

## **Physicians Coalition for Social Justice**

### **Memorandum to**

### **L'Office De Consultation Publique de Montreal**

On

### **Proposed By-Laws on the McGill University Health Centre and Shriners' Hospital.**

Just as the general objective of all city bylaws is the well being of the public, the only justification for zoning change is public benefit. The bylaw not under consideration is tailored to a single project – the MUHC hospital – whose direct public benefit has never been discussed. The promoters of the hospital never speak of the health care advantages of the Glen hospital, just as they never suggest that it will improve the larger urban environment. These are serious omissions.

The documents provided for these hearings stress, not public health care, but the desire for Quebec to promote university medicine and to confirm Montreal's leading role in biomedical research. The studies presented show the impact - traffic, economic, visual – of the hospital project on the immediate area only. None speaks of its effect on the larger city. With its old-fashioned emphasis on cars, parking, and highway access, the project was clearly conceived in terms of 1960's urbanism. No thought has been given to the city of 2020.

We suggest that approval of the bylaws be delayed until these large questions are addressed.

#### **HEALTH CARE**

It is clear from the documentation that the primary objectives of this project are research and support of the biomedical industry. In principle, this is entirely positive, but attention should also be given to the immediate problems in Quebec's health care system. These include:

- shortages of professional staff, resulting from funding cutbacks;
- lack of recovery facilities: MUHC emphasised day surgery as one justification for a reduction in available beds, but it is clear that an aging population will require more, not fewer, medium term beds; and
- difficulty of access: the number of hospitals in Montreal has already been reduced; a further reduction as proposed by the MUHC, will make local health care, with its familiarity and personal contact, even less available.

An overriding danger, never mentioned, is that the MUHC project will drain away from these and other areas, reducing, rather than enhancing, health care for the Montreal public.

## SITE SELECTION

The project, as presented is based on the assumption that most facilities will be concentrated on the Glen Yards site. The question remains however; “Is this site the best location for a hospital?” Although it is one of few large sites on the island, is it possible to create a healthy environment there?

We already have sites that are ideal for healing with views and fresh air. Existing hospitals were precisely placed around the mountain for exactly those attributes. They also create a band around the mountain that contributes to the mountain’s public function. The mountain is for Montrealers, including those who require medical care.

Continuing doubts about the possibility of decontaminating the site further detract from the Glen Yards site as a potential healing environment. The physical barriers that surround the site - two highways, the rail line and a cliff - fray the already established web of communications between hospitals, between hospital and city and between hospital and McGill University itself. The project cannot create the spontaneous connections and vitality that already exist in the city’s urban areas. The voids left by vacated hospitals will have a negative impact on their neighbourhoods.

## THE FUTURE OF MONTREAL

If 800 000 000\$ of public money is to be spent on a public project, the public should expect some consideration of the city as it exists and as it will be in the future. We should accept that the automobile will not always determine every aspect of civic design. We should expect some respect for the city and its buildings – including those that will be left vacant by this project.

Instead, the MUHC project has been designed and promoted like a suburban shopping mall, with its emphasis on cars, parking and bits of grass between big, inward looking buildings. This is the future as it was seen 50 or 80 years ago; we deserve a future for today.

In conclusion, we recommend that the proposed by-law not be adopted until the larger context of the MUHC hospital is fully examined. The information available at this time shows too little concern for health care generally, for the suitability of this project on this site, or for the future of Montreal. Only when these matters are fully exposed for the public scrutiny should a new bylaw be contemplated.

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