

## **FROM ROBERT HAJALY**

Good evening. My name is Robert Hajaly, and I am a long standing resident and worker in the Peter McGill district. In brief, I wish to oppose the building of the Prevel project on the former site of the Franciscan monastery. My reason for this is that this land is needed to provide a local, public, outdoor, recreational sport facility for the local community. There are now NO such recreational facilities in this neighbourhood and in all of the Peter McGill district, and this land is the last available vacant land in this neighbourhood that can be used to provide such a recreational facility. It is large enough to provide, for example, a mini soccer field, and in winter, a skating/hockey rink. Bear in mind that there are now more than 34,000 residents in this district, and more than 4000 children (figures from the 2011 census).

The reasons given by the city, and in particular by Mayor Denis Coderre, for not having such a recreational park on the Franciscan site are not convincing. Mayor Coderre, at the Ville-Marie borough council meeting of May 12, 2015, claimed that this site was too noisy and polluted for such a park, because it is near the CP commuter railway and the Ville-Marie Autoroute. If this is so, why is it not too noisy and polluted for a \$100,000,000 condo project and its future residents? In comparison, there are four city parks east of the Jacques-Cartier bridge squeezed between traffic laden Notre-Dame Street and the port railway, and no one has complained about them! Mayor Coderre also claimed that the Franciscan site was too small for a park, but this did not prevent the Ville-Marie borough from drawing up its own plan for a possible mini soccer field on the Franciscan site, which according to the borough satisfied both municipal and provincial norms for such a sport field. This plan is contained in one of the documents listed by the OCPM under the Franciscan site dossier, and is dated April 1, 2014.

Mayor Coderre also claimed that residents in the area of the Franciscan site could use the soccer field of Rutherford Park. However, this park, which is now being developed by the Ville-Marie borough, is in the northeastern corner of Peter McGill district, 2.5 kilometres from the Franciscan site going along the streets, and it will be available to local residents only half the time, being reserved for members of McGill University the other half of the time, even though it is a public park! Therefore few residents in the area of the Franciscan site, and certainly not young children, are likely to use this Rutherford Park. And note that, by comparison, in the eastern part of Ville-Marie borough there are eight differently located sport fields offering fifteen different sport facilities, so there is also an issue of equity here in Peter McGill having only one sport field.

At the information session of May 12 we were told by Ville-Marie civil servant Marc Labelle that there could be created a recreational facility in and around the nearby site of the former Children's Hospital. I agree that an equivalent outdoor sport field could be built there, but to do so the city would have to alter somewhat the local street grid and spend money to create this field, and so far Mayor Coderre has refused to commit the city to doing this, even when asked explicitly at Ville-Marie borough council meetings whether he would do so. So such an alternative site is now merely a hypothetical possibility, which means we are left only with the Franciscan site as a real existing possible location for a recreational sports field for the neighbourhood.

In my view, the chief real reason why Mayor Coderre and the Ville-Marie council under him--but not our local councillor--favoured a condo project over a recreational sports ground for the Franciscan site was to save and make money; specifically, avoiding paying to buy this land and create a public park, and instead receiving the condo tax revenues the city would receive from this condo project. And underlying this decision is the lack of democratic accountability of the Mayor to the people of Peter McGill, since, unlike other borough mayors, he is not elected by the people of Ville-Marie to be Ville-Marie mayor, but rather gets automatically to be Ville-Marie mayor because he is the Montreal mayor. My hope is that if your commission advises against this condo project, this might add to the public pressure on Mayor Coderre to change his position on this issue and be more responsive to local residents's desire for a park on the Franciscan site.

I now want to comment briefly on certain aspects of the proposed condo project, in case it gets the ultimate go ahead. First, I think the height of the proposed towers greatly overwhelms and diminishes the adjoining Masson and Judah houses, so that instead of enhancing their value, as the Ville-Marie 'Sommaire

decisionnel' claims, this height really diminishes their value. This tower height is also greatly out of scale with all the other buildings surrounding this project, and it should also be remembered that the Franciscan monastery was only four floors high. It was claimed by the promoter, at the May 12 information meeting, that this greater height enables more green space to be preserved. However, I fail to see why a, say, eight storey project--allowed by the present 25 metre height limit--could not preserve the same green space; that is, except for the promoter's desire to build more units and make more money, the desire of the Franciscans to get more money for their land, and of the city to get more tax revenues. Your commission should not allow this financial greed to overcome harmonious urban design and integration. And if the developer wishes to build more units at eight floors he can create a 'U' by uniting his two buildings, thus recreating the plan of the monastery and its chapel, without sacrificing any adjoining green space.

My next concern is with the affordable housing to be built in this project. When I asked the developer at the May 12 meeting what percentage of this affordable housing would be for family units, he replied, "none". I consider this to be unacceptable. Everyone knows that housing for families downtown or close to it is expensive, making it impossible for most families to live there if they want to. And yet the city talks about the desirability of attracting families away from the suburbs to the city, and of social 'mixity'. I agree that these things are desirable, and also families with children are more likely to demand public facilities which improve the quality of a neighbourhood. Therefore, please recommend that the developer build at least half of his affordable units as family units, at prices low enough to qualify for city subsidies for such units; and to help him do this, the city should raise the sale price at which a unit can qualify for such subsidies, at least for the downtown area where the costs of land, and therefore of building, are higher.

My last concern is with where the social housing financed by the promoter's donation for such housing will be built. When I asked civil servant Marc Labelle at the May 12 meeting whether such housing would be built specifically in the Peter McGill district he said that he could not guarantee this; he could only confirm that it would be built somewhere in Ville-Marie borough. I consider this to be unacceptable. As of the end of 2012, according to Ville-Marie borough figures, while there were 6190 social housing units, other than old age units, in Ville-Marie borough outside of Peter McGill, there were only 68 such units in Peter McGill. This is despite about 40% of Peter McGill residents being below the poverty line, according to census statistics, and there being a fair number of homeless people, including (but not only) aboriginal people. So please recommend that this social housing be built specifically in Peter McGill, to satisfy our greater need for such housing.

In ending, I would like to avoid any possible confusion that might have been created by my last few recommendations, by repeating that I am opposed to the building of the Prevel condo project **in any form** on the Franciscan site, and favour instead the creation there of a local, public, outdoor, recreational sport facility. I added the last few recommendations only because of the fear that in the end this project will go ahead, even if you recommend against it. But this should not prevent you from recommending exactly this, that this condo project should not be built in any form, and instead this site should be used for a public park to meet local residents's needs.

Yours sincerely, Robert Hajaly