

Programme particulier d'urbanisme for Saint-Raymond and the area surrounding the MUHC

Introduction

My name is Robyn Dalton. I have lived in the neighbourhood my entire life and have been on the board of the NDG Food Depot for the last three years. I am very attached to my neighbourhood because of the rich variety of people who live here. We have people of all ages, backgrounds, races, religions, languages, circumstances and income levels living in NDG. This mix, this beautiful balance of people from all walks of life is what makes this such a special place to live. However, I am concerned by the fact that changes to this neighbourhood may make it such that this richness and diversity is no longer possible. Community organizations, whose work is critical in ensuring that all members of this community have access to the various support mechanisms when they need them, find themselves in a precarious position due to the many changes happening in the area.

History of NDG Food Depot

One such example is the NDG Food Depot, which has been serving NDG and the surrounding area since 1986. The Depot began as a project of the NDG Community Council, when it was found that many residents in NDG were unable to access sufficient amounts of food. The project was meant to be a temporary measure to provide people with emergency food baskets, which they could access twice per month and which were meant to provide food for a period of three days. Rather than subsidize, however, the need for emergency food baskets has grown. In 2003, the NDG Food Depot became an independent organization. Along with the growth of the food bank, the Depot has also developed a series of complementary programs meant to accompany our members out of poverty. We offer a variety of skills building and cooking workshops, information and referral services. Unfortunately, with 750 people per week accessing our emergency food basket program, the food bank continues to be a service that many residents depend on, making the need for our work indisputable.

Our Current Dilemma – Forced to find a new home

For the last 20 years, we have been located in the same space. This continuity in our location, the fact that our members could always find us and therefore count on us, has allowed our members to access our emergency food basket program as well as our many other services with as little difficulty as possible. Unfortunately, we have been forced to begin the search for a new home and our members are very worried. Our landlord, recognizing the potential value of our location on De Maisonneuve and Oxford, not far from the new MUHC construction, decided that it was a good time to sell the building. We are facing the challenge of relocating head on but unfortunately have not yet found a space. Despite having strong community support, our organization has been placed under immense pressure, which is felt not only by our staff and board, but more importantly by the many people who access our services.

Why this is important for NDG

Food security is an issue that challenges far too many residents in our community and is one that we work to address every day. On average, 750 people per week come to us for emergency food relief, 35% of whom are children. While we hope that our service is only a temporary measure, half our members have been coming to the Depot for over a year. From recently-arrived immigrants, seeking to build a new life for themselves and their families to older unemployed workers facing age discrimination in the labour market and are therefore unable to find work, the NDG Food Depot is there to provide the support that our community members need in order realize their full potential.

Space Shortage: A major issue facing community organizations in NDG

The Programme particulier d'urbanisme for Saint-Raymond and the area surrounding the MUHC is a plan that will completely transform the face of NDG. It can act as an invaluable opportunity to improve access to health services for residents in this area.

However, to ensure that its development is the most positive as possible, it is essential to take into account the potential negative impact this project may have on community organizations like the NDG Food Depot. As real estate developers continue to see value in building new condos and other such developments in the area, organizations like ours will be forced to relocate. This is a problem facing many community organizations in the area. Rents are becoming prohibitively high and few organizations have the means to purchase property. A coalition of at least 15 organizations was recently formed to address this serious issue. They are working together to find a solution and ensure that they can continue to thrive and support the residents of NDG. Appropriate action by our public partners is needed tackle this dilemma.

Conclusion

The PPU is an excellent opportunity to make number of positive changes for the community. Notably, I would like to see that the citizens of my community facing the hardships of living on very low incomes continue to have access to sufficient food and community support through our organization, as well as access to the improved health services possible with the new hospital.

However, I am concerned that as the neighbourhood is transformed by this incredible development, it will not be entirely transformed for the better. Community organizations in the area must still be able to thrive, to continue to do the important work of providing citizens with the support mechanisms they need when they need them.

The situation now facing the NDG Food Depot should not represent the beginning of a new trend for community organizations, forced to relocate as higher-valued condos and other such developments continue to take over the area. We need public support to help us find a solution to the space shortage in the area. Our role in the community must not be ignored.