

Office de consultation publique de Montréal

Brief for the consultation on Les voies d'accès au mont Royal

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Executive Summary

The City of Montreal, particularly Montreal Mayor Valerie Plante and Plateau de Montreal Borough Mayor Luc Ferrandez, owe a serious apology to all the citizens of the island of Montreal, be they from Montreal proper or the independent municipalities, for the inept way that the city closed Camillien Houde Road to cross-mountain traffic for the recently completed pilot project, which Ferrandez and Plante claim to be a “success.”

Firstly, the road was closed prior to holding public hearings and consulting the public on the possibility of holding a pilot project, especially as all citizens on the island, via their municipal taxes, pay for the upkeep and maintenance of Mount Royal Park and the road. Secondly, the pilot project was initiated without the city/Plante administration establishing the benchmarks to deem it a success or failure and when the results of the pilot project were made public, the “success” was based on whatever the city determined it to be – that is not how successes are determined.

Thirdly, prior to the test, the city did not provide the following information:

- The number of cars traversing the cross-mountain on average weekdays and on weekends, and breaking that down in terms periods of the day and different seasons.
- The impact that the closure would have on other roads that people would use as alternatives to Camillien Houde, including pre-pilot project traffic data and what the expected increase would be on those roads once the pilot project was initiated.
- The level of noise on the mountain prior to the pilot project and what they expected would happen to noise levels during the pilot project.
- Breakdowns on the number of people who visit the mountain from either direction and the extent that they would return home the same way or cross the mountain.
- How many people use the route to visit the graveyards on the mountain – which days and when?
- Breakdowns on the age groups that visit the mountain and how many people would have difficulties walking to various locations from the parking lots they would be forced to leave their cars, depending upon which side they accessed the mountain from. Some people would have no problem, while others clearly would. Nor was it determined how much time those walks would take for various ages and for people carrying various items, which would cut into time that they could enjoy the mountain.
- Breakdowns on how many people use the mountain route to shop, dine, visit doctors, see friends, etc. on either end of the city, or to show visitors one of the premiere sites of the city.

Nor did the city ask people on the following:

- What can be done to reduce the number of visitors to the mountain? This should have been stressed as we have a situation where too many people visit the mountain annually

and that is resulting in serious damage being done to the environment and having a terrible impact on its biodiversity and the overall health of the natural areas.

- What were the alternatives to a full closure that could have been studied through pilot projects that would have limited thru passage to the morning and evening rushhour periods, and some hours at night for people to visit the park in the evening; close the mountain to thru traffic during the weekdays and have it open on weekends when people and families have more free time to relax; and bring in a toll to use Camillien Houde and see how it would impact traffic, with the money collected to be used for programs to maintain Mount Royal Park.
- What their impressions were on the state of the mountain's environment and biodiversity, and its future if appropriate actions were not taken now and that a program be developed to protect the mountain for now and the future?

There are many other issues that required additional information, which had they been asked and the city projected a desire to seek the consent and concensus from the citizenry to act, could have yielded a plan of action that would have united Montrealers instead of creating division and acrimony and demonstrating to people that the Plante administration has only one agenda – its own and an attitude that the opinion of others does not matter.

We saw that attitude reach full bloom, not only with the closure of the mountain road to thru traffic, but with the unilateral destruction of the softball field in Jean Mance Park at the corner of Park and Mount Royal avenues without any consultation whatsoever, with the city citing a ballistics report that it refused to make public. Only now is the city holding consultations on future initiatives for Jean Mance Park – the damage, alas is done, and unless the Plante administration loses the next election, the decades old softball field will be lost forever.

Thus, the pilot project for Camillien Houde was riddled with flaws from the beginning – the concept and the promotion of the concept, the actual pilot project, and the determination of it being a “success.”

So, having pointed out the serious flaws, it is necessary for the administration to apologize for its actions and ineptitude, and to go back to the drawing board to come up with a proper plan to consult the public on what should be done to guarantee an excellent and healthy future for an icon that many believe is the symbol of or city.

Introduction

Mayor Camillien Houde, whom the road from Park Avenue to just past Smith House is named after, completely opposed the construction of a thru road that now bears his name. Moreover, many who opposed the construction of the road, which resulted in the loss a serious amount of forests and natural areas – sufficient reason on its own to reject the road, accurately predicted that the road, combined with the Remembrance Road section, would become a thru-way for Montreal motorists. The thru-way is indeed a pleasant drive – one of the most scenic in the city

with brilliant views, especially at night, and even better when combined by taking the road up to the mountain's summit in Westmount to look at the homes in Westmount and enjoy the view from the Westmount lookout.

So, it should not come as a surprise that many people were outraged by the Plante administration's decision to proceed with the pilot project unilaterally, without consultation on why it was being conducted and the benchmarks to determine if it would be a success, and the full-court press from the city by the likes of Luc Ferrandez, CDN-NDG Mayor Sue Montgomery, and others in the administration to sing the praises of the closure and demonize those opposing it. As noted in the Executive Summary, the pilot project from its inception to becoming a reality, was ineptly handled and alas, deliberately so.

What made things worse was that Ferrandez and others touted a 2008-2009 study conducted by the city, presumably by the OCPM, that supported the closure of the road, with elected officials from the Projet Montreal caucus saying that a nine or 10-year-old study, which only had 4,000 people participate in at most, stand the test of time. As well, excuses were given that previous city administrations had planned to close the road to thru traffic, which made the Plante administration's action appear as one that had the backing of Montrealers.

As we know, more than 25,000 people signed a petition opposing the pilot project and closure, with about 7,000 plus signing a petition to support the closure. Elected officials such as Montgomery and others questioned the validity of people from parts of the city that did not border the mountain and from the independent municipalities, to hold a legitimate opinion on the road closure. And yet Montgomery, Ferrandez, and Plante have no trouble collecting agglomeration taxes from the independent municipalities and raising them consecutively since 2018 to help for the cost of maintaining Mount Royal Park, declaring it a shared service. This smacks of serious arrogance and hubris, and exemplifies the attitude that the Plante administration knows best and that the public should refrain from asking questions – essentially an attitude of “trust us and be quiet.” This was the working attitude of the previous Denis Coderre administration, which was demonstrated daily, particularly with the spending of \$1 billion for the 375th anniversary of the founding of the City of Montreal, including the \$3.45 million for the 27 granite stumps that adorn the mountain – money which would have been better spent to remove invasive species of trees and other flora in the Mount Royal ecosystem and replace them with native trees, shrubs, bushes, and wild flowers.

What to do with Camillien Houde

The Executive Summary also noted some of the alternative to the closure that could have been examined. Thus the question of the integrity of the results of the pilot project and what should be done with thru-way. Remembrance Road pre-dates Camillien Houde and if we could go back in time, the construction of Camillien Houde should never have occurred. We survived without it back then, and we can survive without it now. The road can be restored to a natural area,

complete with a tramway – one or two tracks, similar to the Darjeeling Mountain Railway, which takes people up to Darjeeling, high atop the mountain. The route is scenic and is used by locals and tourists. There is a road to the hill station and tea plantations, but it has been there for over 200 years. Camillien Houde was only built in the 1950s, and sadly its construction not only damaged the park and its ecosystem, splitting the parts of the park into sections, but Mayor Jean Drapeau took upon himself to have several hundred thousand trees cut down to “improve” the look of the mountain. Drapeau’s actions – building the road and the terrible felling of the trees and the impact on wildlife, is still being felt.

I fully realize that there is no going back, and that the road will be with us for quite a while. Removing Camillien Houde would cause a serious outcry, even more so than the pilot project. So, the key question is what to do now. Alternative suggestions were put forward in the Executive Summary and it must be noted that any future decision on what to do, will require the consent of the majority of the island of Montreal residents, which will surely displease advocates of some solutions to the road and the park.

Like others, I enjoy the scenic drive across the mountain, be it just for that purpose or to cut across the mountain to reach Mile End and the Plateau from NDG and the West End. Limiting thru traffic to rushhours during the weekdays and having it open on weekend 24/7 makes sense, but if the goal is to reduce the number of visitors to the mountain – a goal that many support for all the right environmental reasons, such limits would only help to a certain extent.

Another question is to determine the options for the mountain thru-way, and a simple solution is to hold a referendum in the 2021 municipal election. Mayor Plante says she would hold one to seek the consent of the people of Montreal in regards to providing public funding for the construction of a baseball stadium should there be a serious chance to have Major League Baseball return the Montreal Expos to the city. If we can do that, then we can hold a referendum for the future of the mountain thru-way in Montreal proper and the independent municipalities. Such a referendum may also serve as a means to increase voter participation in the next election. This solution is certainly a viable one and we have time between now and 2021 to come up with three or four reasonable and well-explained options for people to cast ballots on.

In fact, the city can seek public input on options with a design challenge. When Stephen Colbert hosted *The Colbert Report*, he initiated several “Green Screen Challenges” that secured thousands of entries. Montreal is home to many experts in regards to traffic and urban planning, and no doubt they and other concerned citizens would participate in such a design challenge if the proper tools were provided and easy to access, in French and English. This information could easily be collated and translated into referendum question options. We can also have municipal officials examine how other cities and national parks deal with similar situations. The information is out there.

The pilot project did not protect cyclists

One of the key arguments put forward by the city for the thru-way closure was to protect cyclists, with the invocation of the death of the cyclist killed by a driver (a tourist) who made an illegal U-turn on Camillien Houde. The cyclist was going down the mountain towards Park Avenue when he was hit.

And yet, the Plante administration stressing its concern for the safety of cyclists, has still not placed a metal fence in the median to extend the barrier – already in place - that divides the two lanes of the road. There is no excuse for this deliberate failure to protect cyclists and prevent motorists from making illegal U-turns. In fact, camera crews from media outlets have filmed people making illegal U-turns, across the double white solid lines, at the same spot where the cyclist was killed.

To make matters worse, the city did not object to the provincial Crown Attorney's office (CAO) to not press charges against the motorist, who is now safely back in California. The CAO had no problem pressing charges and successfully winning a case against a woman who stopped her car in the middle of road, on a curve, to safely a family of ducks cross the road. A motorcyclist, when turning on the curve, hit the woman's car and was killed.

And yet, the COA did not press charges against the man who made the illegal U-turn on Camillien Houde, who admitted to making an illegal U-turn and checking to make sure that no one was coming down the hill before making the turn. Solid double lines mean the same thing in California as they do in Montreal, and the driver was aware of the signs that warned against making U-turns.

The city publicly accepted the decision by the CAO, and by its silence, declared an open season on cyclists by motorists who make illegal U-turns on Camillien Houde and presumably other city streets that result in deaths or injuries. There was no excuse for the city's silence, particularly as we had the precedent set by the successful prosecution of the woman who stopped her car on the road for the ducks.

This is an important point because it completely negates one of the main reasons for the pilot project. The city's report on the results of the pilot project noted that cyclists and motorists are still moving faster than the officially posted speed limits for Camillien Houde.

The pilot project in action and its cost

It should be noted that the pilot project was poorly thought out in terms its planning and actual functioning. While tickets were issued to some people who illegally drove across the mountain, passing the point where they were required to turn around, many still went through and were not ticketed or stopped by the police. The city could have issued tons of tickets by placing a police

car and officers on-site – 24/7. But this did not happen. Nor do we know how many vehicles illegally crossed the mountain.

And we do not know how much the pilot project cost the taxpayer, which is made worse by the lack of benchmarks to determine the success or failure of the initiative. The city should immediately make public the complete cost of the pilot project and provide the complete documentation for the pilot project from the conception, carrying out of the study, and how the report – declaring it to be a success - was determined. If this is not provided, it speaks volumes about how the city manages taxpayers dollars, treats citizens, and determines policy.

It should be stressed that I am not being harsh on the Plante administration for personal reasons as I most definitely applaud the efforts they are pursuing in regards to preserving and protecting threatened wilderness and green spaces in Montreal. This pilot project was poorly thought out and executed; created massive division amongst Montrealers; prevented people to a large extent from enjoying the mountain in the spring, summer, and fall months; and treated citizens poorly and as children by carrying out the pilot project first and then initiating a public consultation process. And as noted, this was followed up by the destruction of the Jean Mance Park softball diamond without proper consultation, followed by a serious refusal to explain why it was done, followed by mediocre excuses, and a refusal to provide the documentation to back up the mediocre excuses for the decision.

Dogs, smoking on the mountain, and mountain biking

Concerning the management of Mount Royal Park, several actions can be taken to now to improve enjoyment of the park by people and eliminate the damage caused by mountain biking enthusiasts that are wrecking the hillsides, vegetation, and disturbing the wildlife inhabiting the park.

Concerning dogs, we need the city to immediately order the animal patrol officers to stop issuing tickets with fines and instead issue warnings. Right now these officers deliberately target pet owners at the park and parks in all boroughs to check for dogs that do not have licenses. This has to stop city-wide as pet owners are not “cash cows” and should not be treated as such. If someone lets their dog run loose, which can pose a threat to wildlife and people, then a warning should be issued, with the name of the person registered so that, should a second violation occur, a ticket can be issued.

Dogs do have a place on the mountain, but should be banned when birds are breeding and looking after fledglings until they can fly. The City of Westmount bans dogs in Summit Park during this important season for birds.

Moreover, the city’s Parks Department should initiate a program to remove feral cats from the mountain, which cause the deaths of many birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians that reside on the mountain.

Concerning smoking, the city should also ban the smoking of tobacco and pot on Mount Royal and all municipal parks, as other municipalities on the island have already done. There is no need for park users to have to put up with smell of tobacco or drugs when visiting a park. For our city to let smoking occur in the park, especially for drugs, is telling people that it does not care one iota about the health of its citizens and the pollution caused by cigarettes.

The Verdun Borough just recently announced that it will ban smoking on the public beach that is now being constructed and be opened to the public in the spring. If this can be done for a beach, then it can be done for Mount Royal Park.

As for mountain biking on Mount Royal, it should be completely forbidden. The city's Parks Department knows full well the damage these cyclists are causing on a daily basis. Ban mountain biking and issue stiff fines, along with immediate and permanent bike confiscation, and the loss of demerit points on drivers' licenses. Do this and many immediate problems affecting the natural areas of the park will be solved.

Protecting the forests and wildlife of Mount Royal Park

As noted, the wasteful spending of \$3.45 million for 27 granite stumps by the Coderre administration could have easily been allocated to removing invasive species of plants and replacing them with native trees, bushes, shrubs, and wild flowers.

One-third of the trees on Mount Royal consist of Norway maples, an invasive species, as well as a large number of ash trees that have to be removed due to being attacked by the emerald ash borer, an insect that is killing them and spreading across the island. These insects are surviving our winters due to climate change.

We need the Parks Department, along with the help of arborists and horticulturalists, to start planning a campaign – which should be initiated as soon as possible – to divide the mountain into small sectors so that invasive flora can be removed and replaced with native flora. Seeds for trees and various plants and flowers can be collected at the mountain and grown at green houses and fields at the Montreal Botanical Gardens and the Morgan Arboretum, with a plan of relocating young trees to replace the invasive Norway maples and damaged ash trees. We have the resources to do this and inaction on our part, means the spread of more Norway maples and the loss of native flora that in many cases is unique to the St. Lawrence Valley and is being lost due to rampant development.

A schedule can be prepared for the flora renewal operation, which will take years to complete via the efforts of municipal employees and volunteers. Les Amis de la Montaigne already conducts operations, via volunteers, to remove invasive flora and replace them with native flora.

Also needed are the creation of more ponds and wetlands on the mountains, which can easily be designed and constructed with the help of wildlife experts, officials from Parks Canada and the

Provincial Park system, and officials from the American Interior Department, who have the expertise and experience in protecting existing habitat and recreating lost habitat across the United States, especially to support migration routes used by hundreds of millions of birds.

We can also use another comprehensive survey of native wildlife, flora, reptiles and amphibians, and insects to determine the health of the populations that are present, find out what is missing or declining, and learn which invasive species have taken found a home at the park. We could certainly help out with ongoing research to determine which animals, birds, and insects are moving north due to climate change and which species were released into the Montreal area. This also helps to identify which areas of the park need to be placed off-limits to visitors and hikers, and where conservation efforts should be focused.

We can also do with more bird boxes on the mountain, as well as bat boxes, and nesting platforms for birds of prey. We should also build some caves for bats to roost in, especially in the winter. These caves should be designed to prevent people from getting inside, save for researchers to monitor bat populations and they can help bats that are infected with white nose syndrome and may die during the winter. We can intervene, via monitoring with cameras, to save them.

Also needed are pollinator gardens to help Monarch and other butterflies, moths, bees, and other native insects; and humming birds. We can have a few gardens, as well the planting of flora all over the park. Also required are more beehives to help bolster the bee population on the island. Honey from the hives can be sold, and the city could secure the help of beekeepers. The Montreal Botanical Gardens and Morgan Arboretum can help with the plants needed to do this.

And speaking of paths of on the mountain, much of the concrete and asphalt paths should be removed in favor of natural paths. Access for those in wheelchairs is important, but should be balanced with concern for the environment. The official paths in the forest should be cleaned up and restored, but the ones created by illegal hiking and mountain bikers should be eliminated. They pose dangers in terms of erosion, disturbance of animals and plants, and ultimately lead to more natural areas being disturbed and damaged by visitors – those with malice and those who are unaware of their impacts.

Reducing the number of visitor to Mount Royal Park

It is well known by the city and the Parks Department that too many people visit the mountain, and by doing damage many parts of the park and get their by car, which increases the amount of vehicles using Remembrance and Camillien Houde Roads. There is a way to combat that and still provide a nature experience for Montrealers.

The solution is to create more nature parks, which would include the creation of the Meadowbrook Nature Park on the site of current 57-hectare Meadowbrook golf course in West End Montreal (one half sits in the Borough of Lachine and the other in the City of Cote Saint

Luc). The golf course can easily be re-wilded and served several hundred thousand people in the boroughs of Lachine, CDN/NDG, Verdun, and LaSalle and the independent municipalities of Cote Saint Luc, Montreal West, Hampstead, and Westmount. Les Amis du Parc Meadowbrook is advocating for this park to be established.

Another park to be created is the Turcot Nature, which needs to be brought back to the original concept of the Falaise St. Jacques-Turcot Nature Park – this can be done rapidly by putting back the 25 plus hectare hillside forest back into the park plan. This park can serve over 200,000 people from NDG/Snowden, the Southwest and Lachine boroughs and municipalities such as Cote Saint Luc, Montreal West, Hampstead, and Westmount, and downtown residents. Sauvons la falaise is advocating for the nature park that includes the falaise, desiring that the falaise be upgraded from an ecoterritory with no protection to the official status of nature park. That point was made clearly at the recent OCPM hearings for the Turcot Nature Park.

The Plante administration is also helping with its plan to convert the municipal golf course in Anjou into a nature park, attaching it to an adjacent municipal park; and the ongoing initiative to create the large nature park – presumably an urban national or provincial park that would include all of Angell Woods, the 265 hectares of the L’Anse a l’Orme wilderness and wetlands, the threatened forests and fields in Ste. Anne de Bellevue, and the Morgan Arboretum.

Without question there are other large wilderness areas and green spaces that need to be protected – especially in the East End, and by doing so and creating a series of large and attractive nature parks, pressure can be relieved on the number of people visiting Mount Royal Park. We have to act fast on this aspect of the problem as sadly we are “loving Mount Royal to death.”

Here are some key points from a recent Gazette article concerning parks and the lack of green space in Montreal - [Montreal has less green space per-capita than other cities in Canada](#); and Montreal ranks dead last among major Canadian cities for green space, with just 250 hectares per 100,000 inhabitants, compared with the median of 473 hectares per 100,000 residents for Canada’s large cities as a whole; that the city would need to add 4,575 hectares of parkland to attain the median.

Thus the importance of the Plante administration’s priority to address Montreal’s green-space deficit, budgeting \$60 million in the three-year capital works program to acquire green space and \$56.8 to upgrade large parks, and transfer \$57 million to boroughs to upgrade local parks.

Thus by protecting more wilderness and green spaces all over the island, with the cooperation of the independent municipalities, serious pressure can be relieved on Mount Royal Park.

Conclusion

The points put forward in this brief address the problems associated with the pilot project that was conducted and offer a solution – an island-wide referendum in 2021 to decide what to do about the future of cross-mountain traffic; suggestions and possible solutions to protect and enhance Mount Royal Park’s ecosystem and biodiversity; way to improve the enjoyment of the park by citizens; and overall thoughts on what can be done to ensure that future generations of Montrealers – citizens, wildlife, and flora – will be able to enjoy the mountain and be able to call it a safe home.

There is much that can be done and many are willing to pitch in to ensure that we get it right. Montrealers see Mount Royal as a jewel that we cannot afford to lose or be diminished by neglect or overuse. They understand the need to cherish and protect it, and do whatever is necessary to ensure a positive outcome. We have the opportunity to secure an outcome that has the consensus of the majority and addresses issues and challenges to be resolved, whether they are popular or not.

These OCPM hearings are an excellent first step and through the goodwill of the Plante administration, our municipal institutions, and the input of the citizens of Montreal, we can accomplish much and achieve serious results that future generations can be proud of.