

McGill University Health Centre / Shriners Hospital Development at the Glen Yards Site

Mémoire

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Presented by:



**CONSEIL COMMUNAUTAIRE
NOTRE-DAME-DE-GRÂCE
COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

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We are pleased to have this opportunity to present to this Commission regarding the development of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) / Shriners project on the site of the former Glen Yards. We recognize the importance of modernizing the current hospitals that constitute the MUHC and the relevance of this project for increasing the quality of health care for many in western and indeed the greater Montreal region. The Glen Yards site, particularly with its proximity to highways and several forms of public transport, is clearly an ideal location. It is evident that a project of such magnitude will have a significant impact on the surrounding communities. Our objective in presenting to this Commission is to contribute to ensuring that the MUHC / Shriners project have minimal negative impacts on nearby communities, preserve existing assets and have maximum positive impact over the coming years. The site's proximity to an inter-modal transportation point, with immediate access to highway access routes in a variety of directions, makes it an ideal location. .

Founded in 1942, the NDG Community Council (NDG CC) is a community organization which enables citizens and community organizations to work together to improve the quality of life in our community. In its co-ordination role in promoting social change, the Council develops and supports projects that respond to the needs of local residents. Over the years, this work has involved supporting the mobilization of citizens with respect to a wide range of issues and has led to the creation of many independent organizations that now play a vital role in NDG. Amongst these are Operation Contact that led to the home care services of our local CLSC, the NDG Senior Citizens' Council and Head and Hands. Health care issues have been high on the NDG CC's agenda for decades, with our organization helping surface and respond to the need for home care, working towards the creation of the NDG - Montreal West CLSC and lobbying for quality health care.

The NDG CC has been actively involved since 2004 through its participation in the Inter-Quartier Committee of the three communities neighboring the MUHC / Shriners project. In addition to the NDG CC, the members include the Cote-des-Neiges/NDG CDEC, the NDG-Montreal West CLSC, RESO, Solidarité St-Henri, the CLSC St-Henri, the Westmount Municipal Association and the Contactivity Center. To date, sub-Committees have been working on issues of Employability and Decontamination, with others planned on Housing, Economic Development and Traffic

The NDG CC supports the establishment of the MUHC / Shriner's project at this location. However we do have concerns about various aspects of the development, largely as to how they will affect those residents living closest to the site as well as those in surrounding areas who will experience the ripple effects of such a major project. Therefore, while we are in favor of the adoption of the proposed by-laws, we submit the following issues as considerations for improvements to the proposed development.

1. It is recommended that the proposed by-laws be adopted, with consideration of the concerns that follow.

Site Access

We note with concern that there is only one public vehicular access to the site, with that being located on Decarie Boulevard. Our understanding of principles of other hospital developments is that it is considered highly preferable to have more than one public access point to a hospital. In addition to the potential congestion issues given that the current design for traffic flow has minimal alternatives for entrance should Decarie Boulevard be blocked, it is this factor that we believe contributes most significantly to the vast majority of what will be perceived and experienced as negative impacts (i.e. increased traffic volume) exclusively into the western neighborhoods. A second entrance on the eastern portion, leading to underground parking under the green space, would distribute this more evenly. As discussed elsewhere, shifting the building alignment somewhat towards the east would decrease the walking distance for those parking in such a location.

We are also concerned that there will be traffic travelling between the Glen and Mountain sites. With the current single access point, many will likely take the route through a highly residential area north on Decarie Boulevard to NDG Avenue and across to the Mountain site. This also lends weight to consideration of a second public access point on the eastern sector of the site which would decrease the intensity of the impact on the immediate NDG neighborhoods, possibly linking via Atwater to the Mountain campus.

- 2. It is recommended that there be more than one public vehicular access to the site in order to decrease the intensity of the pressure at one location and to ensure more equity in the impact of the additional volume of traffic on local neighborhoods.**
- 3. It is recommended that a second entrance to the hospital located on the eastern sector, in the vicinity of Claremont Avenue and de Maisonneuve Boulevard, be studied and reported upon publicly before finalizing the plans. It is recommended that an entrance at this location could lead to underground parking under the green space with an underground passageway to the eastern end of the hospital.**

Parking

While wishing to promote the use of public transportation as much as possible as a key environmental measure, we recognize that for many hospital employees, patients and visitors, cars will likely be the preferred modality to access the site. Given this, it is crucial that adequate parking be planned in order to avoid on-site parking to be full. This would undoubtedly send the excess vehicles into the surrounding neighborhoods to seek parking, thus adding to the potential irritants of noise, pollution and safety issues related to the additional volume in nearby residential areas. Neighborhood residents without their own parking are also worried about the disappearance of available parking for themselves. Concerns have been expressed that the planned 2,500 parking spots do not accurately correspond to the equivalent of the existing parking facilities at the combined locations of those to be transferred to the Glen Campus. Reassurances are desired with

respect to the calculation, and in particular that this total include the alternate street parking that is inevitably used at the existing locations when hospital parking lots are full. Parking needs also must take into account the probable emergence of medical buildings and clinics that will spring up.

- 4. It is recommended that a clear breakdown be made public of the parking spots available at the current establishments that will be moving to the Glen Campus, including both those operated by the hospital and those used by hospital linked traffic in the surrounding areas likely to be used as spill-over options in order to demonstrate that what is planned will adequately meet the projected needs.**

Traffic Considerations

We are generally in favor of the reconfiguration of the highway links planned to connect with the site, recognizing the importance of the principle of facilitating traffic entering the hospital site as quickly as possible following leaving highways. There are many related potential developments in NDG, which we believe need to be taken into consideration in order to develop the best traffic patterns. Amongst these are the Cavendish Boulevard Extension, the potential development of the Turcot Yards, the interest expressed by Wal-Mart in establishing themselves in the vicinity of St. Jacques and Cavendish, the likely redevelopment of the Trinity Memorial Church on Sherbrooke and Northcliffe Avenues (particularly critical if developed as a two-story Loblaws) and the added impact of traffic related to the new medical services which will likely arise in the immediate area. Each of these potential changes will have a ripple effect, impacting upon whatever changes take place to accommodate the hospital. We believe that the changes related to the hospital ought not to be determined piecemeal, but that the "big picture" be studied taking all these factors into account.

- 5. It is recommended that prior to moving ahead on major changes that a more global study of traffic patterns in the NDG area take place, taking into account the related impacts of the potential developments noted above.**

We are however concerned with the impact and potential blockages that may result in the surrounding neighborhoods with all the public and employee traffic concentrated in the western portion of the site. In addition to the recommendation related to access, we believe it is important to create alternatives. We note the creative solution in using Pullman Avenue south of the Falaise St. Jacques as a route for that appears to be minimizing the impact of truck traffic during the decontamination phase. This leads us to think that this route could be a complementary route enabling people to connect to the western extremity of NDG and Highway 20.

- 6. It is recommended that the use of Pullman Avenue as an additional complementary east/west route for hospital traffic be studied in order to minimize traffic concentration.**
- 7. It is recommended that all traffic measures to be implemented be assessed, in**

collaboration with local merchants, in order to ensure the minimum negative impact on existing neighborhood businesses.

Promotion of Public Transit

We understand that currently many hospital employees live off the Island of Montreal, making their use of cars more likely. None-the-less, major efforts ought to be made to encourage those who do live within a reasonable area to use public transportation. A public education campaign on the environmental and health benefits of the use of public transit will be critical in order to help bring about the maximum potential change in deeply engrained habits. The frequency and location of bus service accessing the site must also be the most effective possible in order to encourage their use. While this is likely already identified as an important priority of the Société de Transport de Montréal (STM), we suggest that an intensive campaign be developed specifically in relation to the MUHC/Shriners project at the Glen site. This would specifically target employees and visitors preceding the opening of the first phase of the Glen Yard facilities and then be added to with each subsequent phase and continued on an on-going basis following the full functioning on the site

- 8. It is recommended that the S.T.M., in collaboration with the MUHC and others with expertise in environmental public education, develop a focussed public education campaign targetting employees and visitors, to maximize the use of public transport as a means of accessing the site.**
- 9. It is recommended that the S.T.M. examine and adapt bus service to incorporate additional stops, notably opposite the Decarie Boulevard and St. Jacques entrances to the site with a frequency appropriate to encourage the increased use of public transit in accessing the site.**

Cycling Considerations

We are very pleased to see that a new bicycle path traversing the site is incorporated in the site plans. In addition, the redesign of the connections that this will necessitate provides the ideal opportunity to create a connection via the Falaise St. Jacques to the Lachine Canal cycling network. This was put forward in the consultation on the revision of the urban plan for the Cote-des-Neiges/N.D.G. borough, with the creation of such a link effectively meeting a gap in the existing cycling network. This action would contribute to increased safety for cyclists and constitute an added incentive for visitors and employees accessing the site from the west to use bicycles, rather than cars.

- 10. It is recommended that the Cote-des-Neiges/NDG, Sud-Ouest, Ville St. Pierre and Lachine Boroughs work together in implementing a link between the cycling path traversing the hospital site, the de Maisonneuve cycling path and the Falaise St Jacques that connects with the Lachine Canal cycling network.**

It is widely recognized that adequate numbers, quality and appropriate location of bicycle parking contributes to their increased use as a method of transport. Practices of many institutions and corporate settings who have taken a pro-active approach to encouraging bicycles as a method of transportation for their employees indicate that the presence of

shower facilities for employees is a helpful component of any campaign that encourages cycling as the means of getting to work.

11. It is recommended that adequate numbers and quality of bicycle parking be integrated at a variety of appropriate locations, ideally at the entrance to each hospital pavilion and that showers accessible to hospital employees be included in the design of hospital buildings.

Environmental Impacts:

We applaud the priority given to an environmentally sound approach to this project and note interesting environmental measures such as green roofs etc. This is an opportunity to "get it right" on the environmental front, particularly in the context of critical worldwide environmental issues. We urge the MUHC and Shriners to incorporate every initiative possible to reflect this priority. NDG is rich in groups with environmental expertise (Co-op Maison Verte, L'OEUF architectural firm implementing cutting edge environmental measures at Benny Farm, Evergreen, Equiterre, Eco-quartiers, Cote-des-Neiges/NDG CDEC etc) and well recognized for innovation in this area. Other neighboring communities undoubtedly have similar resources which could be tapped for contributions to this aspect of the planning.

Residents in the immediate area, particularly those living on Decarie Boulevard, the St. Raymond area and neighborhoods located north of de Maisonneuve (Sherbrooke St., Decarie Boulevard and eastward) have expressed considerable concerns about the environmental impact on those living in close proximity. We understand and fully support their need to have clear, understandable information about the assessment of potential environmental impacts in the period of decontamination, construction and post-establishment phase of hospital development. This means information on potential pollutants and changes in levels linked with all phases as well as measures planned for minimizing and protecting residents from these effects. The increase in traffic volume is of particular concern that needs to be assessed and presented more clearly.

12. It is recommended that appropriate studies and projections be carried out and presented publicly, along with plans to address the impact of increased pollutants, in order to assure maximum attention is paid to these issues (particularly with respect to how residents living in close proximity to the site will be affected).

13. It is recommended that the MUHC work in collaboration with existing community environmental resources to maximize effective input to innovation in this domain.

Equity - Issues of access, impact of traffic and proximity to green space

We note that the MUHC and Shriners Hospital's physical plants are all located in the eastern section of the site, while the green space is entirely located in the western segment of the site. In addition, the only public entry and the spill over traffic will impact almost exclusively the surrounding western neighborhoods. This creates an

obvious inequity with the majority of the negative impact in increases in traffic affecting the western sector. The newly created green space, a significant improvement and asset, is in much greater proximity to those living in the eastern areas. These factors suggest a clear inequity when comparing the impact on the eastern and western sectors. We recognize the rational of having the importance of maintaining the alignment of the hospital buildings with the Vendome Metro link. We do not accept however the conclusion of the "Architectural Commission" which indicated that it would be more esthetic to have hospital building facades facing Decarie Boulevard rather than green space. We question whether their analysis took the global development picture and important considerations such as those noted above for the surrounding community. Shifting the placement of the hospital pavilions to a more centered location towards the east would permit the same net area of green space for future development to exist, but to be shared more equitably between the eastern and western sectors.

14. It is recommended that the alignment of the buildings be shifted eastward, resulting in the link with the Vendome Metro walkway being located with a more western segment of the construction rather than its current placement.

Use of green space

While understanding that the green space included in the project is reserved for potential development, we are extremely pleased that additional green space is being created for the interim period between this project and any future development. We appreciate the intention of the MUHC and Shriners Hospital to make that space accessible to the public, particularly the inclusion of a cycling link. A certain number of corporations and institutions have demonstrated creativity in landscaping and design that favors public use of green space. In our increasingly dense urban environment, even small spaces are highly appreciated. The relatively small but tranquil space created just north of the Unitarian Church on de Maisonneuve Boulevard illustrates the attractiveness of such a measure. As discussed elsewhere in this brief, we urge that the physical placement of that green space be shifted slightly in order to insure more equity between the eastern and western communities bordering the site.

Given the existence of 5 community collective gardens in NDG and the pressing needs for fresh produce for the recipients of the NDG Food Depot and other food security services in the South-west Borough, the inclusion of a portion of this land for be allocated for the purposes of a collective community garden. (The 5 existing gardens, with animation from Equiterre, a non-profit community organization, involve local families in working together in cultivating vegetables. The harvest is shared amongst those who work the gardens, with a significant portion contributed the NDG Food Depot).

15. It is recommended that design/landscaping measures be incorporated that maximize public use of the green space on the site.

16. It is recommended that, in collaboration with Equiterre, collective community gardens be incorporated into the design of the green space on the site.

Economic Impacts

The installation of the MUHC and Shriners Hospital in the west-end will have a major economic impact on many dimensions of its new location. Our objective is that the implications be as positive as possible, particularly for local merchants and businesses in order to best offset the negative affects of increased traffic, noise etc. We urge that everything possible be done in order to ensure that this be so. The arrival of these institutions in our community presents a wonderful opportunity for the MUHC and the Shriners to engage actively with the local community to promote economic development. While recognizing union constraints with respect to hospital employees, the MUHC and Shriners could play a role in assuring that policies of preferential local hiring and purchasing be the norm for related medical services, clinics etc.

17. It is recommended that measures be developed, in collaboration with the Cote-des-Neiges/NDG CDEC, Réso, local merchants and the personnel of affected Boroughs, to ensure that the economic impact on businesses in the surrounding neighborhoods be as positive as possible.

18. It is recommended that the MUHC and Shriners make a public commitment and develop an action plan to promote the implementation of policies of preferential local hiring and purchasing for related medical services, clinics etc. that develop in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Protection of Existing Resources

There are considerable units of decent quality, affordable housing located in the St. Raymond area and in the Decarie Boulevard / Sherbrooke St. area. We are concerned that the installation of medical buildings and services linked with the hospital has the potential of displacing tenants and resulting in the loss of critical housing in the area. We urge the MUHC collaborate with the community in its vigilance to ensure that the arrival of the hospital does not result in a loss of very precious housing assets.

Conclusion

We thank you for your attention to these concerns with respect to the MUHC / Shriners project and its potential impact on the NDG community. We look forward to continuing to work in collaboration with the MUHC and our partners in the two surrounding communities in ensuring that this major project is implemented in such a way that will have the best possible results for all concerned. We conclude by noting that should for whatever reason, the MUHC/Shriners development project not be completed at this location, that the Boroughs concerned rezone the Glen Yards site to include a significant portion as residential. It will come as no surprise to those who have followed local community action over the past years in NDG, that we would particularly urge that a priority be accorded for affordable housing!

