

Milton-Parc Citizens Committee

Brief to the OCPM public hearings on propositions  
for improving the Montreal Charter of Rights and  
Responsibilities

December 14, 2010-12-07

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the MPCC on the specific issue of housing which is dealt with in Articles 18 and 16 of the Charter.

The MPCC is proud of the City's Charter of Rights and Responsibilities, and we are particularly pleased that the Charter commits the City government to offering affordable, safe and secure housing to the population who need it.

A recent article in the Gazette (November 20, 2010) "Poorly housed Canadians face same challenges as homeless" stated that "400,000 men, women and children are living in inadequate, unsafe housing where rent alone eats up more than half the household income". These figures come from a recent University of Toronto study. I'm including with this brief a photocopy of the whole article.

But first a word of history,

The Milton-Parc Citizens Committee was started in 1968 for the purpose of protecting our neighbourhood from the wholesale demolition of our houses, (most of which had heritage value), from the construction of a completely new urban landscape, and from the complete change of the demographic composition of the neighbourhood.

Twenty years later, after sit-ins, demonstrations, petitions, presentations of alternatives and the arrest of 59 citizens, we succeeded in saving two-thirds of the neighbourhood; establishing 22 co-ops and non-profit housing corporations, renovating all the housing within those two-thirds, and enabling all residents who wished to, to remain. We continue to live in our renovated homes at modest rents, and manage autonomously our own co-ops, and the land trust on which they sit. We represent a proud legacy.

The Milton-Parc cooperative project is a benefit not only to its residents, but also to the city as a whole. It has kept a large part of the downtown, east and west of the project (population 12,000), as a stable, safe, vibrant, demographically mixed and livable area. This area, which is the southern part of "Le Plateau", is an urban success, in part because of the input and the demand to be heard, of the original and current residents.

The development of housing in any part of a city has to do much more than make money for developers; it has to preserve history, maintain a demographic mix, encourage a vibrant street life, offer a mix of services; in other words, become a neighbourhood, safe, stable and livable.

Let me elaborate on one of these points; on the need for a demographic mix in any neighbourhood, old and new. I don't need to recall for anyone here the crying need for more social housing; and we support the organizations who have already spoken for more social housing at these hearings.

No one item does more to stabilize the living conditions of any family than to have secure, decent housing at costs the family can afford. This is particularly true for families on low income who find it very difficult to secure social housing. Think of the results. Such housing allows children to grow up in one home and one neighbourhood: same school, same friends, same group of adults who know them well; the results of which are to produce secure adults, who form strong bonds and attachments, who know what it means to be responsible for one's behaviour because the members of a community pay attention to each other.

Secure housing pushes adults to take care of their homes because they will be there for a long time. In addition, this housing gives residents the security, and the time, to become citizens, to be involved with their neighbours in the public life around them.

But it's not only low-income people who benefit from Social Housing. WE ALL DO.

Think of the neighbourhoods that are the most stable in Montreal, where community organizations have roots and provide leadership: Milton-Parc, Mile End, N.D.G, Westmount, Point St-Charles, Park Extension and Verdun. These neighbourhoods support an income mix added in part by the presence of social housing which helps contribute to stability; there is little moving in and out and thus these are safe places for everyone to live in.

Montreal is a safe, vibrant and comfortable city; a major reason is that scattered everywhere in the city are residential neighbourhoods; large areas where people live, work nearby, shop and recreate—often within walking or cycling distance.

The Milton-Parc community, located right next to downtown, is one of those neighbourhoods. And who benefits? We do, to be sure; but so does every citizen in the greater Montreal area.

Who are these citizens? Those from the West Island who come downtown to dine and walk safely through the neighbourhood to and from their parked cars or from the metro; those of University level who wander everywhere at all hours (sometimes annoyingly!) and who feel safe; those teenagers who pour in and out of Kola Noté and No. 80 bus and whose parents know they don't have to worry; those seniors who freely visit each other in their homes or in the mall of La Cité.

Our neighbourhood is culturally, socially, and economically vibrant and it is safe—and we all benefit. It is demographically mixed; subsidized and cooperative housing adjacent

to expensive condos, owners and renters, new immigrants and old timers, children and elderly, middle class, working class and poor. The mix makes our neighbourhood safe.

Why is this so?

Various populations of residents present a variety of lifestyles. Some people go to the cottage on the week-end, while others stay in town; some sit out on their front steps, while others are doing a BBQ in the back. The presence of residents socializing and watching their children on the street, especially in summer, makes the neighbourhood safe for everyone.

A word about the homeless: (Section B)

“Homelessness in Montreal is getting younger”. (Mike Boone, Gazette, November 15, 2010). Another article, “Schizophrenia, the New Leprosy, Meredith says” (Gazette, November 24, 2010) explains that Meredith, on welfare, live in a subsidized housing unit that caters to people with mental illness. The article quotes Meredith “It’s really a wonderful place to be. I was in expensive group homes before...but this is way better.”

What this brief has just said about the stabilizing effect of decent, secure, affordable housing on all people, applies as well to the homeless. It is the single most stabilizing factor.

Whether the homeless person is mentally ill or not, whether the person needs medication or not, whether the person is a petty thief or not, a beggar or not, having a secure, decent place to live mitigates any one of these characteristics. Once housed appropriately according to the specific characteristic of the formerly homeless person, the problems become much more manageable. One size does not fit all.

Some simply need a decent subsidized apartment, so that the person’s natural abilities can strengthen. Some need regular medication in a setting where there are compassionate, watchful eyes. Some need to be part of a community of peers. There are various models.

One thing is sure: decent housing is less costly to society than hospital emergency wards, police surveillance and jails. In 2007, a study was carried out by the University of California at San Diego. Fifteen homeless persons were followed for eighteen months; the study found that their cost to the system (jail, police, hospital emergency, drug overdose, etc.) was \$3 million: that is \$200,000 per person—enough to buy each one a condo! I have no doubt that the same results would be shown here, especially if such a study would include the cost of temporary night-by-night sleeping arrangements at the missions.

As we said before, ALL of society gains when everyone is decently, affordably housed.

*To conclude, therefore we would like the following changes to the Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities:*

[1]

Article 18, section (b) "...homeless persons with permanent secure housing..."

[2]

Article 18, section (c) should read "Considering the needs and the right of all individuals and families, particularly those of low and modest income, to decent, secure and affordable housing in its implementation of housing measures."

And related to the above, we also propose to change:

[3]

Article 16 (d). to read as follows: "Providing annual summaries of the Montreal financial statements, budget and three-year capital works programme before public consultations are held leading to a participatory budget process before their adoption;"

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*Lucia Kowaluk is member of four boards of directors which are social housing osbls and co-ops, and is also on the board of directors of the Institut de politique alternatives de Montreal. She was the founder of Chambreclerc, subsidized housing for the homeless mentally ill.*