

I would like to express my concerns and opposition to the Franciscan project as it is currently proposed.

The developers along with the support of the City of Montreal have tried to make a strong case in favor of this project because it would “preserve” an important part of the cultural and architectural heritage of this sector of the city. In fact, they are so favorable to the project that they have denied citizens of the neighborhood their legal right to hold a referendum to express their opinions.

It is most unfortunate that the city regards this project as a suitable way to preserve these two historic buildings and the site on which they were built. There are numerous reasons for regarding this as a bad attempt to preserve the architectural heritage of Montreal:

- a) The two 2-3 story historic buildings which are immediately in the shadow of the two 20-storey high rises will be completely dominated by the skyscrapers. Thus, any heritage value that these relatively modest structures have will be lost amidst these towering buildings
- b) Part of the historic value of these buildings is linked to their location and their placement on the site – as noted by the City of Montreal itself. The construction of such over-sized towers completely adjacent to the two heritage buildings is a violation of their historic presence and a mockery of any value they continue to have.
- c) The City of Montreal justifies derogation of the City’s own planning documents to allow these over-sized towers on the grounds that they are compatible with the height of other buildings in the neighborhood and with the overall trend from taller to shorter from the city centre outwards. However, the City failed to point out that many of the tallest buildings in the area where this buildings will be constructed are much shorter – 2-4/5 stories. Moreover, many of the skyscrapers that were used to formulate their model were themselves permitted only as a result of derogations in the City’s height restrictions – as a result, previous violations of the planning code are used to justify present and future violations. One wonders whether the planning code itself should just be derogated.
- d) The developers argue that the two skyscrapers only occupy 20% of the site – this is with respect to the horizontal dimension of the site; with respect to the vertical dimension of the site, however, the buildings will occupy about 10 times more space than the two historic buildings.

It is unfortunate that by ceding ownership of what is probably the last heritage site in the west-central zone of Montreal, the City has now given virtually all important heritage sites in this area of the city to private owners, thereby minimizing their value to local residents. The City has thus also lost an opportunity to do something truly innovative with these buildings and this site. With its proximity to the Canadian Centre for Architecture, something truly outstanding and interesting could have been achieved that highlight the architecture of Montreal and complement the historic value of this area. Instead, we have Toronto-style high rises.

Montreal boasts that it has been designated an International Design City; however, by building such featureless, skyscrapers on the backs of heritage buildings, it is difficult for residents to see why we deserve this label.