

MÉMOIRE / BRIEF

THE DESTINY OF THE BEAUMONT BUFFER ZONE

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Une stratégie pour la revitalization du territoire des
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by

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THE DESTINY OF THE BEAUMONT BUFFER ZONE

For some 40 years, since the days when you could short-cut from the end of de l'Épée across sleeping rail yards to the Outremont end of Querbes, I took Beaumont Avenue for granted. Now, the PDUES is challenging us to reconsider its past and envision the future.

After studying heritage aspects of the Plan that affect Park Extension in a collaborative Brief presented with neighbours (April 9), I have given thought to that industrial zone (Parc-Beaumont-Acadie-railway) that separates residential Park Extension "town" (pop. 30,000) from the "gown" of the new university campus. As a neighbour, Camil Gaston Bréton, suggested in his brief (April 11), economic development is like nature, requiring comprehensive planning and balancing as it grows. We cannot just watch the trains go by.

In view of the ECONOMIC forces unleashed by the UdeM project, I doubt that the Beaumont landscape can remain as it has been. Although some buildings are unchanged for a near century, other sites have been the object of fierce speculation as the economy evolved. Where Léo Perreaut had a lumber yard, at 1100 Beaumont, Egyptian businessmen received a federal industrial grant to build a factory that once employed textile workers. Next door the crafts warehouse was needed as a school by Outremont Hassidim. On the north side of the Avenue, garage owners retired to Greece in 2012 when a condominium developer bought their lot.

SOCIALLY, Park Extension is also changing.

There is a fraying of the traditional pattern of resident ownership and varied rental offerings that previously sustained immigrants and low-income Canadian families here. Availability is reduced, not only by scattered gentrification but also by conversion of 'plexes into student 'boarding houses' and growth since the 70's of City- and Hapopex-owned social housing.

Having had tenants for 30 years I, and others, now find it hard to find "good" tenants; too many are without stable jobs, have debts and need 2 cars to commute to industrial parks. Who can put down roots or contribute to a strong community network while fretting for the future?

Better income resources are needed, while the University and Outremont borough should be given incentives to build housing and schools on the Campus for their anticipated floating populations.

Let us now examine opportunities in the Beaumont Buffer Zone, dividing it into two parts, located north and south (commonly called east and west) of the future de l'Épée park and level crossing axis. (*see map, page 3*)

The RED SQUARE shares the “mixed” composition of Marconi-Alexandra, with a similar history. It blends into the upper Park Avenue transportation corridor where citizens go for services and entrepreneurs seek clients. Creative and coop efforts have found a niche here. Permits have been given for a stimulating crazy-quilt of day-time activities. I say God Bless, insh’allah, may it continue to offer flexibility for initiatives and opportunities for cultural contact and creativity.

Suggestions: An interior bike path could connect to de l’Epée, the ghost Querbes Street be given form and children be prevented from finding the railway tracks at the end of Hutchison, across from the tempting Atlantic building.

The YELLOW CIRCLE to the south is, I find, one of the most exciting development opportunities in the PDUES, although given short shrift in the December 2012 Plan. This area could be an international, light-industry, IT, private sector hub, drawing on multilingual and “economic” migrants living nearby Park Extension, Outremont, and Mount Royal and along the Métro and nearby highways. An architectural competition could be held to design a green office tower “paysage” incorporating heritage elements of the zone (a treed bike/walking path, widened boulevard, openings between structures, heritage buildings, “gazometer” as public recreational space.)

Some heights could extend beyond 8 stories, averaging 8 within the zone by permitting lower heights in the Red Square. We have seen Toronto’s Harbour Front “wall” and Chicago’s articulated Michigan Avenue. Which profile is more livable? Higher, with artistic flare, can instill pride and identity.

Features along this end of Beaumont Avenue could include:

- Construction in phases, within 2 or 3 “cul de sac” entrances off Beaumont, of central green courts with entrances, parking & underground office parking.
- A sunny self-contained court devoted to urban agriculture.
- Underground access to the Métro (sharing UdeM tunnel)
- A pedestrian bridge over the tracks linking a tower to the campus
- Inclusion of a hotel. A helicopter landing pad.

In short, if well and imaginatively designed, this in-between zone offers scope to respond to urban, economic and social needs of the nearby neighbourhood, the adjoining boroughs, the City, and the region.

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Google maps (Station 33)

BEAUMONT BUFFER ZONE

indicating proposed

TOP: Red square (cultural/light industrial)

BOTTOM : Yellow circle (international/commercial)