

This is the first time I participate in a public consultation. I am not a resident of the South-West borough, but I live right on the border of the Ville-Marie borough, on Guy Street just below St-Jacques, in a condominium consisting of 7 units. I've been living there for 14 years. Needless to say, some changes have occurred in that time: the Manoir St-Jacques condos (three buildings, three storeys) were erected about 5-6 years ago, another small condominium (three storeys) was built on St. Jacques and Lusignan and, lastly, the Jardins Windsor development was finished a couple of years ago. Except for the latter, the new additions have not had a huge effect on our quiet neighbourhood. Vehicular traffic has not increased a whole lot on Guy Street, which is generally very quiet.

My key concern regarding the new Bassins development is the negative environmental and visual impact that the excessive density and height of four high-rise buildings will incur, and the consequent number of parking spaces required to accommodate the number of vehicles the buildings' residents are expected to have (this in itself contradicts the sustainability objective that advocates the use of public transit).

I would like to make clear that I have no objection in principle to the Canada Post site being redeveloped. But having attended the three evenings of public consultation (February 17, 18 and 19), a large part of the project still seems rather vague. We saw no images of the architecture that is being considered for this development, nor were we given an indication of the kind of businesses that would be sought out to blend into this new neighbourhood, or why it would take up to twelve (12) years to complete the project and how neighbourhoods like mine would be affected. There was also a lot of talk about 'adapting' the east side of the project to Devimco's Griffintown project, which we now know will be drastically revised and reduced in scope. In addition, much emphasis was placed on the rehabilitation of the basins, which appear to be serious budget-breakers, but, from what we were shown, it was difficult to establish whether the overall benefits of restoring them justify the considerable costs involved.

As noted above, my key concern deals with the **PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATION, that is, the Adoption of a draft by-law pursuant to section 89 of the Charter of Ville de Montréal.**

"Adoption of a draft by-law pursuant to section 89 of the Charter of Ville de Montréal. Draft By-law P-09-004 provides for variances to Urban Planning By-law of Sud-Ouest Borough ( 01-280), with respect to height, density, setback, side yards, uses and land coverage."

I believe there is a conflict in the ultimate goal of the development and the means by which the developers wish to reach it, based on the presentations made during the public consultations, which involves three parties.

The first party, the **Canada Lands Company or SIC**, has the mandate to **optimize** the financial and community value of strategic Government of Canada properties, and to implement innovative property solutions to create strong and competitive communities. It has worked on some remarkable redevelopment projects, including Garrison Woods in Calgary, Garrison Crossing in Chilliwack, and of course, Benny Farm in NDG.

The second party, **Groupe Cardinal Hardy**, is represented by Josée Bérubé, by all indications a highly qualified architect and urbanist, and whose presentation on the environmental design can only be applauded. She advocates the need for a sustainable approach that would balance environmental, economic and social concerns, reduce the dependence on cars, encourage the use of public transit, create a friendly and family-oriented community that is livable and appealing for all income levels. This group and Canada Lands hope to obtain LEED-ND certification, which is based on the principles of smart growth, new urbanism, and green building. The concept of *new urbanism*<sup>1</sup> is "**Giving people many choices for living an urban lifestyle in sustainable, convenient and enjoyable places, while providing the solutions to peak oil, global warming, and climate change**". The principles are:

1. Walkability
2. Connectivity
3. Mixed-use and diversity
4. Mixed housing
5. Quality architecture and urban design (Emphasis on beauty, aesthetics, human comfort, and creating a sense of place; Special placement of civic uses and sites within community. Human scale architecture & beautiful surroundings nourish the human spirit)
6. Traditional neighbourhood structure
7. Increased density (More buildings, residences, shops, and services closer together for ease of walking, to enable a more efficient use of services and resources, and to create a more convenient, enjoyable place to live.)

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1. source: [www.newurbanism.org](http://www.newurbanism.org)

8. Green transportation (A network of high-quality trains connecting cities, towns, and neighborhoods together and a Pedestrian-friendly design that encourages a greater use of bicycles, rollerblades, scooters, and walking as daily transportation)
9. Sustainability
10. Quality of life

The third party is **the Sud-Ouest borough**, involved because the terrain is located in their borough and, presumably, interested in a growing tax base. It is seeking exceptions (or a one-time amendment) to two by-laws. It wants to add a height sector of 44 metres (or 14 storeys) and another of 60 metres (or 20 storeys) in an area where the maximum height is 25 metres (= 8 storeys). Examples of how high 60 metres is would be the tallest buildings of the Windsor Gardens (Les Jardins Windsor) at the intersection of St. Jacques and de la Montagne streets. Oddly enough, the borough's December 13, 2006, presentation<sup>2</sup> called for the buildings to respect the current maximum height level of 25 metres. Who or what induced its officials to change their minds?

### **ISSUE: Two conflicting ideas**

On the one hand, Canada Lands and Groupe Cardinal Hardy are promoting a project that hinges on innovative solutions, on a sustainable approach, on the environment, on family- and community-based values and, above all, wanting to encourage people to live in the city of Montreal.

On the other hand, Canada Lands is insisting that it needs 2,000 units to make the project financially viable. The project calls for four high-rise buildings in a neighbourhood which has, for the large part, buildings that are three to five storeys high. The planned high-rises will detract from the overall character of the neighbourhood (rather than enhance it) and spoil the view of the city from the south side of the Lachine Canal as well as from any elevated point. High-rise structures cause a loss of human scale—particularly at street level—and reduce the sense of community between neighbours. These high-rise buildings are meant to be privately-owned residential condominiums, but run the risk of having characteristics more closely associated with a rental building. In other words, people might buy the units as a pied-à-terre or for investment

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www2.ville.montreal.qc.ca/ocpm/pdf/P34/4a.pdf>

purposes, to rent out. The occupants will reside in the buildings, but what percentage will really live there? How much responsibility will they assume for their surroundings? A twenty-storey building does not offer the “intimacy” and sense of community of, say, a four-storey building. Unfortunately, we have no idea what the actual architectural style(s) of the project will be – at least, I hope it is not what has been shown thus far.

### **PARADOX:**

In reply to my question “why 2,000 units?”, Mr. Cavis explained they are needed to recoup the excavation and decontamination costs. I quote (February 19, page 24) :

*« Il y a des coûts importants dans la décontamination du site, comme la plupart des sites industriels qui longent le Canal. Il y a des coûts de déconstruction de l'immeuble, il y a aussi des infrastructures à mettre sur le site : les rues, le bassin, et cetera, et on paie des frais de rétention, des taxes foncières, des frais pour le site et aussi, il y a des coûts liés à la mise en valeur des bassins et des espaces qui sont sur le site.*

*Pour ces besoins, ça prend une certaine densité pour qu'on puisse avoir un projet rentable et cette densité-là se trouve à avoir les 2 000 logements qui sont sur l'objectif du site. »*

I find this a rather short-sighted view. I understand there are considerable costs involved in getting the land ready for construction. But this appears to put profitability above the concepts of new urbanism, smart growth, transit-supportive and traditional neighbourhood development. Is it completely out of the question to consider options that might cost less in order to create a liveable development that is on a more human scale? At least one participant clearly said that this site should be viewed as an extension of Old Montreal. Which is not totally inaccurate.

### **COMPARISONS WITH OTHER CLC PROJECTS:**

The Canada Post land is 23 acres (9.6 hectares) in total<sup>3</sup>. CLC wants to build 2,000 housing units. At 18 acres, the much-lauded Benny Farm will have about 530 units. The redevelopment of the 80-acre (32.37 hectares) Garrison Green site, [w]hen complete, [...] will contain 1,000 housing units of various types. Garrison Woods in Calgary, as another example, has a total of 176 acres (71.2 hectares)<sup>4</sup>. This is some 7 times bigger than the Canada Post site and yet the

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<sup>3</sup> source: <http://www.clc.ca/en/pr/qc/1500.php>

<sup>4</sup> source: <http://www.clc.ca/en/or/successStories/garrisongreen.php> and <http://garrisonwoods.ca.v4.redmanonline.biz/images/RMOimages/siteimages/274/629/Garrison-Woods-Calgary-Alberta.pdf>

total number of housing units built/rebuilt at Garrison Woods is 1,600. The success of this project can be attributed, according to a couple of journalists, as follows:

“Interestingly, Canada Lands Co. set a goal of providing affordable housing options for all Calgarians, mandating that 60 per cent of the housing units in Garrison Woods be multi-family housing (unprecedented at the time).

**However, ironically, the new concept has been so popular that it has become one of the most expensive districts in Calgary, notwithstanding the smaller, more modest forms of housing in a much higher density.**

Garrison Woods has in fact proven successful in more ways than originally expected. Some will argue that the success of Garrison Woods is due strictly to its location.

Location is always a factor in real estate development, but there are many other variables here -- and the bottom line is that Garrison Woods was different, it was gutsy, it was against the odds, and a very risky approach when the tried and true would have virtually guaranteed some level of success.”<sup>5</sup>

Another CLC example is Victoria Village in St. Catharines (ON). The 14-acre (5.7-hectare) site is waiting for approval for a 119 unit low-rise residential development<sup>6</sup>. Granted, this is a different type of development altogether, yet the reason for it is that this site is situated along the historic Welland Canal. “Victoria Village provides yet another example of CLC's commitment to develop former surplus government lands in partnership with local communities and to recognize and celebrate their heritage.”

**Why is CLC so insistent that 2,000 units and/or four high-rises are absolutely required to make the Bassins project profitable? What type of clientele will be attracted to this enclave?** And must there really be one (1) parking spot per privately-owned housing unit (even if underground)? The traffic, noise and pollution engendered by so many cars will surely worsen the quality of air in this area. It also makes me wonder where the ‘walkability’ concept comes in, as well as the whole aspect of climate change. And what about the future design and performance technology of cars? I hope the size of the parking areas will be reviewed once construction is under way.

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<sup>5</sup> source: <http://www2.canada.com/calgaryherald/news/newhomes/story.html?id=a42c85d0-7446-4ae0-8c95-fea3fb52dc0e> See also : <http://www.hometohomecalgary.com/editorial/?id=190>

<sup>6</sup> source: <http://www.clc.ca/en/pr/on/vicvillage.php>

## **CONCLUSION**

The site as we know it is ideally situated geographically. It is surrounded to the east, north and west by buildings not much higher than 3 or 4 storeys. As many have stated before, the site is also adjacent to an historical district, and its south side fronts the Lachine Canal. Given the general philosophy of the Canada Lands Company and the vision outlined by Mme. Bérubé's firm and the architects, it makes more sense to build a neighbourhood structure that could attract a clientele that is environmentally- and socially-conscious. This growing population segment is willing to pay more for quality products, is generally involved in the community, takes responsibility for its surroundings, and seeks an environmentally-conscious lifestyle. It consists to a large degree of younger generations with children growing up in an era of climate change. They are familiar with organizations such as Equiterre and La Coop Verte, and with concepts such as organic, fair-trade products, reducing waste, buying locally, etc. They are more likely to use public transit, to cycle, walk, car pool or use car-sharing networks like CommunAuto. Here is a demographic group that the CLC/Sud-Ouest ought to be targeting if this development were done on a more human scale.

Lastly, there might even be a good number of baby-boomers entering their retirement years who could be seen as another potential target market (assuming their investments recuperate sufficiently in ten years' time). We all know that our society will soon be faced with a massive elderly population. There exists a form of housing that provides a combination of support services which enables seniors to remain independent and active for as long as possible. It is called supportive housing. In general, it ensures older citizens have good access to amenities and resources, and have every opportunity to participate in community life. **Why was no supportive housing included in the plans?**

I sincerely hope the density will be reviewed downwards and that the public will have some say in the architectural design requirements.

Sincerely,

Barbara Dylla  
March 5, 2009