

Opinions on the proposed maximum height for building in the area and the proposed building Ilot Ste-Catherine

by Chantal Rivest

15th October 2020

Height exception for the project Ilot Ste-Catherine allowing a maximum height of 45 meters in a zone where the proposed new height will be 16 meters

I am firmly against increasing the height from 25m (8 floors) to 45 m (15 floors) for the property between 1920 and 1946 Ste-Catherine Ouest. In fact, that area should be classified as density 3 and the maximum height for such property should be reduced to 16m (5 floors) in line with the proposed changes for the rest of Shaughnessy. This view is based on the following considerations:

- A. Height and visual impact of the proposed modification for a mixed-zone building having a significant impact on residential zone of historical interest in the buildings of the
- B. Impact on air quality, noise pollution and traffic
- C. Inconsistency with height for building in other historical areas in the same area
- D. Misleading information about light impact on other buildings
- E. Ability to address the Mur Aveugles issue in different manner
- F. Misleading statements about 'bringing consistency' in the area

When analysing the points in details, one must consider that the increased in proposed height is for a building in a zone classified by the Ville of Montréal as 'mixed-use area', but the area south of the same is a 'residential' zone of historical interest (Mixed-use area is defined in the Masterplan of the Ville of Montréal as a *diversified areas comprising a variety of activities and housing. A number of these areas encompass sub-areas that are designated for increased housing and employment density. Residential area refers to areas including mixed activities, especially mixed retail/residential streets*).

A. Height and visual impact of the proposed modification for a mixed-zone building having a significant impact on residential zone of historical interest

The analysis as contained in the documentation submitted by the City on Montréal and by the quarter (*Modification du plan d'urbanisme: Abords de la rue Sainte-Catherine Ouest, entre le rues Guy et du Fort*), is only looking at the impact on the axis east to west of Ste-Catherine (mixed-use area), but fails to highlight the significant negative impact that increase in the height for a mixed-use area will have on the south part of Ste-Catherine (immediately south of 1920 to 1946), which is a residential area. The impact analysis was not carried out either by the Urbanism Office nor by 'Verification demandée' par le Comité

Mixte. The impact is clear when one analyses the attached documents and takes into consideration the characteristics of this part of the Shaughnessy Village. There are three types of impact on visual:

1. The proportions are altered significantly between the new proposed building and the area south of Ste-Catherine, which is mainly Victorian Houses of three floors (Document E).
2. Residents of the area south of Ste-Catherine will lose sight of the sky from their house. We specifically note that residents in the new building will get unique access of view to sky at the detriment of the residents on Tupper (Document A).
3. People in the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) will lose sight of the Mont-Royal. (Document B, C, D).

Document B: photo taken on the 11th October 2020 from the garden of the CCA (building closed because of COVID 19). From the garden one has some visibility on the top of the Mount Royal on the buildings between 1920 and 1946 of Ste-Catherine Ouest. The view of the mountain will be even clearer when on first and second floor of the CCA, which is now closed and evidence cannot be produced.

Document C and D: images produced from a similar position of the proposed building using the software provided by Office de Consultation Public de Montréal. The Mont Royal is visible when on St-Marc or du Fort, but the view is now lost between 1920 and 1946.

Document C and D also clearly illustrate that any new development of up to 45m is disproportionate versus the other residences south of Ste-Catherine between du Fort and St-Marc. It has been argued by both the developer and the City of Montréal that the new rise will bring harmony between du Fort and St-Marc, but such harmony will come at the detriment of one of the most important historical areas of Shaughnessy Village, as clearly highlighted by the documents provided by the City itself (reference to the study from Beaupré et Michaud, 1988), that defines as '*néfastes*', the intrusion of buildings between 12 and 20 floors in the area (p. 24), as '*il subsiste cependant des rues relativement homogènes dont il importe de sauvegarder l'échelle: ce sont, par exemple, les rues Seymour et Tupper qui constituent une promenade où se relève la richesse de l'architecture résidentielle victorienne*'. Within this context it must be considered that the area south of Ste-Catherine Ouest between du Fort and St-Marc enlists:

- One *immeuble classé* (level one), the CCA
- Around 25 *bâtiments exceptionnels* (level three), and
- Between 10 and 15 *bâtiments intéressants* (level four).

All of these buildings being part of the '*patrimoine*' will be adversely affected by the proposed exception allowing a 45 metres height building in the area, this exception should not be granted and the maximum height should be the same for the entire area: 16 metres as proposed.

B. Impact on air quality, noise pollution and traffic

The proposed increase will have a significant impact on issues such as: air pollution, noise, car space availability for residents south of Ste-Catherine as access to the building for rubbish collection, deliveries for shops and residents, car access for residents to a building classified as 'mixed-use', thus with high density, will go through a residential zone, not fit for that purpose.

During the seance of the 15 September it has been said that there is a will of densification in the city centre (references were not provided). However, it must be noted that this area of the city centre is already having the highest density in Montréal (The density in Ville-Marie is 5398 habitants/km² as oppose to 22396 habitants/km² in the Shaughnessy area) and continuing to build to increase density is irresponsible. The district has 0.6 hectares of green space per 1,000 residents, while the recommended amount is 4 hectares per 1,000 residents. An increase density without the appropriate **public** spaces such as green space, common spaces and infrastructure is a recipe for disaster as we witness in Montréal-Nord for years.

The development will result in the addition of around 200 habitative units on top of the very high number of habitative units presents in the other buildings on Ste-Catherine between du Fort and St-Marc and will put significant stress on a *ruelle* that was originally XIX century) conceived to serve around 40 habitative units. This will be made worse by the traffic related to deliveries for shops and bars and the traffic generated by the hundred cars coming in and out of the parking of proposed building. The same problem applies to Tupper as the cars and lorries delivering to shops using the *ruelle* will inevitably enter through Tupper street.

In the planning it was not considered that Tupper is a residential area. It is not a mixed-zone area and the area is already under much stress because of the traffic on du Fort and St-Marc generated by the accesses to the Autoroute Ville-Marie. There is already very little parking spaces for the residents in the areas. Adding 200 units will increase congestion, pollution and noise and is straight against the advice of the research Beaupré et Michaud (1988) that advice the City to '*Aménager les rues Seymour, Tupper et Baile de façon à créer un réseau de promenades agréables pour les piétons; étudier en conséquence l'éclairage, le mobilier urbain, les revêtements de sol et les plantations; étudier dans ce contexte l'impact négatif de besoins en stationnement générés par la fréquentation des commerces du Fabourg Ste Catherine*' (p. 250).

In the document produced by the City of Montréal on the 8th of October 2020, a study of the impact on traffic will be made once the increase in height will be approved. However, this is a clear evidence of why such increase should be stopped. It is a laughable idea that you start by defining the height of a building for a mixed-zone area and then you assess the impact of the traffic in a residential area after approving the project. Common sense and all researchers would argue that you start with an assessment of the capacity available to define the height and density, not the other way around.

C. inconsistency with height for building in other historical areas in the same area

There are notable inconsistencies in the proposed change for the urbanist plan. Place Dorchester (1160 Saint-Mathieu Street /Boulevard René-Lévesque Ouest), is a tower of 25 floors built in 1976, with a height in excess of 50m in a zone at density 3 with a new height restriction at 25m. Place Dorchester is served by roads that can sustain a high level of traffic and the impact on the neighbours is minimal. However, it is proposed that a *ruelle* for a residential zone will serve a building with density 6 and height of 45m. Why such inconsistency? Evidence, history, the road infrastructure, the nature of the house stock, and the people living in the area suggest that the entire zone of Ste-Catherine between du Fort and St-Marc ought to be classified as a density 3 area and the maximum height should be 16 metres.

D. Misleading information about light impact on other buildings

The statement *'pas d'impact sur l'ensoleillement des rues Ste Catherine et Tupper'* is misleading. In housing there is a difference between Sunlight and Daylight. *The latter is defined as being the volume of natural light that enters a building to provide satisfactory illumination of internal accommodation between sun rise and sunset. This can be known as ambient light. Sunlight refers to direct sunshine.* The analysis shared by the developer is only looking at direct sunlight, not indirect sunlight. Today it is possible for people living on Tupper between number 1951 and 1917 to look at the sky while sitting on the back of the house (Document A). The light inside the houses does not come from directly from the sun, but from the sky light or day light, this will no longer be the case after a new building of 45m will be built. This is why the height should not be increased at 45 metres, there is no justification for this exception, the permitted height should be at 16 metres as proposed for the area.

E. Ability to address the Mur Aveugles issue in different manner

It is argued in the document from the Ville of Montréal, that an increase in the height of the building will address the issue of 'murs aveugles' between 1906 and 1920 Ste-Catherine Ouest, we note that this is a poor and expensive way to address a problem that can be easily addressed through either a mural or a green wall. The increased height should have a rational or social justification nothing in the proposition as it stands at the moment justify this increased height at 45 metres instead of 16 metres for the rest of the area. In Montréal the 'murs aveugles' are common and are not an issue, they have always been part of the landscape and are more and more used in innovative ways that add value and originality to Montréal.

F. Misleading statements about 'bringing consistency' in the area homogeneity

It is argued that increasing the height will bring homogeneity on Ste-Catherine (south side) between du Fort and St-Marc. However:

- There is no homogeneity in height between the north and south side of Ste-Catherine as the maximum height for the buildings in front of the new development will actually see a decrease in height from 25m to 16m.
- There is no homogeneity in buildings on Ste-Catherine from west to east on the entire length of the street. More precisely, in the area on the north side of the street

most of the buildings are 3 floors. Hence homogeneity should be on the way down, not up.

- There will be no homogeneity between the south side of Ste-Catherine between du Fort and St-Marc and the buildings south of Ste-Catherine.
- Again as for the argument of the 'murs aveugles', Montréal is characterised by its buildings of different heights and of different styles. The argument of creating homogeneity uniquely on Ste-Catherine south side between du Fort and St-Marc is a fallacy.
- Inconsistency with the concept of Shaughnessy Village. The concept of tower is fundamentally against the concept of village. It has a different dynamic with the way that people live and interact. This was clearly highlighted by a study made in 1988 by Beaupré et Michaud (1988, p. 249), who argue that is essential to '*Renforcer l'image du quartier, cet aspect 'villageois' qu'espèrent lui conférer ses résidents.*'

The project Ilot Ste-Catherine Ouest

The accommodation is apparently aimed to people in their 50ies and is for rental. However, a number of features is inconsistent with such target: the small size of flats, the focus on rental, and the ratio of parking places to number of flats. Such features are more consistent with the accommodation for students, attending Concordia and McGill University or short term let such as AirB&B. No supporting evidence has been produced to show how and why people in their 50ies would find the accommodation attractive, additionally, during the question time seance on the 15th of September, the consultant architects admitted that one cannot discriminate who to rent to based on age considerations. This project by its nature and the style of flat it proposed is not consistent with the concept of 'village', aiming at resi55dence with long tenancy and having a mixed population in terms of demographic (age, ethnicity, marital status, etc.) and financial means.

The project aims to be 'revolutionary in the words of the architects, but such revolutionary aspect is unclear. If you wish to have a look at a revolutionary project for people, please have a look at such video (https://www.linkedin.com/posts/world-economic-forum_environment-sustainability-nature-activity-6721344892880125952-7EOH). In the case of this project it is just propoganda. There is no evidence about the sustainability aspect of the building. Is this building carbon neutral? Will water be collected and used for the green areas? Is there a plan for using grey water and thus minimise the impact on water (note that the area i still served by old pipes with high level of lead). Again no innovation that could justify making an exception to the 16 metres height proposed elsewhere.

Commercial role of Ste-Catherine Street

It is not clear what such project is adding to the commercial activity in Ste-Catherine Ouest. It is a redevelopment of ugly buildings and is providing a uniformity of view. This can be achieved with a building with lower height of a maximum of 5 floors/16 meters.

As for the area, a new proper research is required. This was a residential area of two to three floors building that eventually became commercial in the 1920s as houses were used for commercial activities. It then became 'the faubourg of Ste-Catherine' and it is now a mixed zone with several independent restaurants and commerces. At a time where large distribution is failing, there is a risk that the proposed building will not attract large retailers while pushing away small independent businesses. The opening remark of Mr Bruno Collin (paragraph 2465, p. 72 of the transcript of the Seance held on the 15th of September 2020) was that 'urbanism is just about buildings'. Contrarily to this unfortunate comment, urbanism is about how inhabitants of urban areas, such as towns and cities, interact with the built environment. No such study has been made in relation to this proposed building. On Ste-Catherine, a disproportionate percentage of the road is allocated to a very few parking spaces. It is not clear what the City of Montréal wishes to make of Ste-Catherine. Where is the analysis of who visits Ste-Catherine and why? What type of shops are doing business in this area? What is the demographic of its residents? Why are people parking on the street and for how long? Who are the owners of the shops? What is the average tenancy? What causes failures in the shops? The urbanism office argues that this project and the increase in height is good for Ste-Catherine; says who? The personal opinion of the urbanism officer that believes that urbanism is primarily about buildings? Where is the research? If this is all the urbanism office can do? Creating exception to the maximum height a building just because it is convenient for the building developer? What Ste-Catherine needs is a study of the type highlighted above and a complete rethinking of the road use. Then you defines density areas and purpose of buildings.

Other considerations: Administration of the City of Montréal

A public office should maintain a level of impartiality versus citizens and businesses. However, in all the analysis made by the City of Montréal through the representatives of the planning office such level of impartiality was not demonstrated. Nor in the documents presented, or in the behaviour throughout the public hearing. This is a serious concern given the cases seen in the past decade about the relations between large enterprises and public bodies. The City through its administration cannot make exception to its own rules just to accommodate the will of private developers .

Conclusion

The increase in height for permissible development on Ste-Catherine Ouest between 1920 and 1946 is a poke in the eye for a community that has taken much care in maintaining houses part of an historical patrimony of Montréal at its own expenses and that resides just south of Ste-Catherine. It destroys the nature of the village by increasing traffic, especially on Tupper and the small *ruelle* between Tupper and Ste-Catherine. It has significant visual impact on one of the areas of Montréal with the highest level of Victorian classified buildings. It reduces the skylight/daylight for residents. It dangerously increase

density in an area already too densely populated for the existing infrastructure. At a time where the increase in density in town is pushing families out of Montréal, this development focuses on individuals at the expense of a community.

It is hard to understand why the analysis on the impact on the south part of Ste-Catherine between du Fort and St-Marc was not carried out. The powerpoint presentation by the Ville shows photos of the nice front part of the building proposed, and of other '*ensembles d'intérêt patrimonial*' that are far away from the proposed new building and of lesser *patrimonial* importance. It does not show that the proposed building will cut the view of the Mount Royal from the CCA and how it will dwarf the houses on Tupper and Baile. It does not show beautiful Tupper Street with its Victorian buildings where most of the houses will suffer the highest impact by being deprived of skylight/day light and privacy as well as being negatively affected by all the traffic from the new building which will go through Tupper and the *ruelle* between Tupper and Ste-Catherine. It is inconceivable that the impact on traffic will be made at a later stage, when it is going to be too late, the quarter life of the area will be destroyed by traffic and this building will contribute to a reduction in the diversity of the people living in the area. It will increase the transient nature of the population and in terms it will contribute to the decline of the quality of life in the area. Buildings are there to serve people, so one starts with people, not buildings. There was no analysis on how the project of height modification in the area and the proposed building Ilot Ste Catherine will impact on the residents of south of Ste-Catherine and on the buildings on the adjacent streets.

A properly independent urbanist plan for Ste-Catherine and its population would be welcome, a study that takes into account the history of Ville-Marie, something that the current plan and office does not appear able to conceive. With regard to Shaughnessy, it would be great to see some of the ideas presented back in the plan of Architects Beaupré et Michaud being implemented, i.e. how to reduce the traffic on du Fort and St-Marc and give the village and its roads back to the people living there rather than to passing cars and construction developers who are in for profit only and have no idea of urban planning and quality of life in the area where they want to make business.

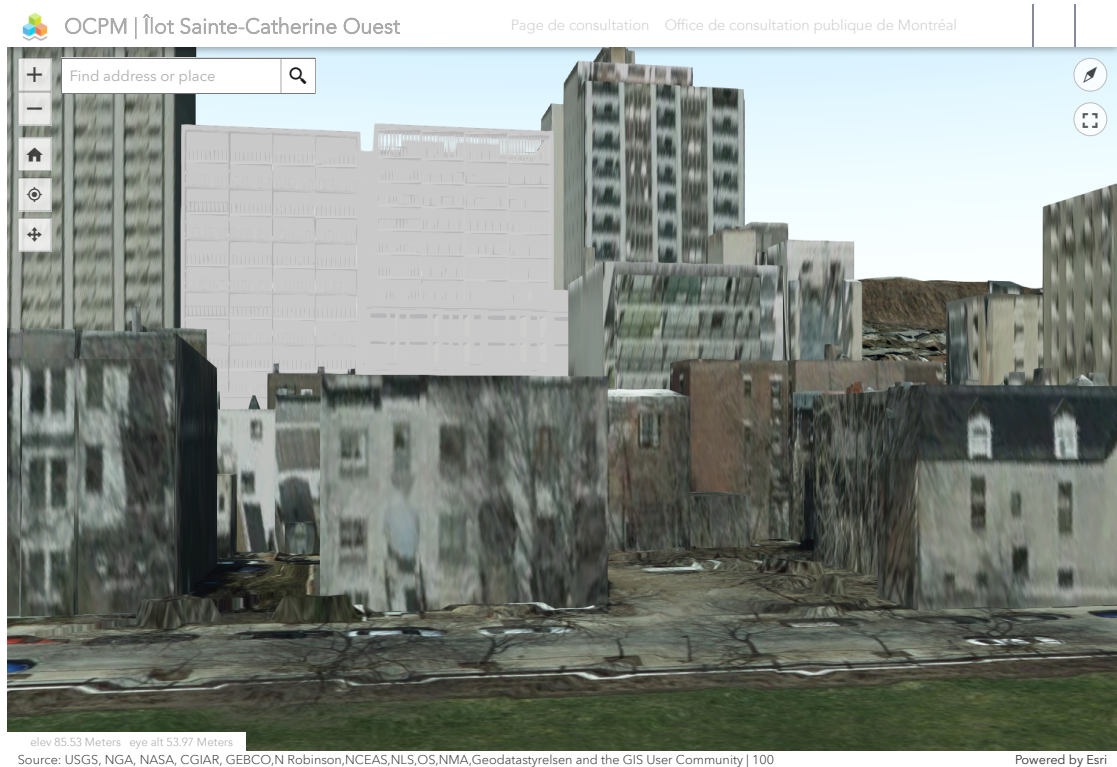
DOCUMENT A - Photo on the back of the new development from a dining room on Tupper



DOCUMENT B - Current View from the CCA



DOCUMENT C & D - Views from the CCA post the development



DOCUMENT E - View from Baille post the development

