

Submission for the public consultation re: Secteur Griffintown

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## 1. Neighborhood atmosphere and aesthetic

I have lived in Griffintown since July 2009. Since July 2011, I have lived in Griffintown on the stretch of Notre Dame west between de la Montagne and Guy.

The building to the east of mine, where my three year-old daughter attends Parenthèses daycare and where we often bring friends to brunch at the Griffintown Café, recently won a 2011 Montréal Belles award from OperationPatrimoine.com, as recognition that it is a 'superb property that makes our streets and neighborhoods attractive' and constitutes 'a wonderful legacy for future generations.'



*Fig. 1 Photo of award-winning building, from the OperationPatrimoine website*

The mixed-use building is four-storeys high and the owners of the stores on the ground floor have put a lot of effort into creating a maintaining an attractive building façade. The part of Notre Dame west where I live is pleasant to walk along, especially because the condo complexes on the north side of the street, across from us, is appropriately set back from the street, has grass, lawn and trees next to the sidewalk and because the buildings themselves are nicely textured, with balconies, indentations, and variatios.

From July 2009-July 2011, I lived in the Jardins Windsors, Terrasses Windsor complex that occupies the entire block between St Jacques, de la Montagne, Notre Dame and Jean d'Estrées.

I can assure you that that complex and its buildings will never be nominated for any such award, much less win! The Jardins Windsor building is built flush with the sidewalk, as is the ETS dormitory across the street. (See Fig. 2, pg. 3) The trees in front of spindly and pathetic and provide no shade whatsoever. The merchants in the buildings are mostly chain stores (Subway, Couche-Tard, Royal LePage, Amir, Metro) and their storefronts are bland and boring, if not outright tacky.

Walking along this part of Notre Dame west, between de la Montagne and Peel, is very different from walking along the section I described above. The wind whips at

you through the canyons created by the tall buildings set flush to the sidewalk. People hurry through this section; they don't stroll, as they do on the section I describe above.

I'd like to see more encouragement of small, local business in the neighborhood, something that may require subsidization from the city as incentive for landlords. For example, Marché Bleuét is an independent organic food grocery store that opened last year at the corner of Atwater and Notre Dame. When I spoke to one of the owners, I found out that they had initially wanted to open in the space between the Salvation Army and the Staccaro outlet just west of Notre Dame and Guy. How wonderful would it have been to have a grocer in the neighborhood that is neither a chain like Métro nor a simple dépanneur! However, they were turned down in their attempt to lease the space because the landlord chose instead to lease it to a laser hair removal clinic, Skins. (Now that the Staccaro space is empty, I believe it could be turned into a great space for a local business, but given this anecdote I just recounted, I am not hopeful about the outcome.)

This is my biggest worry about the development currently taking place in my neighborhood and an opinion that I have seen vocalized often on the OCPM Griffintown website as well as at the Journée Portes Ouvertes on January 21: the buildings I have seen go up so far – the new ETS dormitory, the Lowney, the condos on William, on Ottawa, the projects anticipated along Peel – all follow the Terrasses Windsor and ETS buildings in style much more than they are similar in style to the Griffintown Café building, or even my building (Les Cours Versailles) or the buildings along Lucien l'Allier and Place Victor Hugo.



*Fig. 2: Photo taken Feb 9, 2012 on Notre Dame looking east. Please note especially how the appearance of the buildings changes as you move east towards ETS – the façades are varied, interesting and historically significant right until the two buildings on the far left of the photo, i.e., the two ETS/Épicerie Métro buildings, which are boxy and highly unattractive.*

As a resident, I feel frustrated, disgusted by this situation and helpless to do anything about it. Many of the projects have already been approved or in fact have already been built. In many respects, it is too late to turn back and all I can hope for is a slight mitigation of the ugliness of the buildings that are in the works.

I lived in China for four years and watched as they built one giant square concrete or glass box after another and breathed a sigh of relief when I arrived in Montreal and saw how different the architecture and city planning was here – there was attention to history and preservation and an effort to foster culture and personal interaction in the municipal plan.

As it stands right now, the strip of Notre Dame west where the Jardins Windsor and ETS buildings are is no better than the ugliest street in China.

## 2. Parks, planning, family friendliness

My second concern is also one that I heard expressed frequently at the Journée Portes Ouvertes: where do the parks, recreational facilities, and cultural institutions fit into this plan?

My family uses the Lachine Canal often – we run, rollerblade and bike to Parc Jean Drapeau or to Atwater Market and we attend events along the canal. But this is not enough green space for the whole neighborhood. Besides the site of the ruins of the St. Ann church and the dog park next to it, there is no other park that is considered part of Griffintown.

Even the projected parks are planned for the perimeter of the neighborhood, near the Bonaventure Expressway, while what we need is green space in the heart of the neighborhood. The Lucien l'Allier playground is the closest park I have to take my daughter, and its equipment is pathetically outdated. The park is also just as often used by teenagers to smoke marijuana.

I am not very confident about the green spaces that are indicated as part of the Nouveau Havre and District Griffin developments either, given my personal experience with the green spaces in the Jardins and Terrasses Windsor. There, the green space is overly manicured, treeless and has a fountain, of all things (pretty useless and a waste of water, and the building owners refuse to turn it into a skating rink in the winter).

Moreover, there is a laneway (see Figure 3 below) between the Jardins and the Terrasses that was probably intended to be a 'green' space much like what is planned for the Bassins and District Griffin. In practice, that laneway is a barren concrete desert, with ugly light poles, no trees and a strong wind that sweeps all the way from de la Montagne to Jean d'Estrées. It is not pleasant to walk through and doesn't attract any people to just spend time in the space.



*Fig. 3 Photo taken 9 Feb 2012. Laneway that is part of the Terrasses and Jardins Windsor complex – ugly light posts, a strip of concrete, no trees.*

In contrast, the green space just across de la Montagne (Fig. 4), between 525 and 575 Lucien l'Allier and leading towards Place Victor Hugo, is much more pleasant, although still somewhat sadly small and underused. But at least there are plants and grass in that space.



*Fig. 4 Photo taken 9 Feb 2012 – trees, grass and, on the day the photo was taken, birds chirping.*

### 3. Sustainability and environmental responsibility

We chose to purchase our condo in Griffintown because it allows us to walk to work – indeed, this is one of the biggest selling points advertised at the Griffix: ‘talk to us and we’ll save you 1,000 hours a year by cutting out your commute,’ their ads promise.

Having lived at Jardins Windsor, however, I can assure you that this mentality of walking to work and using one’s car less often is not a common characteristic among residents in that complex, even though they live just as close to downtown as I do.

We could promote a willingness to use one’s car less by encouraging more Communauto lots (none of which, according to city documentation) are currently placed in the neighborhood.

We could also promote an increase in pedestrian traffic by making the streets *pleasant* to walk along, something that will not happen so long as the developments continue to build on every square foot of land available (at the expense of grass and trees) and as high as the zoning regulations allow. As Kenneth Greenberg said during the Journée Portes Ouvertes, it’s not how dense you make it – it is HOW you make it dense!!