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Wednesday, March 30, 2011

Re : Special Planning Program – Quartier des Grands Jardins

Madam/Sirs

I write this “memoire” in regards to the Special Planning Program which is planned for an area in which I own three businesses. I have operated in this area for over 5 years as a clothing retailer, and am most familiar with both the richness and darker undercurrents of the neighbourhood.

I write to you in particular regards to the park which will be imposed on the neighbourhood between the Royal Montreal Curling Club and the former Victoria School. I state without reservation that this park is a bad idea, and that no sane planner who understands the challenges of our neighbourhood would ever propose such.

As the commissioners may or may not know this neighbourhood is plagued by aggressive beggars, homelessness, public drunkenness, and drug abuse. While the neighbourhood also benefits from an incredible diversity of residents and small businesses, we cannot ignore social issues which challenge us daily. These problems are evident all day, and explode at nightfall. I have personally thrown drunks from my store and have been threatened by aggressive beggars in search of their next fix. The police provide little in the way of timely protection from such anti-social activity.

Notwithstanding these demographics, the urban planners of the City of Montreal see fit to impose a most unusual park without any prior consultation with the public at large. Having attended the information sessions this week, I stand all the more convinced that the planners have not researched this issue at all. It would appear no other sites have even been considered and the city appears to be completely ignorant of the security issues at hand.

I will summarize my opposition as follows:

1. The proposed “park” will be a long narrow rectangle, surrounded by three commercial buildings. This is not a park, this is a bowling alley.
2. It is evident that the police will not be able to secure the green space as there is improper visibility from boulevard deMaisonneuve. The city has already established its inability to secure such open sites as Cabot Square and Norman Bethune Square as well as the green space that was installed on the former grounds of the John Molson School of Business (Guy and deMaisonneuve). Why should we expect them to perform better with a park that has even greater security risks and reduced visibility?
3. On an even scarier note, the rear of the park is a commercial lane which is a notorious hangout for local crack users and dealers and the seediest elements which congregate at the rear door of Bar Diana (fronting rue Sainte Catherine). Throughout the lane we find garbage, empty bottles, syringes and used condoms. Here are two pictures of the lane:



(Please note that neighbouring properties have barricaded their rear access with barbed wire (needless to say this is not for the squirrels!)).

4. At the rear western corner of the proposed park, there is an unusual check in the building line which creates a haven for antisocial activity. I have personally witnessed prostitution and the consumption of hard drugs. For your information I have attached a photo taken last Friday which shows three crack addicts hiding behind 1845-53 rue Sainte Catherine ouest engaged in their habitual activities. This haven communicates directly into the park.



5. On a most disturbing note, the city seems prepared to encourage the use of this park by young children. It seems totally irresponsible to propose mixing young children with some of the seediest elements of downtown Montreal.

The neighbourhood could use a good dose of greening, and I would suggest that for a fraction of the cost of imposing such a park the city could plant trees and other plants within the many alleys of the neighbourhood. As we have seen and endured in the past, this park too will be seized by the most antisocial inhabitants of the area. Over two days of consultations, I have heard nothing from the representatives of the city which would suggest any sensitivity to or knowledge of these challenges.

If we are truly the Quartier des grands jardins and can access these enormous institutional gardens, then why is the city so focussed on creating a seedy park which has little to no chance of succeeding?

For the reasons set out above, I would ask the commissioners to use your good offices and judgment to recommend against the creation of a park as detailed in the Special Planning Program. I would have preferred to present these statements at the meeting of April 20th 2011, but will be out of the country.

Respectfully yours,

Chooi Wei Ho