

## Submission to the OCPM re the Ilot Sainte-Catherine Ouest project

From Robert Hajaly

Oct. 8, 2020

Hello, OCPM Commissioners;

First I would like to thank the OCPM for providing us the opportunity to express our opinions on this project. To briefly introduce myself, I am a long standing resident of the western downtown area of Montreal, and am an active member of the local Peter-McGill Community Council, though the opinions expressed here are my own.

I have a number of objections to this project which I would like to briefly explain. First, I object that the building proposed by this project, if built as proposed, will **excessively block sunshine** from the portion of St. Catherine St in front of the building. The architects' report presenting this project attempts to show, on pages 64-65 of their report, that the building will allow the north side of St. Catherine St to have sunshine from 12:30 PM-3:00 PM at the equinox, satisfying the city's requirement of 2.5 hours of sunshine. However, I believe the architects' report does not truly show this, leaving aside that 2.5 hours of sunshine isn't very much. Specifically, while at 12 AM the report shows, on page 65, that the shadow created by the eastern part of the project's building projects further across the street than that created by the western part of the building, because the eastern part rises up from the sidewalk and is one floor higher than the western part, which rather is considerably recessed from the sidewalk, the drawing of the situation at 1:00 PM shows these two shadows to be of equal projection, which is false. If the shadow of the eastern part of the building at 1:00 PM were projected further than that of the western part, as it should be, it would in all probability put the north sidewalk of the street still in shadow at 1:00 PM.

Moreover, the report's shadow study does not take account of the shadow that will be projected by the 14 floor high building now being built on the north side of St. Catherine St, between Towers and Fort Streets, opposite the building proposed for 1920-1946 St. Catherine St on the south side of the street. Almost certainly this north side building, called 'Le Gabriel,' will create a shadow on the north side of the street before 3 PM, as the sun moves behind this building. So in sum, the north side of the street will likely have a shadow on it at least until 1:00 PM, and before 3:00 PM, so less than the required 2.5 hours of sunshine. Also, regarding the architects' report's claim that the south side of the street in front of 1920-1946 St. Catherine will have sunlight from 2:00-4:30 PM, this also is likely false, because of the long shadow that

will be projected by the 14 floor building across the street, reaching to the south side of the street well before 4:30 PM. Again, the architect's report did not take account of this shadow that will be created by the north side building.

Bear in mind also that the two existing tall buildings on the south side St. Catherine St between St. Marc and Fort Streets, adjoining the east and west sides of the proposed building from 1920-1946 St. Catherine, also now create long shadows on the north side of the street. The result is that if the building at 1920-1946 St. Catherine St is built as proposed, this will create a continuous unrelieved shadow 390 feet long on the north as well as the south side of St. Catherine St between St. Marc and Fort streets. And this shadow will be even longer and be present more hours of the day in the colder months, when we would most like a little sun on our face. The only way to avoid this negative consequence is to keep the permitted height of the proposed building from 1920-1946 St. Catherine St at its current zoning height of 25 metres (82 feet), permitting an 8 storey building to be built. Even a compromise permitted height of 35 metres (115 feet), permitting 11 storeys, would be better than 45 metres, but a 25 metre limit would allow more sunlight on the street, for a longer period of time, than a 35 metre limit, and so is even more preferable.

I would like to put this issue of sunlight in a larger context. Traditionally St. Catherine St is regarded as being, or as ought to be, a pedestrian friendly street, because it is the main shopping street in the western downtown area, and therefore the street most frequented by pedestrians. And so traditionally buildings along St. Catherine St are less high than those along neighbouring major streets such as de Maisonneuve and Rene-Levesque Blvds, partly to allow more sunlight on St. Catherine St. However, in an attempt to promote the building of new, taller residential buildings along St. Catherine St, for the purpose of densification, the city a few years ago raised the permitted building height from 25 to 45 metres along St. Catherine St from Lambert-Closse to Fort and Towers Streets, and is now attempting to do so to St. Marc St on the south side of St. Catherine. My view is that while densification is desirable, it should not be at the expense of spoiling the environment, and in any case, the burden of densification should not be focused exclusively in Montreal on downtown, and least of all on St. Catherine St, at least not to spoil its pedestrian friendly character by reducing the sunlight along it.

Therefore, I recommend going back to the zoning height of 25 metres along St. Catherine St from Lambert-Closse to Fort Street, as well as keeping 1920-1946 St. Catherine St at 25 metres. On the other hand, I do not support, though am not strongly opposed to, reducing the zoning height from 25 to 16 metres on St. Catherine St from Towers and St. Marc Streets eastward, as proposed by the city. I appreciate that this would preserve the consistently low building height of this part of St. Catherine, but permitting buildings of 25 metres high can allow more people to live along the street without unduly cutting down on sunshine. For the same reason I do not

support reducing the zoning height from 25 to 16 metres along the southern side of de Maisonneuve from Fort St to east of Pierce St, with the exception of using 16 metres to protect the former Victoria School and the Royal Montreal Curling Club buildings between St. Mathieu and St. Marc Streets. I would also use 16 metres to protect some sidestreets having low rise buildings of some architectural and heritage value, specifically Pierce St, St. Marc St south of de Maisonneuve and St. Mathieu St south of St. Catherine St.

I now wish to turn to a second concern, specifically the grossly **insufficient number of 2 and especially 3 bedroom units that could be used by families with children** in the proposed building of 1920-1946 St. Catherine St. In the question and answer period we were told, if I am not mistaken, that of the 198 total units in this project there are only 6 three bedroom units and 16 two bedroom units, whereas there are 172 one bedroom units and 4 studios. The explanation given of this by the promotor of this building is that the proposed building is mainly intended for older retired persons. However one problem with this is that there is already a large residential building, very nearby the proposed building at 1920-1946 St. Catherine St, that caters specifically to older retired persons. Specifically, the Manoir Charles Dutaud, at 2165 Tupper St, has 201 rental apartments for older retired persons, more particularly 136 one bedroom units, 63 studios, and 2 other units.

On the other hand, there is a crying lack now in the western downtown area of larger apartments suitable for families, especially larger apartments that are affordable. This is why the city will be requiring as of next Jan. 1 that new residential developments have at least 20% of their apartments suitable for families. However, I see no reason to wait for this requirement to have legal effect, since this crying need for family apartments exists now. Therefore I would like to recommend that this project at 1920-1946 St. Catherine St have at least 20 three bedroom and 20 two bedroom apartments, and that 15 of the three bedroom and 12 of the two bedroom apartments be affordable according to the city's rental norms, since this project is required to have 27 affordable apartments, and it is larger apartments that are obviously more expensive, and so need more to be made affordable.

I now turn briefly to a third concern, specifically the amount of **financial compensation** that the promotor of this project must give the city in lieu of building social apartment units. According to my understanding of the city's 'Strategie d'inclusion,' the amount of compensation per unit that the promoter must give is not based on the cost of building a social unit but rather on the cost of the amount of land necessary to build such a unit, which for the downtown area is set by the city at \$29,000/unit. So since for this project it is calculated that the promotor must offer

25 social units, the total compensation he must pay is 25 times \$29,000 = \$725,000, which wouldn't build many social units downtown. It seems to me that this basis of calculating this financial compensation makes a mockery of the requirement that developers of large apartment buildings must provide 15% of their apartments as social units. It may be too late to change this current financial compensation requirement for the project at 1920-1946 St. Catherine St, but my hope and recommendation is that this financial compensation requirement should be rethought in any new bylaw covering this matter, if this hasn't been done already.

I now turn finally to the issue of the **architectural integration** of the George Young greystone building at 1944-46 St. Catherine St with the rest of this project. I only wish to make two comments. First, in the 'improved' version of this project appended to the end of the architects' report presenting the project, it is suggested that the lower ground floor of the George Young building should be eliminated and that the upper ground entrance and side window of this building should be extended downward to accord more with the appearance of the new store fronts of this project immediately to the left (or east) of the George Young building. However, I'm against this suggestion, first because this change would spoil and make unnatural the appearance of the George Young building, in fact, violate its integrity; and, second, because you would then lose a potentially valuable lower ground floor, especially if it were used to house again the Cock N' Bull pub or another enjoyable replacement! On the other hand, my second point is that the two new proposed rectangular store front surrounding structures immediately to the left of the George Young building should be made as high as the front facade cornice of the George Young building, to appear more integrated with this building. According to the drawing in the architects' presentation, page 55, these rectangular store front surrounding structures appear now to be of less height than the front cornice of the George Young building.

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