

**Memoir presented to the OCPM
Future development of the “185”
Pierrefonds West**

Michael Labelle

- **Development of the “185” needs to be an experiment in the future**
- **Montreal does not face a critical shortage of alternative building sites right now – there is no rush**
- **We should have a real design contest with cash incentives for the area**
- **Quality planning requires a quality process**
- **Promoters are pulling numbers out of the air when it comes to economic benefits**
- **There are no cost estimates for the required infrastructure for the city and time horizon for their implementation**
- **Too much of this “planning” process has taken place behind close doors with little or no public input**
- **Development of the “185” should be a case study in excellence**
- **The mistakes of the past should never be repeated**

I write this memoir with great cynicism towards the current public consultation taking place. The OCPM enacted a similar but broader consultation in 2007. Its recommendations for the west of Pierrefonds were to maintain the AG (agricultural) zoning until a PPU had been put in place for the sector. The message was clear – GO SLOW.

Neither the Pierrefonds borough council nor that of the City of Montreal chose to respect the OCPM's recommendations and allowed for RE residential zoning and skip development to take place.

The borough council allowed for a “pilot” project to move ahead in the west once new services had been installed, allowing for further destruction of the heritage character of Gouin Boulevard.

When questioned on why the borough had not followed the OCPM's directives, the current borough of Pierrefonds-Roxboro provided the following response through the office of its director general

You also mentioned in your letter that the zoning changes have allowed skip development west of the cemetery on boulevard Gouin Ouest. The development in question was actually a pilot project for the development of the Pierrefonds West area. Also, as you might be aware, the borough is working on the planning of a special project for the Pierrefonds West area. The eventual adoption of a special project by-law is actually the most appropriate planning tool for the borough to control the intensity and the deployment of development of the Pierrefonds West area on a long-term vision. Presentations and consultations concerning the planning of Pierrefonds West area should be held in 2016-2017.

Photos of the impact of these changes on the rural landscape of Gouin Boulevard are on the following page. I would invite the OCPM to find the desirable attributes of this “pilot” project.

Of particular interest is how an existing home was moved closer to Gouin Boulevard, and three new ones were built. Gouin Boulevard is a major thorough fare with heavy traffic flows during the mornings and afternoons as people travel back and forth to Charlemagne school.

The Pierrefonds city council had wanted to preserve the rural character of Gouin Boulevard and increase construction density slowly as it moved south towards the limits of Kirkland. One word can be used to describe this “pilot” project and that is mediocre.

The immediate economic interests of developers took precedence over the long term interests of the community.

Gouin boulevard west Prior to “pilot project”



Gouin Boulevard after “pilot project”



A brief history – speaking from experience

My family settled in the west of Pierrefonds in the early 1950's. My father was a WW II veteran who had served 9 years as an officer with the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery .He commanded an anti-aircraft battery during the Battle of Britain and was a forward observation officer during the Italian campaign.

He was elected Mayor of Pierrefonds in 1963 and served one term. He was defeated in 1966 by 5 votes having been accused of stopping a real estate development in what is now Cap Saint-Jacques Regional Park.

Below is a text he wrote just prior to the elections of 1966.

Quite simply the decision facing the new residents of the period 1957, '58 and '59 was this: "Was the administration of the Town going to function for the benefit of land speculators, favored contractors, and members of Council who might line their pockets, or was the Town to be administered for the benefit of the homeowners and their families?"

It is ironic that not much has changed in the past 51 years when this text was written, public trust in our institutions has not improved.

My childhood memories of the west of Pierrefonds, are a rural landscape of farms and open fields. There was a fully operational dairy farm with 40 head of cattle and a stainless tanker truck would roll up and down Gouin boulevard carrying fresh milk. We had green house operators and market gardeners. My own family had a large garden on their 4 acre property. We raised chickens and pigs. In the summer private beaches would be full of people from the city seeking to escape the heat while we swam in the rivers and lakes when and wherever we felt like it.

In the early 1970's the family of a good friend of mine who lived next door moved to Washington D.C. and he ended up putting down roots in the town of Reston in Fairfax County Virginia.

For those of you who don't know the city of Reston, the following is courtesy of wikipedia:

Reston was conceived as a planned community by Robert E. Simon. Founded on April 10, 1964 (Simon's 50th birthday) and named for his initials, it was one of the first modern post war planned communities in America, which sparked a revival of the planned community concept. Simon's family had recently sold Carnegie Hall and Simon used the funds to create Reston. Simon hired Conklin Rossant Architects as master planners to incorporate higher density housing to conserve open space, as well as mixed use areas for industry, business, recreation, education, and housing.

My many visits to Reston made a lasting impression on as they reinforced the notion of "where there's a will, there's a way".

My thoughts on urban planning were further influenced by my years spent at the University of Guelph. Here we had a learning institution settled in a well planned rural community.

Again this text courtesy of wikipedia describes Guelph.

Guelph was selected as the headquarters of British development firm “the Canadian Company” by its first superintendent John Galt, a popular Scottish novelist who designed the town to attract settlers and the surrounding countryside. Galt designed the town to resemble a European city centre, complete with squares, broad main streets and narrow side streets, resulting in a variety of block sizes and shapes which are still in place today. The street plan was laid out in a radial street and grid system that branches out from downtown a technique which was also employed in other planned towns of this era.

My limited experience lead me to the conclusion is that although you cannot always contain development you can always control it.

And that uncontrolled and poorly planned urban development benefits no one in the long run.

My family background and interest in urban planning lead me in to municipal politics and I was first elected a Pierrefonds city councilor in 1989. And from 1993 to 2001, I was the district councilor for the area in question.

During my tenure as councilor we conducted several studies regarding the future development of our western territory. In the year 2000, I invited, with the consent of my then colleagues on council, graduate students in Urban Planning from McGill to use the area for their Master’s thesis group project.

The ideas submitted where of great interest and many elements are also found in the “invisible” master plan that has been worked on by the current promoters for the area.

The message I would like to convey here to the OCPM that despite the sense of urgency imposed on us by the current promoters, there is again no need to rush things.

It would be a shame if we did not once again call upon the all of the available resources and mobilize the best and brightest minds in this city to revisit the planning for the area.

And while the promoters may want to lament the delay the costs will be minimal when compared to the potential long term benefits.

Heritage on the Lake – another failed project in the west of Pierrefonds.

This is a photo Pierrefonds-Boulevard just west of the right of way for the planned north south urban boulevard taken back in 2009. Other than zoning changes that allowed for the construction of 4 story condo units at the end of this “Boulevard” not much has changed. There are no sidewalks, streetlights or bike paths.

The original criteria set by the old city of Pierrefonds for the burying utility poles so not to pollute the visual landscape were not respected by the borough council of Pierrefonds-Roxboro



Below, on the next page, was our vision of Pierrefonds Boulevard in the west was expected to look like and what we had planned for.

While more land intense it supplies a green belt separating the boulevard from the homes on the right of the embankment.

Note that in urban planning it's hard to correct mistakes once they have been made. The borough could easily have allowed for more room for bike paths and other infrastructure.



I have submitted the study produced by McGill University over 17 years ago.

It serves as an example to the OCPM that we have resources available and owe it to ourselves to ensure that whatever takes place is an exercise in excellence – something we can all be proud of in the years to come.

I thank the OCPM for having received this brief. For ordinary citizens this is a difficult exercise.

The current process is flawed and lacks transparency – there is no harm in going to the drawing board – the level of time, effort and money put in by the promoters is greatly exaggerated.

Let's take our time – the land isn't going anywhere.