

Without prejudice

About the Proposed development of the property located at 1500 ave du Dr Penfield



This document asks that the City of Montreal reject the development proposed under the dossier no 1124400061. The project consists of an extension to the building whose volume and height would take the fullest advantage of the allowable site coverage, height limit, and floor area ratio. The only derogation that this author would have been questioned involved a small volume of the building at its southern limit that exceeded the height limit on the top storey.

This project was advertised in Le Devoir on Page C8, le 9 septembre, 2012. An information meeting was held on Wednesday the 19th of September when the project was shown to thirty odd people, minor derogations to the existing zoning regulations shown and explained, and the project discussed.

One of the reasons that this author attended the information meeting was that it was felt that the advertisement was presented using a text size that was far below the size that it could be read with any ease. One had to be lucky to notice the notice. A second reason for attending was that I wanted to protest the summary descriptions of the changes to the zoning that were proposed. Derogations are all supposed to be minor, meaning very small. These, besides being unusually numerous (9) spoke of height and set back changes, without quantification. Both of these values have had major effects in other local projects, effects that have enlarged new building projects well beyond the zoning rules in a way that ordinary citizens would find excessive, uncalled for, and damaging to neighbouring properties. Particularly worrying in these cases are those aspects of damage that adversely affect buildings and ensembles and their high development potential as more important heritage properties. In the event, the zoning regulations were shown to be substantially conformed with by the building proposed.

But to this writer, the proposed project, however conforming it was with the zoning for the site, if built would certainly harm to the immediate historic character of the local ensemble of recognized remarkable historic buildings. Further, the geometry of this project poses a precedent where any other relatively small building in the Square Mile can be similarly over-developed. Do we want another small building to have grafted onto its (emptied) skin, a new volume of residential units which together would cover the entire site to the maximum extent allowed by the zoning. In the case of this building, the maximum site coverage is believed to be sixty-five percent. The area of the site 50x150 is 7500 square feet. The total building size proposed is $4 \times 0.65 \times 7500 = 19,500$ square feet. This area is divided into ten (or eleven) individual living units which include six row houses and four (or five) apartments on the upper storeys (or storey). There would be virtually the entire site covered save for along its western limit where its set-back allows for 15 foot wide garden terraces behind the row houses. These terraces are overlooked by a wall some forty feet high. The neighbouring building to the west is adversely affected in its environmental quality by the same new forty foot high wall just 15 feet away from its rear yard.

Now this project is not the wholesale attack on the quality of the Square mile environment that characterized the nine or ten storey Redpath House project of a few years ago.

But the project proposes to remove the heritage characteristics of the original building as described by the ENONCÉ D'INTERÊT PATRIMONIAL in a SYNTHÈSE DE L'INTÉRÊT PATRIMONIAL, dated 4 juillet 2012.

'L'intérêt patrimonial du site du 1500, ave, Dr Penfield repose d'abord sur sa valeur paysagère urbaine en raison de son intégration harmonieuse et sa participation à la qualité du cadre bâti environnant associé à l'ancien quartier résidentiel du Mile Carré doré. Implantée à l'angle de deux rues, la maison forme un ensemble avec la maison voisine (1508, ave du Dr Penfield), qui présente des caractéristiques similaires, ainsi qu'avec sa dépendance érigée au fond d'un jardin paisible aménagé et planté d'arbres.

Speaking to the historic value of the building as a social statement, its evolution and its site, the Division de l'expertise en patrimoine headed by Mme. Jennifer Ouellet, conseillère en aménagement, and her Groupe de travail, including Mario Brodeur, Brian Burrows, Thomas Fontaine tous les trois, architectes; ainsi que Françoise Caron, Jennifer Ouellet et Stéphanie Turcotte, tous les trois, conseillères en aménagement of the City, write further :

Ce site présente aussi une valeur historique associé au développement résidentiel du flanc sud du Mont Royal et du quartier Mile carré doré. De plus, cette valeur repose sur son ancienneté, cette maison étant une des plus anciennes du secteur, et sur son témoignage des modes d'implantation des résidences cossues en milieu urbain et des modes de vie des familles bourgeoises de l'époque..... On a subsequent page one states further : la qualité des espaces intérieurs et de leurs détails architecturauxet de la présence ... de la qualité de sa construction et de ses matériaux d'origine.....par l'organisation intérieur de la maison, notamment la présence de la cuisine au sous-sol, le butler's pantry (et son monte-plat) derrière l'ancienne salle à diner, le hall d'entrée et son escalier menant aux chambres.... et la présence d'un logement d'employé en fond du cour. Aussison lien historique avec la maison voisine, ces deux maiaons (ainsi qu'une troisième aujourd'hui disparue) ayant été construite par le même promoteur.

In their appreciation, the Division de l'expertise found further reasons, this time artistic in nature, to preserve the building as it is:

L'intérêt du site est également associé à sa valeur artistique (et architectural) en raison de l'importance des concepteurs du bâtiment d'origine de 1871 (John James Brown) et des modifications des années 1920 (Barott & Blackader), de la qualité de la construction de la maison, de sa composition architecturale intéressante ainsi que l'effet d'unité avec sa dépendance.

On a following page the Division adds to their appreciation about the garden:

La valeur urbaine du site Repose sur... le caractère privé et paisible de la cour arrière et l'aménagement en paliers qui suit la topographie du secteur.... Et la présence d'arbres qui contribuent positivement au paysage de la rue Simpson. (Ces Arbres sont protégés par les règlements de la ville et ses permanences sont aussi assurées par les règlements de remplacement des arbres) and elsewhere on the same page : son gabarit, sa volumétrie, sa composition architecturale ... la fermeture du jardin par des murs de maçonnerie and elsewhere in the report about the gardenl'aménagement paysager de la cour arrière datant de 1929 et conçu par l'architecte paysagiste, Robert G. Campbell.

In the last thirty years or so when demolition for large high rise building stopped on the south flank of Mount Royal, and which saw the advent of strict land coverage and setbacks particularly for small lots in a greatly reduced zoning law for the whole Square Mile area, several other free-standing buildings of great quality in the Square Mile district have been similarly enlarged with volumes of multi-residential units that are much bigger than the historic buildings to which they are tightly attached. All of these examples have diminished almost all of the values that they had as heritage buildings. From first to last the quality of the design of the overbearing additions fail to match the quality of the originals. They lost most or all of their green space, along with their unique relationships to their original sites. One has to question whether the additional taxable values attached to the relatively small number of new

apartments was worth the loss of environmental values which would have been more than compensated by much higher plus values that similar large and important heritage buildings have enjoyed elsewhere on the Island of Montreal. Further, a small fraction of the the relatively large number of new high-rise projects built elsewhere in the centre of the City would have easily supplied all of the new apartments whose construction so damaged the heritage qualities of the enlarged heritage buildings in this valuable historic district.

To quote from policy documents on the development of heritage properties in Toronto, projects where the heritage values have been recognized by expert evaluations such as the one done for this building and which are quoted above, any alterations to such properties have to retain the heritage values enumerated

From page 7 of the Official Plan 5-year review Proposed Heritage Policies third paragraph last sentence:

The proposed policies state that the alteration of a designated heritage building should not be approved if it will negatively affect the heritage attribute of the designated heritage property. And in a subsequent paragraph: ... new construction beside or across the street from a heritage property ... will have a minimal visual and physical impact on the heritage property....

From page 4 of the same document : *The retention of facades alone .. (which is definitely the case here) is poor conservation practice.*

Even the subdivision of the property to allow an individual building separated from the main building would be a breach of rules that a sensitive knowledgeable practitioner of the arts of building in a city should obey to protect the heritage values of this site, however higher the taxable valuation of the property at the end. This is not the last opportunity to add necessary housing in the Centre of Montreal.

Moreover the building is within the aire de protection of the Classified Greenshields house across avenue Dr Penfield. I believe that this means that the commission des Biens culturels must approve the project at 1500 ave, Dr Penfield. There is no indication that the comité de patrimoine of the City of Montreal has seen or has approved the project or otherwise.

One hope that the reception of a copy of this letter will cause both of these committees to do the right thing and to reject the present project.

I attach a copy of a part of a plan from the Hopkins Atlas of the City of Montreal. I have looked at all of the buildings located in the Square Mile shown in this atlas which is dated 1879. Almost none remain. Within the part of the drawing shown, only 1500 and 1508 remain.

These buildings both deserve the care that a new private owner connoisseur would be privileged to lavish on it as a celebrity private residence or failing that, a residence owned by a corporation that would be used for an executive residence.

In conclusion, I ask that the planning department revise their recommendation to the political leaders of the city that the project be approved and instead that the project be rejected.

I would add a personal note. As an architect starting my own private practice, during the late 1950's and sixties, I designed and helped design scores of low rise three and four story apartments in the newer sectors of the City of the time for speculative builders. Typically they all measured 5000 square feet in site coverage and they had minimum setbacks identical to the building proposed for 1500 Dr Penfield. Almost all of them have been destroyed today. Their rear yards were depressing affairs that never caught on like the buildings that had lots of light and air for the homes within them. I know how these buildings aged and how they disappointed us over the long term. Such buildings may be possible today, But I have not designed any like them for many years. I learned.

Michael Fish, retired



