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Mémoire au sujet de la politique du patrimoine de la Ville de Montréal
soumis à l'Office de la consultation publique de Montréal le 10 février 2005
Révisé 11 février 2005

The publication of the politique du patrimoine must be welcomed by all those concerned with the conservation of buildings and cities. I have devoted a long professional and academic career towards this end, presided national and international conferences on conservation and rehabilitation, supported community organizations and citizens groups in their struggles, taught and encouraged students of architecture to give equal consideration to the conservation of existing neighbourhoods and their residents, to the re-use and recycling of existing buildings for community purposes. co-founded three non-profit co-operative organizations to these ends.

I have advocated the conservation and improvement of urban space for the enjoyment and activity of our citizens, our streets, squares, parks, our gathering places. It has been a lifelong passion that has made me a constant explorer and recorder of city form

I am a critic of the abuse of cities, the savage destruction of their built resources, the creation of wastelands, scars, empty lots that disfigure the city fabric. I deplore the loss of buildings created by earlier generations, mansions of leading citizens, the humble homes of those that built them; hotels, religious institutions, theatres, cinemas, all that could have stood witness to our growth.

I welcome the objectives of the Politique that would improve our public spaces encourage their design, integrate works of art, give priority to the pedestrian, make way for the cyclists, tame traffic, make the city safe for children. I trust that the revised plan d'urbanisme both at the level of the city and at that of the arrondissements will fulfil that trust.

I understand that you have received and listened to numerous presentations from individuals and representatives of groups concerned with different aspects related to our patrimoine and they were no doubt wide and diverse. In recent years I have found myself concerned a number of issues a discussion of which could well exhaust your patience and the time allotted my participation. They have all raised important questions related to patrimoine and the need for public consideration;

Benny farm -a post second world war housing development for veterans a unique example of garden city planning based on models developed in Great Britain. With its population aging it would have been totally demolished and replaced with multi-storey high density development. Years of community effort would have conserved the almost totality of the buildings and added additional

units of similar scale. Bureaucratic intervention thwarted this initiative resulting in the majority of the existing buildings being demolished. new replacement units will fortunately be of a less radical scale than originally proposed.

The Notman House, originally home of the man, who recorded in photographs an extraordinary record of Montreal's built fabric, was to be turned into a bar/club the buildings with which it shared the site originally occupied by St Margaret's women's hospital to be demolished to make way for a luxury hotel. In the face of opposition and the eventual protection of the Ministère de la Culture et des communications, a more modest proposal has been submitted which would use the buildings for residential purposes but unfortunately adds additional housing on the space of the hospital's garden. this project is opposed by neighbouring residents who wish to present their objections to Commission des biens culturels du Quebec.

The proposal by the McGill University Health Centre to close its existing institutions and to centralise its facilities in a so called Superhospital met considerable opposition. Original plans to transform the vacated buildings, which include the venerable Royal Victoria Hospital, into condominiums was dropped and health facilities will be maintained.

A similar debate is raging over **the Centre hospitalier universitaire de Montreal**.

In future it is to be hoped that the fate of individual heritage buildings or sites will not be dependant either on private financial interests or upon the energy needed to rally the citizenry for their protection. Faced with too many setbacks, even the most committed succumb to indifference and inaction

The creation of the Office de consultation publique de Montréal has allowed the voice of citizens to be heard with regard to many issues related to the urban environment. It is however convened at the discretion of the City Council or its Executive Committee which occludes request for debate on issues made by individual citizens or their organizations. Perhaps this will be considered in the new Politique du patrimoine

A reading of the published document shows the diversity of areas classed under the term patrimoine. and I was particularly interested in the a list of committments by the City of Montreal defined in the parallel document Politique de développement culturel which I hope will be met.

An issue which has long occupied my attention is that of **redundant church properties**. I use the term coined by a Commision established in the United Kingdom faced with destruction, loss and inappropriate re-use. When one peruses Simon Jenkin's *England's thousand best churches* one can understand the enormity of the challenge that is faced in that country. With a similar reading

of *Les Églises une repertoire d'architecture traditionnelle sur le territoire de la Communauté Urbaine de Montréal* one appreciates the challenge faced by this city already known by 1910 as **la ville de cent clochers**. The repertoire lists 250 catholic churches and many more of diverse religious persuasion.

The latter part of the 20th century witnessed the total destruction of Ste-Anne's Church in Griffintown, the dismemberment of the monumental basilica of St Jacques and the integration of its remains - the bell tower and principal facade into the new buildings of UQAM -to my shame its architect was awarded a prix d'excellence by l'Ordre des architectes.

More recently the First Presbyterian Church on rue Jeann-Mance was gutted, Only two facades retained behind which tumble the patios and balconies of some twenty condominium units. A later generation might well believe the old church had been struck by fire, rather than by greed, and had been cleverly restored.

The Church of First Christ Scientist, on Côte des neiges, its architectural qualities disputed by the City's Jacques Viger Commission, was condemned and reduced to rubble. Well situated and close to University institutions it could have well served as a fine auditorium.

L'Eglise St Jean de la Croix on Blvd St-Laurent was subjected to radical surgery, its vast interior space stuffed with 59 apartments. The public decor was conserved but its public vocation sacrificed to private interests. The developer of the project is proud of his company's skill in this type of operation and without doubt, seeks further opportunities for its exercise.

In the near future the Diocese of the Archbishop of Montreal foresees the redundancy of numerous churches in its territory. Either this legacy of the growth of Montreal neighbourhoods and their people will be lost to the bulldozer or for those that escape this sad destiny, their remains will serve as masks to four, five or six floors of up-scale housing - Montréal Ville Carnaval!

It is in the light of this valuable patrimonial resource and what might be considered an endangered species, that I examined the Politique du patrimoine section 5.3.2 together with a reading of the Engagements in the City of Montreal's Politique de développement culturel .

Item 2

La Ville s'engage à faire de l'année 2005--- l'an 1 du plan de rattrapage du réseau des bibliothèques publiques de Montréal

Item 33 c) favoriser une plus grande ouverture des réseaux des bibliothèques et des lieux de diffusion municipaux aux artistes étrangers dans le cadre d'échanges internationaux

Item 10

La Ville s'engage à favoriser la mise en oeuvre du **Reseau Patrimoine Montréal** dont le principal mandat sera de faire connaître les intervenants en patrimoine et de promouvoir leurs activités... **en vue de rejoindre efficacement le plus vaste public possible.**

Item 16

La ville s'engage à mettre en oeuvre un plan d'intervention stratégique sur les pôles culturels qui propose les moyens **de mettre en valeur les pôles existants**

Item 4

La Ville s'engage à mettre en place un volet culturel dans **le programme de revitalisation urbaine intégré, à favoriser l'accès à la pratique culturelle et artistique dans les projets issus** de ce programme...

Item 17

La Ville s'engage à se doter d'une signalisation cohérente, mettant en réseau et **donnant tout la visibilité requise aux institutions, équipements,** événements, oeuvres d'art public et autres témoins significatifs de la culture et du patrimoine montréalais.

The network envisaged in these commitments exists already in the form of the numerous churches to be found across the territory of Montreal. They are **significant, visible buildings, easily identifiable,** containing vast interior spaces that could well respond to the objectives enumerated above. Rapidly losing their congregations, they could very soon appear on the auction block.

Connecting this network to the City's objectives, the result could prove quite different. The buildings could serve as:

Local city halls, Libraries, Museums, Centres for local history and ecology, Theatre and Dance space for new companies, Concert and recital venues, Art centers and artist studios....

Inventories of Church buildings exist, they are the subject of scrupulous research and documentation. Examples can be found elsewhere of skilful transformations for cultural purposes.

It is essential that the City develop a strategy for the recuperation of its ecclesiastical properties nearing the end of their religious vocation and which can assume new functions compatible with contemporary needs. To this end it should call upon the collaboration of the Universities' Schools of architecture and planning for research and innovative solutions.