

Report on Municipal Issues in Point St Charles and Griffintown

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The weeks of February 7th and 13th I attended 4 public consultation meetings regarding the South-West District – “The Canal” – zoning change corner of Des Seigneurs and Canal Lachine; Nordelec – revising permits; Condo project on the canal between Laprairie and Ropery and the presentation of briefs for Griffintown. There were a number of reoccurring issues and instead of addressing them by project they will be addressed by theme.

Issues to be addressed:

1. Follow the proper development procedures and put projects in order of priority. The new master plan must cover the areas of interface with the surrounding neighbourhoods. Demolishing the Bonaventure should be last project.
 2. Varying the heights of the buildings can be interesting but the most beautiful, liveable neighbourhoods are made up of 5 story buildings.
 3. Infrastructure costs connected to a project should be covered by the developer including redoing the streets.
 4. The South- West requires a subsidized housing strategy integrating projects of all sizes.
 5. Traffic – Plan for liveable neighbourhoods and consider connecting Guy and Bridge streets.
 6. Montreal wants to be considered a city of design – prove it. Griffintown and PSC could be a showcase of combining international quality contemporary design with environmental sustainable responsibility.
 7. Trees – Green our neighbourhoods by creating construction and maintenance standards that ensure healthy growth of our trees.
 8. Greenspace – The most desirable liveable neighbourhoods have lots of green space. The denser the population the more quality green space required. Green roofs are necessary but they do not replace public green space.
 9. Changing names of streets and public spaces – Spending tax payers money on rewriting history is irresponsible.
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1. **PROCESS** – It was surprising that the project Le Canal was being discussed because it was stated by Madame Veronique Fournier during the public consultation that the new master plan for the Griffintown area is in the process of being completed. Why is this project being given priority? I asked this question during the session and it was not answered. Development needs to happen in the correct procedural order. Already in Griffintown we have seen many projects

accepted and start construction before the master plan is ready. Incomprehensible and irresponsible! How can a project be evaluated by the council or the citizens if we do not have the framework within which to judge it? There should be **an immediate moratorium** on all development until the masterplan is finalised and then all new projects must be subjected to the standards set out – no exceptions. Plus if a developer comes back asking for modifications to their previously approved project the municipality must review entire project using the new masterplan guidelines. **No exceptions.**

The area covered by the new master plan must cover the areas of interface with the surrounding neighbourhoods. You can't deal with one side of the canal without looking at the other side. The same goes for the other adjacent neighbourhoods including the services offered, green spaces & height recommendations from one area to another.

Replacing the Bonaventure highway project is interesting but it seems the city has a lot of other priorities to focus on in Griffintown and elsewhere. It would seem logical to make the Bonaventure project the last issue to resolve as it is one of the most expensive. Although the project has been studied and designed the municipality must put it into the order of how and when projects should happen. Personally I question the logic of demolishing the whole thing. The section over the Lachine Canal is quite sculptural, spending money to replace it with a tunnel seems unnecessary and therefore wasteful. Montreal has a history of quickly throwing out the old to embrace the new and often there is not a lot wrong with the old. The city is short on money and this project is a huge expense. If we spent money in our own personal lives in the same way we would be labelled irresponsible. **Stop redoing things that don't need to be redone.** When the municipality has the extra money, absolutely consider the project.

2. **The heights of buildings** – The lack of a comprehensive study or master plan makes this difficult to discuss. There are a number of relevant points to be looked at. Any promoter will try and build a building as high as they can possibly get away with. They are in the business of making money and will do what it takes to make it. In the case of the Nordelec, adding the partial floor to the top and completing the wings of the existing building seem acceptable. Even though the building is this huge monolith in the neighbourhood, filling it in won't change the quality of life around the building except for the increasing parking demands and the increased use of the very limited green spaces. I question the logic of filling in the building because almost half of the new units will never get any direct sunlight and the courtyards will receive very little if any sunlight. The new development to the east of the existing building should have heights kept to a **maximum of 5 to 6 floors**. This has long been established as a reasonable height and density for liveable neighbourhoods because you can walk up without an elevator. The existing Nordelec should not be used as the standard or model for this area. It is unique but the rest of the area should not be built up to the same heights.

The north side of the Canal –Le Canal project is a different story. The proposal is for 7 story buildings with 2 additional stories set back making a total of 9 stories. This is very high, much higher than all the surrounding buildings. Is it really necessary to go this high? The proposed tower is 14 stories or roughly the same height as the Nordelec plus it sits right on Des Seigneurs. Is there a clear understanding of the massiveness of this structure? It is impossible to understand how this tower can be justified.

The most beautiful, liveable & walkable cities in the world – Paris, Barcelona & Rome are low rise, high density. The most desirable communities in Montreal are low rise walkable and liveable – the plateau, N.D.G. etc. The Sud-Ouest has the **amazing opportunity to create a new urban neighbourhood** out of the ruins of Griffintown and the revitalization of Point St. Charles. The model being used for development is the typical promoter driven, high as possible – the more units the more profit, sell the units and don't care about the overall quality of life being created. It is the municipality's responsibility to control the development.

3. **Infrastructure costs** - It was appalling to me to find out that the city pays for all infrastructures being installed on city property. Did I misunderstand this? Additionally, the cost sharing agreement between Hydro Quebec and the city is coming to an end soon from what I understood so the cost of redoing all the wiring more aesthetically (underground) will fall largely on the city. Promoters should also help cover these costs. In all 3 projects there are streets being rebuilt. It is a great idea to use the underground space, however the promoters should be paying for 100% of the reinstalled infrastructure curbing, lighting, trees etc. The **costs of upgrades to all infrastructures** in order to service their projects should also be **completely covered by the promoters**. As a resident, property owner and tax payer, I find it unacceptable that I be burdened with these costs. Make no mistake, these projects make big money and the promoters get very rich.
4. **Subsidised housing** – In Point St. Charles there is a very active group that you are aware of, Action Guardian. I am not a member of this group but understand some of their frustration. For years they have been asking for more affordable housing and the policy seems to be that only projects over 200 units have to respond to this. Is this meeting the needs of the community? It appears that the frustration level is going up and not down, so something is not working. Consider creating a comprehensive strategy including financial contributions from the smaller projects. There seems to be construction and renovation projects on every block in PSC but they are too small for the policy to apply. Why not make a sliding scale so promoters of 5, 10 and 20 unit buildings also have to contribute financially to affordable housing. Not just for small square footage units which tend to see a big turn-over but large units for families who can stay established in the neighbourhood. A couple with children must leave to go to the suburbs... This phenomenon has to be reversed. **If the municipality puts in place a comprehensive affordable housing strategy and it works, the community will be stronger for it.**

5. **Traffic** – the objective of fewer cars per capita is a terrific goal but the municipality wants to significantly increase the number of households in the area as well. The traffic getting over the 3 bridges and through a residential neighbourhood is already tedious and it will only get worse. Was there any thought of connecting Guy St. with Bridge St., adding a new bridge over the canal? They are directly aligned and the huge number of cars that drive through the communities every day on their way back and forth from the south shore would be diverted making much more pleasant communities to live in. The communities will be less congested and more walkable/bikeable.

6. **Sustainability and heat islands** - PSC does not have a lot of green. Most of the buildings are built right up to the sidewalk which makes the streets very mineral and heat collectors. Builders are allowed to cover 75 – 80 % of the land, in some cases 100%. This is totally contrary to sustainable development principals. The more hard surfaces we have the hotter it is and the more water is directed to the storm drains with virtually nothing percolating in to replenish the ground water. There is a **need to densify the city but the price to be paid cannot be the environment**. White roofs are a step in the right direction but green roofs are the next essential step. They are efficient at reducing temperatures and allowing water to be evaporated back into the atmosphere which has a cooling effect and reduces runoff to storm drains. Green roofs can even be used for urban agriculture. Neighbourhood wide planning to send storm water runoff to retention basins and bio-swales is cheaper than increasing or replacing existing storm drains. They can be added into the greenspace network and often take very little space but can add tremendously to the ambiance of streets and parks. Make Griffintown and PSC into a showcase of 21st design with a sustainability conscience.

7. **Street trees** are planted in very small tree pits in the sidewalk. Tree pits being installed today are the same size as what was being built 30 years ago. The accepted practice over the last 20 years has been to construct much bigger planting pits to allow the trees to have a fighting chance and a healthy future. This standard is generally not applied in the Sud-Ouest. The results of the small tree pits are that the trees are stressed and dwarfed by their growing conditions. Last spring, as I walked my dog, I noticed a tremendous amount of trees recently damaged by snow removal. You could also see lots of scars from previous years. I decided to count the trees in the blocks around the school complex at Shearer and Grand Trunk. 75% of the street trees were damaged and the damage was bigger than 5 cm. in diameter. This is a major problem to the tree's health. Where is the supervision on this issue or the teeth in the snow removal contracts that require the contractors pay compensation for what they damage.

All 3 of the projects mentioned at the beginning of this brief are putting their green space on concrete slab = green roofs. It will be **essential for the health of the vegetative material that the planted areas integrated into the concrete structure are large enough to support healthy**

sustained growth. If more green space cannot be added at least ensure the green we have is healthy.

8. **Greenspace network** -PSC is surrounded by rail yards and highways. Only Canal Lachine offers a soft edge or green opportunity. Creating stronger links to the Canal is very important and I support the town's efforts on this issue. However the existence of the Canal cannot negate the requirements for green space in the adjacent neighbourhoods. The Canal is also now a highway with cyclists, joggers and walkers constantly zooming by. The adjacent neighbourhoods should have an integrated **network of greenspaces like a green necklace** weaving through all the various neighbourhoods.

Parc Marguerite Bourgeois has beautiful trees but gravel pathways that are muddy and impassable for most of the spring and fall. It would be so inexpensive and simple to add more gravel so the park could be more useable. There is not a pathway to connect to Parc LeBer even though the 2 parks touch at the south- east corner. This is not huge infrastructure cost however a huge benefit by linking the two biggest green spaces together. This park **does not need to be redesigned** and changed, **just repair** the infrastructure and add the pathway link.

Parc LeBer – This is a terrific sports park and seems to be well used despite it being virtually invisible.

Parc Mullins - between Mullins, Grand Trunk and Charlevoix has beautiful trees but the asphalt paths are terribly cracked and need to be replaced. Again this is not a huge cost. The city is trying to encourage public transport be used but the diagonal path through this park which is used by hundreds of people every day to get to the metro station is in dangerous condition. This **park does not need to be redesigned and changed, just have the infrastructure repaired.**

Park Gallery – This is shocking that the city has rezoned this land. It has been a park for over 50 years. **The first park in Griffintown.** In PSC there is one place where you can let your dog run free. Park Gallery is the only safe and sanctioned location in Griffintown and Little Burgundy to let your dog off the leash to get some exercise. An incomprehensible decision demonstrating a total lack of cohesive planning and total submission to developers.

Park Joe Beef is a playing field with a tot lot. The grass is cut but not trimmed along the edges and it seems to be used mostly by dog owners looking for a place to let their dogs run free. It is great the Nordelec group are giving \$300,000 for upgrades. As this park greatly benefits them it would be appropriate for the city to request more money from the Nordelec group. Apparently it is going to be turned into a **soccer field** so for the **exclusive use of a few.** The park should be programmed for use by the community and move the playing field in the park at the west end of Centre Street or the green space adjoining the canal at St. Patrick and the Wellington Bridge. This area of the Point has no large green spaces. There are only a few tiny green spaces. There

is an opportunity to do something special and create a very positive impact on Centre Street and the eastern end of the Point. **This is the park that needs to be designed and invested in.** Move the playing field elsewhere. We the residents need a beautiful space, something we have very few of in PSC.

The current state of most of the green spaces in Point St Charles is lamentable. With all the new construction, densification and renovation, we require green spaces that reflect this rebirth of a neighbourhood.

9. **Changing names of streets and public spaces** – If a name is to be changed, it must be for the correct reasons - celebrating an outstanding life or event etc. Last fall I noticed that one block from my house the name of the street was being changed. I was perplexed. Is this yet again the rewriting of history? This street has been called Richmond for well over a hundred years and now we are to call it rue de la Sucrierie. Wow what an improvement! The Point St-Charles Historical Society is equally perplexed by the change. Yet again Montreal is into changing rather than celebrating it's history. Plus the inconvenience and costs to the businesses and people that live on Richmond street. It would be interesting to know the total cost for this change. There doesn't appear to be enough money in the public coffers for things we need like developing a proper subsidized housing plan or repairing the park infrastructure however the city spends my tax dollars on not only an insulting project but a completely unnecessary one. This again demonstrates the inability of the municipality to set priorities.

Summary:

As a resident of Little Burgundy from 1992 and Point St-Charles from 2008 and I am aware of the tremendous opportunities being created through the renaissance of this area. As a landscape architect practicing in Montreal since 1986, I can see the potential of applying all we have learned about urban settlement and neighbourhood development over the past 150 years. My concerns are that we are not seeing these principles being applied. The municipality seems to be so grateful to the developers, that they are saying yes to everything. The opportunities to create new, beautiful, sustainable and liveable neighbourhoods are being ignored. Griffintown and PSC could be award winning international examples of how to do something right in the 21st century however **Montreal is again getting bogged down in petty politics and a submissive attitude towards developers by the local government.**

We need an **immediate moratorium** on all development in Griffintown and PSC. The municipality needs more from the developers and must **add teeth to the regulations and contracts.** Most importantly **listen and act to benefit all of your constituents.**

In the past I have looked forward to the developments and improvements of my neighbourhood. Currently I am disappointed, confused and angry by the management of the area. Don't waste this opportunity to do great things!

Sincerely,



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