

**A Women's Take on the Impact of the MUHC Development on St. Raymond and the
broader NDG Community**

Presented by the NDG Women's Group / Les Femmes du Quartier NDG

To the Office Municipal de Consultation Publique

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**Women in solidarity for safe, accountable, creative urban development
in our community!**

The NDG Women's Group (Les Femmes du Quartier) is an informal group of women who have been exchanging about how the up-coming establishment of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) will impact NDG and in particular the St. Raymond neighborhood. While the issues that have been identified in the following brief are of particular concern to women and families, we acknowledge that they are not all exclusive to women. Our desire is that the perspective of women and children, frequently vulnerable and often forgotten in the planning process, be a recognized part of this consultation process. The ideas in this brief are being presented to ensure that these voices and the particular concerns of this part of the population are heard and taken into account in what we hope will follow of a participative, collaborative planning process with the MUHC, the CdN / NDG Borough and the City of Montreal.

A. Safety Concerns: Creation of "sidewalk park"; a potential "NO WOMAN's Zone"

Well-known urban activist Jane Jacobs in her landmark book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" indicates that when people say that a part of a city is dangerous, what they primarily mean is that they do not feel safe on the sidewalks. She underlines that a well-used city street is apt to be a safe street, with a deserted one likely to be unsafe. The need for "seeing that public street spaces have eyes on them as continuously as possible" is presented as a crucial condition to contribute to safe streets, parks and neighborhoods.

There are emerging concerns about the "NO WOMAN's zone" that may be created by the park / green area with the closure of Upper Lachine Road, with design elements that don't support safety for women, children and those who are vulnerable. Accessing St. Raymond on foot from the Metro will be through a tunnel and walking through an expanse that has no activity planned for it other than pedestrians and cyclists transitioning through it. This doesn't respect a basic urban planning principle of the presence of people being a key factor in assuring safety. Women will not likely feel comfortable using that route at night and during lower usage periods or at ease letting their children do so as well.

Recommendations:

1. That the portion of Upper Lachine Road currently planned to be closed be kept open, even if only for bus traffic, thus assuring that there are at least some "eye's" on the surrounding area and thus contributing to the safety for women and children.
2. That the design of the "park" area be reconsidered and measures integrated that will add some form of activities or other measures to ensure more of presence of people in that area, more than simply passing through and thus contributing to increased safety.
3. That measures be integrated in the planning stages to ensure that the tunnel currently part of the proposal for this "No Woman's Zone" area not become as much of a liability and perceived as unsafe by women and children as what the experience of living with the Melrose Tunnel for decades has been.
4. That serious consideration be given to "going over" rather than "under" as a safer solution. There is a precedent for such a solution in NDG over the tracks at Grand

Boulevard where those traversing are much more visible and hence less vulnerable than in a tunnel.

B. Safety for cyclists and pedestrians, putting an end to the “Valley of Death”:

That is the way that the Decarie / de Maisonneuve intersection has been referred to for years now, with many considering it incredibly lucky that this intersection has not yet been the site of serious pedestrian or cyclist injuries. Many parents have said that they will not let their children, even teenagers, use this route because of fear for their safety. With the de Maisonneuve bike path an increasingly popular route for those commuting to downtown as well as for recreational uses, there is major concern about the danger created for cyclists of having to be in the mix with the estimated 12,000 extra vehicles per day through that area. The NDG Cycling and Pedestrian Safety Group, as well as the Westmount Cycling Association, have been advocating a safer solution of a bike bridge and path that would be off-road parallel to the tracks for the stretch between Decarie and Claremont for over two years without any openness or serious studies on the part of the CdN/NDG Borough or the City of Montreal to consider any alternatives to keeping all cyclists on the same road as the extra vehicular traffic.

Recommendations:

5. That a bike / pedestrian bridge over the Decarie / de Maisonneuve intersection be studied and seriously considered as the most evident way to prevent serious injuries and increase safety for these more vulnerable travelers.
6. That in the spirit of transparency, that the studies that provide the rationale for whatever solution is being considered be made public.
7. That the top priority be to find a viable way to provide a bike path that would remove cyclists from the mix of cars, buses, taxis and pedestrians in front of the Vendome Metro.
8. That options for the above solutions include studying a path between the buildings on the SOUTH side of de Maisonneuve and parallel to the tracks as well as the having a cycling path that would double back to the east side of Decarie after crossing over the bike/pedestrian bridge, enter the hospital grounds north of the main entrance on Decarie and continue on the hospital grounds to Claremont or another determined link with the de Maisonneuve bike path to continue east to downtown.

C. Need for social and affordable housing:

There has been ZERO investment in social or affordable housing in NDG since the projects at Benny Farm, over 10 years ago. Families living on reduced incomes desperately need decent quality housing in our community. This, along with strong vigilance to retain decent rental housing that does exist, needs to be prioritized as a counterpoint to the tendency towards gentrification. Families, particularly those living on

reduced incomes and below the poverty line are forced to leave NDG, including St. Raymond, because housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable. Many of these are single parent families, women with their children. In leaving, they move away from resources, relationships and a sense of connection to the community they have been living in. Doing so comes with the price of having to begin from scratch in unfamiliar communities to develop a sense of belonging and ability to access critical resources.

NDG has not been the recipient of *any* of the municipal fund designated to support social housing, in large part because this is to be allocated to new buildings. Given that most of NDG, including St. Raymond, has very little available land to build on this effectively means that our community will be highly unlikely to benefit from this fund. This will thus maintain the current low level of social housing.

According to CDEC analysis of the 2006 census data, the Saint-Raymond area has the lowest quality of housing in the entire borough. They note that since 1996, no new housing has been built in NDG, a sign that the borough is saturated with respect to construction (shortage/lack of vacant lots), confirming that Benny Farm over ten years ago the only sector with a significant amount of new construction. There has been practically no new construction in most of the census tracts in NDG the past ten years.

With respect to social housing, despite the overall number of housing units in the borough and the proportion of tenants, in 2007, there were only 3662 social housing units. The borough is in fifth place overall in the city with respect to social housing, behind boroughs such as the South-West and Rosemont–Petite-Patrie boroughs. The social housing stock is barely 3.1% of the total number of units, well below the average for the metropolitan region, which is 9.4%.

The analysis of the affordability of rental costs for tenants indicating the percentage of tenants who spend 30% or more of their income on rent shows that the percentage is significantly higher in NDG (41.7%) compared to 38.4% for the City of Montréal. The high percentage of income used to pay rent in the entire area southwest of Sherbrooke Street (Saint-Raymond and Westhaven) where rents are generally lower than in the north. This is due to lower incomes in tenant households, which translates into a greater percentage of financial resources being required to pay the rent.

Other conclusions include that housing stock is in worse condition than the average for the city as a whole, while the average gross rent is higher than the overall city. The issues raised by the analysis of the census data include the importance of rehabilitating NDG neighbourhoods (developing the existing housing stock) and increasing accessibility of affordable housing,

Recommendations:

9. That priority be given by the CdN/NDG borough to invest in developing social and affordable housing in the St. Raymond area to counteract the anticipated trend towards gentrification and the potential establishment of clinics and doctor's offices.

10. That appropriate zoning and any other by-law changes be made to provide increased protection of the existing housing stock, particularly rental units.
11. That existing “low quality” rental housing stock in St. Raymond be acquired, with the city fund for social housing used to renovate and improve the quality of these rental units in order that either the current tenants could return to live in the improved units or that these become social housing units.

D. Melrose Tunnel under the CP rail tracks; a long-standing concern desperately seeking a Make-over!

A major concern for women in and around the St. Raymond’s area is the Melrose Street tunnel that allows pedestrians and cyclists to cross underneath the rail tracks to go toward shopping and other amenities on Sherbrooke Street and Monkland and to the residential areas north of the tracks. This is the main connector between NDG north of the tracks and St. Raymond between Girouard and Grand Boulevard, and is therefore critical to people who need to access both parts of the community, either for work, shopping, or visiting. These types of “bridges” between the communities above and below the tracks are very important, especially to those living in St. Raymonds, to minimize that community’s isolation. It is an important way for people who live above the tracks west of Girouard and east of Grand and who take the 90 bus to cross the tracks from Upper Lachine Avenue, and for those who live in St. Raymonds to go home.

The tunnel starts at the end of a very isolated, quiet residential part of Melrose Street and ends up on a nonresidential very dark and unpopulated part of de Maisonneuve Boulevard. For women alone the area has a reputation for being dangerous, especially at night. It is dark, lonely and frightening area. The tunnel itself is frequently full of garbage, still water, and urine. The security cameras have never been functional and require monitoring, and are therefore expensive. In the winter the two sets of stairs from Melrose and to de Maisonneuve are often not cleared, and are therefore very difficult for anyone to manoeuvre, but especially problematic for women with strollers. For cyclists, especially women, children and young people, the stairs are very steep and difficult to manoeuvre In the summer and the winter. When concerns have been expressed, the response has always been that the physical geometry doesn't permit a more gentle access. Surely in this day and age, a better solution could be arrived at.

Recommendations:

12. That measures be planned and integrated to render the Melrose tunnel to be safer and more accessible such as a ramp with a gradual gradient to make it easier for cyclists and people with strollers, wheelchairs.
13. Maintain it regularly, particularly clearing the snow and ice so that falls can be prevented and to keep it clean it
14. Install more lighting around the tunnel and inside it.

15. Undertake negotiations with CP about the alternative of having a bridge over the tracks access like the one at Grand (they have apparently said they don't do this, but there is a precedent right there in our own community). Such a bridge would be preferable to traverse de Maisonneuve as well, to be safer.

16. Think outside the box: If the Melrose tunnel can't be made safer for everybody, especially women, and more easily accessible for bikes, strollers, wheelchairs, people with walkers, and elderly people, then explore another potential north /south access within several blocks, for instance a street that would permit gentler slope etc.

E. Concerns about environmental pollution:

Increasingly, women are expressing concerns of their growing awareness about the potential harm from environmental pollution for themselves and their children. For instance, there are three roofing factories in St. Raymond to the west of a primarily residential area, St-Jacques and Upper Lachine have seen an increase in traffic (diesel vehicles included) even during the construction phase , and it seems that the wind blows west-east most of the time

In following up on this with the local City Councillor and the CdN/NDG borough to look into how this can potentially harmful situation can be dealt with, it appears that this will be a major challenge. We understand that some of those roofing companies were "grandfathered in", but what about our grandmothers?

There is some evidence that women in St-Raymond's are more at risk for breast cancer given this environmental exposure (see reference). Children who are raised here may potentially be even more at risk. As people become more informed about this potential hazard, it is influenced some women and their families to move out of this neighborhood as with even tentative indications of harm being enough to have those with concerns feel that it is not worth taking a chance.

In addition, the proposed site of the new "green space" will be bathed day in the toxic emissions of thousands of vehicles hourly and daily from the combination of nearby routes, including the Turcot, Decarie Expressway and the 12,000 increase in vehicles anticipated to arrive daily in the area of the hospital . While it may look attractive, many are not convinced that this will be a particularly healthy place for people to do anything other than cross through as quickly as they can, adding to the already stated potentially "unsafe conditions" raised earlier.

Recommendations:

17. That an action plan be developed, including studies on the impact on the health of residents with an emphasis on the most vulnerable (children, elderly, those with respiratory problems) to do everything possible to mitigate potential harm from environmental pollution in the St. Raymond's and surrounding area most directly impacted by the existing problematic businesses and the increase in vehicular traffic.

18. That the City of Montreal, the MUHC and the Department of Public Health intervene to propose that the revision of the design of the Turcotte expressway, recently announced as being reviewed and to potentially revised, to promote the priority of reducing the influx of additional

vehicles through the inclusion of express lanes for buses and those with two or more passengers per car.

19. That the MUHC begin an internal campaign with their employees to promote their use of mass transit or active transport such as biking over cars, even at their current workplaces in order to begin the often lengthy process of changing employees habits and contributing to eventually decreasing the number of vehicles coming into the area of the Glen Yards site.

20. That current zoning for industrial uses such as roofing companies that are seen as generally incompatible with residential functions be reviewed.

21. That incentives, including financial ones, be offered to problematic businesses to assist them in relocating.

F. Falaise St. Jacques: In the nineties, initial work was begun by the city to create a linear park along the base of the Falaise that would provide an opportunity for cycling, walking and cross country skiing. This could serve as a much needed link between the Lachine Canal area and the de Maisonneuve bike path, contributing to completing the cycling network.

22. To build on the work, including studies, already completed by the city of Montreal in the early nineties towards the development of a linear park along the base of the Falaise in order to provide a critical link between the Lachine Canal and the de Maisonneuve bike path, thus resolving a major gap in the cycling network.

23. That the planning and development be carried out jointly between the Sud-Ouest Borough, the CdN/NDG Borough and the Ministry of Transport (in conjunction with the recently announced review of the Turcotte Interchange proposal) as well as local community organizations and citizens.

G. Public Participation; Shift this from Minimal to Maximum!

The NDG community has consistently indicated its interest and willingness to participate actively in the planning of our neighborhoods, having done so in considerable numbers in whatever forums have been available to do so. Unfortunately these have been relatively few and far between. The exercise of citizen participation has typically been one of extreme frustration with long gaps of time between those meetings sponsored by either the MUHC and/or the CdN/NDG Borough and the City of Montreal. Typically those meetings that have taken place have been essentially information sessions, largely consisting of the major institutions giving information but rarely permitting real input from the community.

Even the MUHC Good Neighborly Committee (Comite de Bon Voisinage) has had an extremely narrow mandate of considering only irritants likely to occur in the immediate month or two, (the frequency of meetings has been reduced from the initial once a month to once ever several or more). When participants at these meetings raise medium or longer term issues, discussion has been occasionally permitted but typically such requests are excluded because they are outside of the immediate months mandate defined by the MUHC. As one participant put eloquently early in the establishment of this Committee, “perhaps if we were permitted to discuss medium or long

term issues we would be able to prevent issues that will become problematic down the road.” No alternative to provide such regular forum(s) for joint planning exist.

This pattern of lack of public participation seems to be in obvious contradiction to the City’s own Public Consultation and Participation Policy. According to this policy, there are “three pillars of participatory democracy; namely, information, consultation and participation.” While offering to share information is a step in the right direction, this does not respond to this Policy or the desire of our community to have timely and meaningful input in the future of our neighborhoods. By circumventing the pillars of participatory democracy, we are deeply concerned that the MUHC, the CdN/NDG borough and the City of Montreal is missing out on an opportunity to include the resources and expertise of residents in making meaningful contributions to the development of St. Raymond and NDG.

In the preface of this same policy, it states that “Montreal acknowledges the fundamental rights of the public to influence the decisions that affect them and to participate in the development of their community.” With the decision-making process experienced to date, we do not feel that there has been any significant “joint effort” between citizens and the city or real opportunity to act on the fundamental rights the city has expressed. As residents, we have not been permitted to collaborate and participate “with” the city, the borough or the MUHC; despite many residents and community organizations expressing their desire to do so. Rather we have consistently been placed reactive positions where we are only able to express ourselves with respect to our preferences and needs and contribute our expertise **after** the key decisions are made. We do not believe that this is reflective of the participatory, democratic approach stated in the Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities.

The lack of collaborative planning also appears to go against Article 15 in the section of the Montreal Charter which indicates that “citizens may exercise their voting rights and participate, within their means, on issues of concern to them and may respectfully express informed opinions in view of influencing the city’s decision.

NDG organizations and individuals participated in good faith in the initial consultation held by the OCPM in 2005 and generally felt very satisfied that the concerns that were expressed at that time were reflected accurately and with diligence in the OCPM report that followed. However that sentiment quickly disappeared when many of the actions that followed did not reflect many of the recommendations put forward at that time, with inadequate explanations by the respective bodies. There was no systematic response to the OCPM report, with the community having the experience of recommendations disappearing into a void, with the community only becoming aware of follow-up decisions in a piece meal fashion. Many were never explicitly addressed, leaving those wanting to understand or being involved in collaborating on the next steps being left in the dark.

Recommendations:

24. That mechanisms be put in place that engage community organizations and residents in on-going meaningful participation in a joint, collaborative planning processes with the MUHC, the CdN/NDG Borough and the City of Montreal on all aspects of that will impact the community,

including all the issues raised in this brief and indeed this consultation (traffic, safety, housing, etc.)

25. That the tools and training be provided to community organizations and residents to enable them participate in an informed and timely fashion in the planning process.

26. That the City of Montreal indicate publicly, ideally at City Council, their intentions with respect to the recommendations of the OCPM report on the consultation currently taking place.

References

<http://www.breastcancerfund.org/assets/pdfs/publications/state-of-the-evidence-2010.pdf>

See page 89+

Jacobs, Jane. (1961) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Random House, New York. Pages 29 - 46

Diagnosis and Analysis of Socioeconomic Issues for Côte-des-Neiges and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce by Martin Belzile, M.Sc. Urban Studies for Corporation de développement économique communautaire Côte-des-Neiges/Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (CDEC) Available on the NDG Community Council website : www.ndg.ca

Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities

City of Montreal Public Consultation and Participation Policy.

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