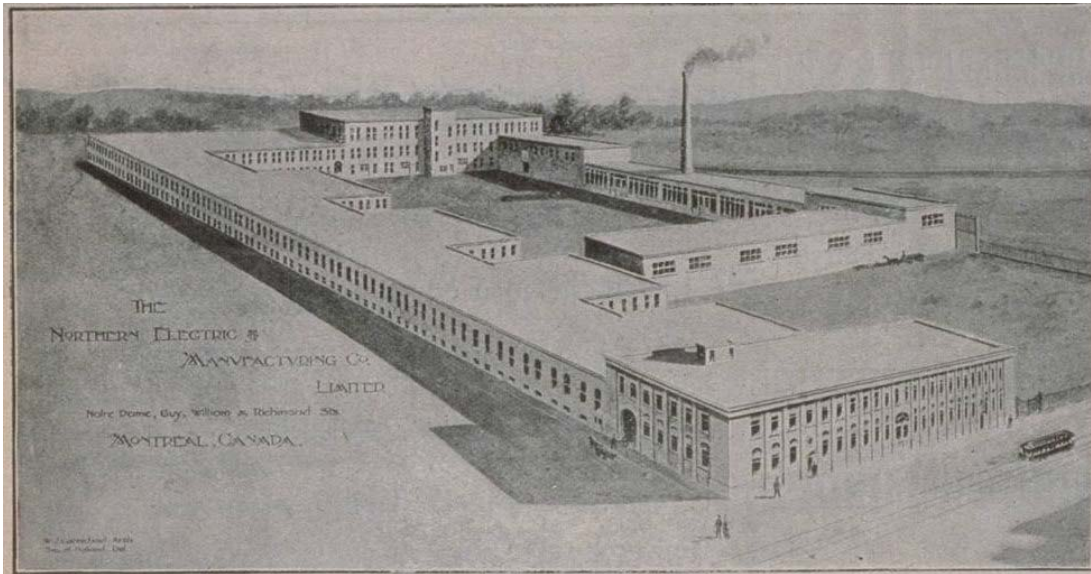
One feature of this site which is threatened by this otherwise acceptable redevelopment project is the expansive green space adjacent to and surrounding the former Canada Post building. This area is contiguous to the federal linear park along the Lachine Canal, [a National Historic Site](#) that celebrates Canada's industrial heritage and has attracted millions of cyclists and pedestrians. The green space at 1500 Ottawa has become an extension of this park and is used by pedestrians, snowshoers, cross-country skiers, dogs and their people, families who picnic and play together, and local youth who set up a basketball hoop in the former parking area. Given that 25,000 residents left Montreal in the past year and there is an abundance of vacant land and underutilized sites in and around the area, it seems a waste that one of the few green spaces we have is due to be lost to a megaproject.



1500 Ottawa

The CLC's plan to build several 20-story buildings also raises concerns. This neighbourhood has always been low-rise and the construction of such towers threatens to obscure the skyline, block views, and irrevocably change the area's historic character.

***Centre du Design complex
Between Ottawa and Notre-Dame***



On the west side of Guy Street between Ottawa and Notre-Dame is a fine old industrial complex built by the Northern Electric Company, which also built the Nordelec, one of the largest brick buildings in the world across the Lachine Canal in Point Saint Charles.



Centre du Design - Christian Roy, photographe

Walking in its inner courtyard, it is easy to visualize the place evolving

into Montreal's answer to [Toronto's Distillery District](#) as a culture and style hub.



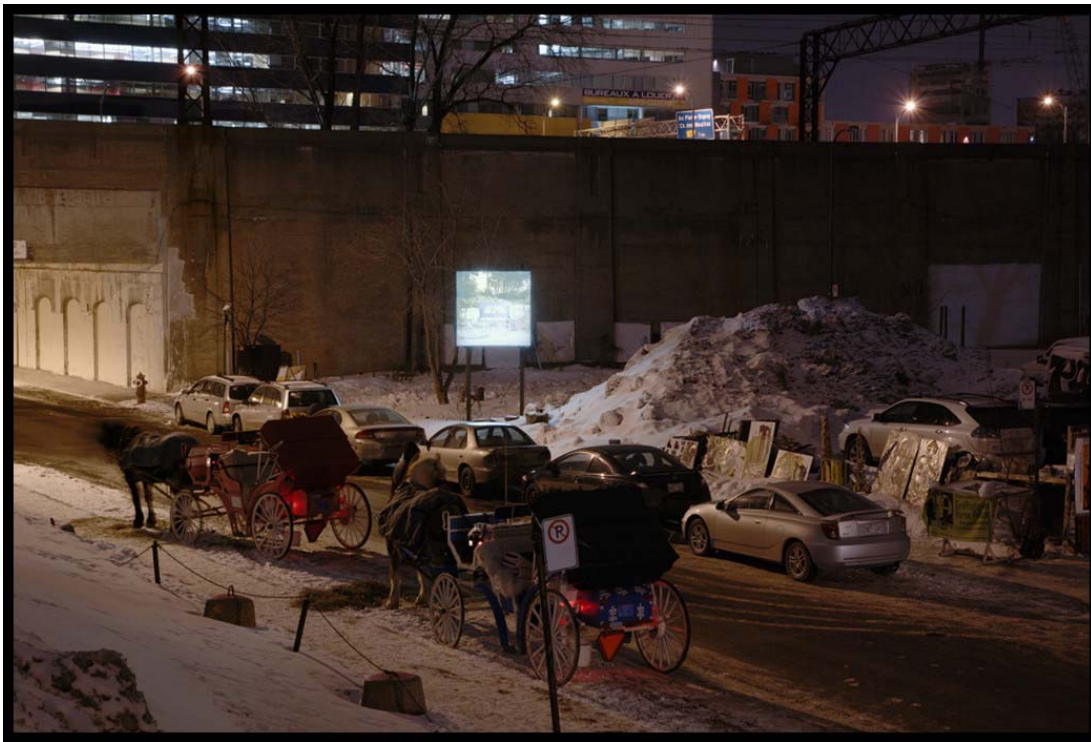
Cour intérieur - Christian Roy, photographe

On William Street it faces the Cité des Artistes end of the Bassins du Nouveau Havre development on the former postal site. That artistic concentration is bound to spill over across the street not only in some more studio-type spaces of the kind already to be found in the Northern Electric plant, but in the terraces that should sprout in the inner courtyard, once the parking spaces are moved away from the quaint brick building facing Ottawa Street. Most of that complex that seamlessly abuts the Quartier des Antiquaires on Notre-Dame Street already goes under the name "Centre du design", housing many agencies active in that area. All that is needed is to boost that existing vocation is renovations and perhaps some academic input. UQAM already has a prestigious Centre du design downtown, the only one of its kind in the city to have excellent exhibition space. Either it could have some sort of extension along the Cultural Corridor (not that far away from UQAM's ÉTS), or another university could be enticed to develop its design facilities there, such as Concordia up Guy Street. A revamped Centre du design could serve as an ideal showcase for Montreal's claims and ambitions as one of UNESCO's "world capitals of design".

Calèches et Traîneaux Lucky Luc

The [Lucky Luc stables](#) are located at 1810 Basin Street adjacent to the canal and the Bassins du Havre project. This is a large property housing many horses and a fleet of over 50 vehicles. Though currently in poor repair, it is well situated and could be remade into an attractive tourist destination. The vision is that the existing buildings be replaced with modern stables and a paddock where, when not working, the horses can get out for both a little freedom and as a canal-side tourist attraction. If this idea were implemented, few can doubt that it would become a popular destination for both tourists and Montrealers who enjoy an opportunity to experience horses in the city.

The Calèche Route and Conclusion



Calèches – Ottawa Street - ben soo, photographe

The sites mentioned above run from Lucky Luc's to 1500 Ottawa to the Horse Palace to New City Gas while our proposal is to extend this cultural corridor to include existing sites in both directions. The aim is to illustrate how this approach to the area would re-establish a link between historically significant neighbourhoods, thereby

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expanding the attraction of each for both tourists and locals. Heading east from New City Gas, we cross the Bonaventure to reach the Darling Foundry, and from there [the map](#) extends into [Old Montreal](#) and the [Old Port](#) to join with the [Centre d'histoire de Montréal](#) (which has expressed interest in linking up with the Griffintown Horse Palace), [Pointe-à-Callière](#), the [Montreal Science Centre](#) and [DHC/ Art](#), as well as many other galleries, restaurants, public squares and historic sites radiating out into the old city. Among the offerings to the west we find the [Corona Theatre](#), the [Georges-Vanier Cultural Center](#), the [Little Burgundy Sports Centre](#), many galleries and restaurants, the [Centre St-Ambroise](#), [Atwater Market](#) and the [Lachine Canal National Historic Site](#).

Another element cohesively linking this all together is the calèches. In Old Montreal, there are locations where you can hire a calèche just as at a taxi stand. The route the calèches follow to get to and from the old city goes east along Ottawa Street and west back along William Street. As mentioned, Lucky Luc's has over 50 vehicles some large enough to accommodate many passengers. The concept is to establish a calèche taxi/shuttle along the corridor with stands at the Horse Palace and Lucky Luc's. The calèche route could also be extended along the canal to Atwater Market and into Saint-Henri as far as the Centre St-Ambroise.

Imagine the tourism brochures: Travel Montreal's Historical and Cultural corridor by horse-drawn carriage (maybe even sell day passes)!! And having the horses in a paddock by the canal (across from the Redpath Sugar buildings and adjacent to the archaeological site at des Seigneurs) would also be a strong draw for people who love to see animals in the city.

Conclusion

Lastly there seems to be this idea that only megaprojects have value but there are many ways we can instill real value in our neighbourhood and make the city a more inviting and living place without going to extraordinarily expensive measures.

A few suggestions are listed here with the intention of stimulating ideas in others:

- A skating link along the canal extending from Peel Basin to beyond Atwater Market.
- 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 port in Vieux Montreal.
- The creation of a poet's corner and/or a speaker's corner.
- The creation of a Quartier de la Photo (since the Mois de la Photo happens to be based in an old factory in Saint-Henri) where outdoor photo exhibitions would be hosted on a year round basis such as is done at Atwater Market and McGill College during the summer.
- Art walks and History walks in this area, which is dotted with artists' studios; there already is an annual Saint-Henri Art Walk of the ones in that neighbourhood, and other cities such as Toronto, New York and Boston have done this with great success.
- 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 reuse and recycling of older industrial properties in a creative manner and would encourage owner operated

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restaurants, cafes, art galleries and ateliers, secondhand bookshops, and inexpensive incubator spaces for creative purposes.

The beauty of it all is that no one part is required; it is the concept as a whole that matters. With or without one or all of the proposed megaprojects, there is room for such a vision. And better yet, within the vision, there is not only room for mega but also for micro. This is our city. We are citizens, business people, property owners, artists, musicians, mothers, fathers, and students, and we can choose to dream and create a city we want to live in. It is not necessary to leave it all to corporations and governments to dream and do for us.

So why not!?

Instead of settling for the same old same old of more condos, shopping malls and franchises, let's insist on keeping Montreal a city with a community, cultural, heritage and tourism focus!

Imaginez les dépliants touristiques:

Venez vous promener en calèche.

Venez voir le Corridor culturel de Montréal !!



Imagine the tourism brochures :

**Come travel
by horse-drawn carriage.**

See Montreal's Cultural Corridor !!