

Dear Sirs /Madam,

May 25, 2009

I am here to present the viewpoint of a concerned citizen. I am also a former student of Marianopolis College and spent two years in the 1980s enjoying the unique splendour of the site of the former Sulpician Philosophy Seminary (also the former Marianopolis for 32 years) now slated for redevelopment.

This site falls within the geographic delimitation of the Mount Royal Historic and Natural District. As such, its “**historic**” and “**natural**” features as well as its location as part of **Mount Royal** are to be protected above all else. This relatively new environmental protection policy is being critically tested by this case.

In designating this site within the Mount Royal Historic and Natural District, the City of Montreal has effectively made a guarantee to its citizens, present and future, that it will assure the protection of this site from over-development that would threaten its historic and natural integrity. “Why?”, we are now forced to ask, is it prepared to allow zoning changes as to height and density of building that fall well outside the provisions of that very protective guarantee?

The current institutional zoning height limit is four stories. Notwithstanding, Développement Cato is applying for new building construction in the range of five to nine stories among 15 new residential buildings. Obviously, having paid \$48 million for the property and having predicated its business model on the number and size of those residential units (as well as those in the original building and the underground parking for 650 vehicles), it must assume that it will get all the zoning changes and green lights it needs to go ahead. Given the building restrictions within the Mount Royal Historic and Natural District, if this is allowed to go through, the message that the City of Montreal is sending its citizens is that our conservation policies are mere window-dressing for a government purporting to care about its historic conservation sites, when in reality, anything is possible. By its actions, it is demonstrating to developers – those like Cato which scored the jewel of the city in the Sulpician’s site – but also all those eyeing the various other institutional properties on Mount Royal which will soon be up for sale (the Shriner’s Hospital, the Royal Victoria Hospital), that they will get the necessary permits to circumvent the protectionist rules.

Unfortunately, when city officials appear ready to fast-track approval of new urban development projects, it is up to the citizenry to “quibble about details” as one Gazette editorial put it. All the better should the new owners choose to enhance the public’s appreciation of this pristine oasis of greenery and calm by permitting access to it like a park. In the meantime, if Développement Cato has its way in re-engineering the site to accommodate over 300 dwellings, including 15 new buildings, some up to 9 stories tall and has dug out the side of the mountain to accommodate 650 vehicles, all efforts to preserve this site will be for naught and it sure won’t resemble any part of the Mount Royal Historic and Natural District.

Signed,
Eada Rubinger