

Every situation is UNIQUE and every planning procedure has three fundamental components: The Needs, The Site, and the Political climate of the time. True Planning finds an intricate balance of these components that provides a physical product, which embraces the vision of any project in a non-static world. Moreover, in our changing and challenging times, more than ever, this vision must encompass respect to public integrity.

An unfortunate incident that killed competitive cyclist Clement Ouimet on October 4, 2017, has triggered much debate as to the kind of accessibility to Mount Royal Park. The young man lost his life because a tourist vehicle driver did not respect the law and made a U-turn in a reckless maneuver.

Being a serious matter, the Plante administration with good intentions, acted responsibly and blocked through traffic on the mountain, in order to conduct a study, between June 2- Nov 1/2018. The study however falls short in providing a holistic examination taking into account the purpose and identity of Mount Royal Mountain, the Park and Cemeteries. Furthermore, the interpretation of the study misconstrues the purpose and identity of Mount Royal. Therefore, we must start with the purpose and identity of the Mountain and how it is associated to this unfortunate incident.

Mount Royal is a small mountain with a height of about 750 feet that is adjacent to Montreal's down town core. The mountain has three peaks and houses the park, the cemeteries and several adjacent parks and institutions that have been combined into the Mount Royal Natural and Historical District by the provincial government in order to protect the cultural and natural heritage of the region. (1)

It has historical relevance dating from the 1500's and Jacques Quartier guided there by the people of Hochelaga. Only later as the City started growing and changing rapidly in the late 1800's, a Vision of the mountain was created. In 1874, The City of Montreal commissioned Frederik Law Olmstead to create a public park space. Amongst other titles, he was also a prominent landscape architect who had recently designed Central Park in New York City.

Being a man of artistic inclination Olmstead saw immediately the unique value and full potential of the mountain. To design it into a space of relaxation that would be psychologically beneficial to the user.

At that time, its rugged topography and blunt vegetation offered simply a basis for this transformation. There was much human activity imposed over many years that required a succession of dramatic artistic and engineering interventions in order to achieve naturalism. It was a work of art and the purpose was one: To offer Montrealers regardless of age, physical capacity, social status or race, an escape landscape close to the city. A note of poetry in the daily noise of urban life through features of a green space.

To this date, and even more relevant than before, this purpose is prevalent and fundamental.

Olmstead believed that the value of any landscape is not in any one element but in the whole. He used the psychological power of natural scenery to design the landscapes needed to create spaces that would enrich and fulfill this purpose. The mountain character of the space was accentuated through vegetation designs, pathways and look out points. All in an effort to fulfill a Vision of a public natural landscape for restorative enjoyment of scenery. (2)

Access to the landscape was very important and his intent was for this city icon to be accessible to ALL people in all weathers and seasons. He took into consideration the harsh and long winter conditions of Montreal. The park was not intended only for pedestrians but other vehicles as well.

The circulation system geared for carriages in the original plan is still relevant to the needs of today's vehicles: A gradual, curved drive, enough to permit steady and rapid movement along it not to exceed the 5% grade in order to focus and heighten the pleasure of anyone's visit. "The park was to be experienced as a series of "successive incidents of a sustained landscape poem". (3).

To this date, that is the purpose of Camillien Houde and Remembrance Roads. They have been designed NOT to simply dissect the Park but to embrace and complement it. Offering splendid scenery to be experienced while driving, walking or cycling. Furthermore, this peripheral artery offers access to the Park, the Cemeteries and the Mountain. It also acts as a crossing route for passers that want to use the road to get from one side of the city to the other WITHOUT invading the Mountain but rather appreciating it while respecting its own character. Moreover, aside from Camillien Houde and Remembrance Roads that are used by automobiles, vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians, important to note is that there are many more systems of pathways that host other users except automobiles.

The main path of Camillien Houde-Remembrance Roads is beautifully curved, single laned, between the Park and Cemeteries, giving access to both the Park and the Cemeteries and provides an essential passage to any visitor who will cross the mountain in an automobile, other vehicle or bicycle.

The design of the road has the capacity for even an increased circulation on the mountain to reflect today's population.

The environmental impact of the vehicles to pass is no threat to the Mountain or Park because it is so intricately sustained by many other variables. Scientific microclimatic studies can prove that.

One can even argue that there is more of an unseen danger to the visitor and the environment from the antennas rather than the vehicles.

- **Choosing to cycle on or through Mount Royal is a tribute to its design.**
- **Choosing to drive to or through Mount Royal is an acknowledgment of its scenic values and precious gift we have as Montrealers.**
- **Choosing to walk to or through Mount Royal is an honor to its pathways.**
- **Blocking, or taking away these abilities is an insult to the Mount Royal Mountain, Park and Cemeteries.**
- **Limiting access to only certain visitors to Mount Royal is discriminatory.**
- **Complicating or taking measures that add to unsafe maneuvers is criminal.**
- **Protecting the accessibility to this IMPORTANT CITY LANDMARK is a necessity.**

In 2018, in a city of tolerance, diversity, rich and poor, climate change, stress, traffic, and construction everywhere, such a positive experience still available at our doorstep is the most profound and effective antidote to daily Montreal life.

The Plante study has concluded that during the summer blockage there was a considerable decrease in the number of visitors to Mount Royal. In planning terms: The identity of Mount Royal has been shadowed.

Therefore, the action required, because of this fatal incident, in order to associate it to the identity of Mount Royal mountain is: **The improvement of safety and accessibility to Mount Royal Park.**

Updating and ameliorating the existing design to 2018 standards that meet environmental specifications, for cyclists, automobile drivers, vehicles, pedestrians, and disabled persons is our now priority.

There is much room for the improvement of the infrastructure and design elements that have not been upgraded to the needs for a safe, coherent, coexistence of ALL users of the MOUNTAIN, THE PARK, and THE CEMETERIES.

The essence of Mount Royal is in its usage.

Let us respect Ouimet and Olmstead, and focus on that.

Politics that play on fear or populism simply disrespect human value.

Clement Ouimet's death is a call to adjust and improve the design elements to 2018 standards.

Let us use design principles that will improve the safety and accessibility to Mount Royal.

Let us also retain our human dignity and ask why we are not focusing on real concerns: What difficulties did the tourist driver experience that made him maneuver a U-turn and why no charges were ever laid in this fatal accident.

Our call is Not to alleviate the PURPOSE and Identity of the mountain.

Let us respect this young man and others who have passed away or injured themselves on Mount Royal by providing ALL Montreal citizens and visitors a safe haven to visit.

Anastasia Kostopoulos
Masters in Urban Planning
University of Montreal

Footnotes: (1) Wikipedia Mount Royal

(2) Mount Royal in the Works of Frederick Law Olmstead by Dr. Charles E. Beveridge

(3) Mount Royal in the Works of Frederick Law Olmstead by Dr. Charles E. Beveridge