

# Comments about the 2014 Agglomeration Land Use and Development Plan, November 17, 2014

By Tracey Arial

The Agglomeration Land Use and Development Plan is a great opportunity to discuss Montreal's future as a linked set of communities all working hard to provide safe, happy living conditions for residents, business owners, investors and tourists in the face of intense challenges, including climate change.

My name is Tracey Arial. I'm a resident of Crawford Park, an author, a community reporter, the co-founder of an urban agriculture cooperative in Verdun, a member of the Transition Town movement, and a recently-accredited permaculture designer.

When the commission released its draft report, I enthusiastically looked for links to all the projects I care about, especially those that build abundance by linking people to politics and nature. I looked carefully for ways that Montreal's development plan can enhance citizen involvement, create jobs, encourage Montrealers to grow their own food and work with nature to improve the life of its residents.

My background is in the tourist industry too, so I also compared Montreal's plan to similar plans in other important tourist destinations, including Australia, Florida and Ontario, where I once worked and places like Maine, where I frequently vacation.

As a result of these reflections, I have 16 recommendations to make, some under each of your four priorities. Most of them are suggestions to add already-existing information be added to the plan so that small investors, homeowners and residents have enough information to choose where to live given the length of time development occurs.

## Improve the Living Environment

- Please consider listing and providing a map of all federal, provincial and municipal public lands in the agglomeration so that citizens can keep track of how these resources change.

Not only would this help show people what's planned for their city, but it would also ensure that everyone is informed about how the most precious public resources are utilized. As you know, there is very little land available on which to develop projects. I've noticed that public land seems to be the only flexible territory available.

- List developments that have already been approved but are not yet built on the territory.

I've spoken to many citizens who are dismayed to learn that developments are planned next to properties they've purchased, but no information about these projects was available to them before they invested in a community.

Not only would this inform everyone properly, but it would also enable your commission to update its maps. In Verdun, for instance, there are inconsistencies with zoning bylaws as they currently stand and those shown on your maps.

I know that the Committee for the Protection of the Natural and Built Heritage of the Desmarchais-Crawford District will be commenting on those specifically concerning the land on the Douglas Research Institute and I hope you'll consider these carefully. The submission from Dorval mentions similar issues. I don't know whether boroughs without members on the permanent commission will present briefs in the limited time left, but I hope they do.

- Include planning information and maps of current and planned sewage and water distribution lines, existing water bodies, contaminated lands, underground infrastructure such as tunnels, basements etc. and other important development in its report.

As some of you may know, last year, Montreal's auditor general reported that some boroughs don't have complete maps of the sewage and water lines on their territories and thus cannot maintain them adequately. I've also spoken to property owners, particularly in the downtown core, who have wood footings that rely on constant moisture to remain intact. Major development projects risk drying up water beds and changing soil consistency, which puts older buildings at risk.

## **Promote Sustainable Development**

- Update the map showing heat island effects to match the development plan.

The map included in the draft project is based on Montreal's current realities. According to an overview on Google Earth, the Island currently has about three times the green-space that's shown on your map of recreational and conserved properties. Changing this will

- Link the conservation and green space territories with ecological corridors.

No species can function with disjointed habitats.

- Include maps about geological formations, contour lines, ecological corridors, bird migrations, butterfly migrations, bats and other flora and fauna realities in the plan.

Experts in urban development can't discuss natural systems if there isn't a common understanding of what they are.

- Include information about changing climate, sun, wind, snow and rain conditions in the development plan so that we can build abundance with nature, instead of working against her.

Prevailing winds in the city, for example, come from the south, southwest and west throughout the year, with stronger cold winds from the north and northeast during the winter. This commission can help communicate these realities with maps showing the trends and how development changes those trends, such as how the wind moves between high-rise buildings.

I've also heard that snowfall from new taller buildings infilled next to shorter existing buildings can cause an increased load on the roofs of the older buildings. This is causing insurance problems for these residents, which could create a public relations problem for infill development in future. Pre-preparation could help mitigate these issues.

- Flood zones and earthquake fault lines should be specifically mentioned in agglomeration development plans.

After Vancouver, Montreal is the most likely place for a catastrophic earthquake. The Civil Security Centre shows that a 5-6 magnitude earthquake occurs every 25 years. The strongest

earthquake to hit so far took place in 1732 and was measured at 5.8 on the Richter scale. Earthquakes at some distance can cause damage as well. Montreal East's city hall was so badly damaged during the Saguenay earthquake in 1988, it had to be rebuilt. How many other buildings are at risk of similar damage? These issues should be named.

## **Fuelling the Vitality of the Agglomeration and the Central Core**

- Remove current regulations to enable mixed-use residential properties to be easily modified to include granny flats apartments, small business operations and other ad hoc densification strategies within family homes and ensure jobs closer to home.
- Set aside industrial territory for alternative energy and telecommunication experiments.
- Create specific industrial territories for the production of food in greenhouses, in industrial buildings and in the ground.
- Increase the amount of agricultural land in the city, which has dropped to a negligible amount from 2% a decade ago;
- Consider adding orchards and nutgroves to every neighbourhood on the territory as was the case during WWII.

As many of you know, almost 30,000 of us signed petitions to hold a public consultation into urban agriculture in 2011 and the consultation itself was held in 2012. The 145-page report has many recommendations for projects and actions that I'm hoping your commission will adopt.

## **Enhance areas of interest**

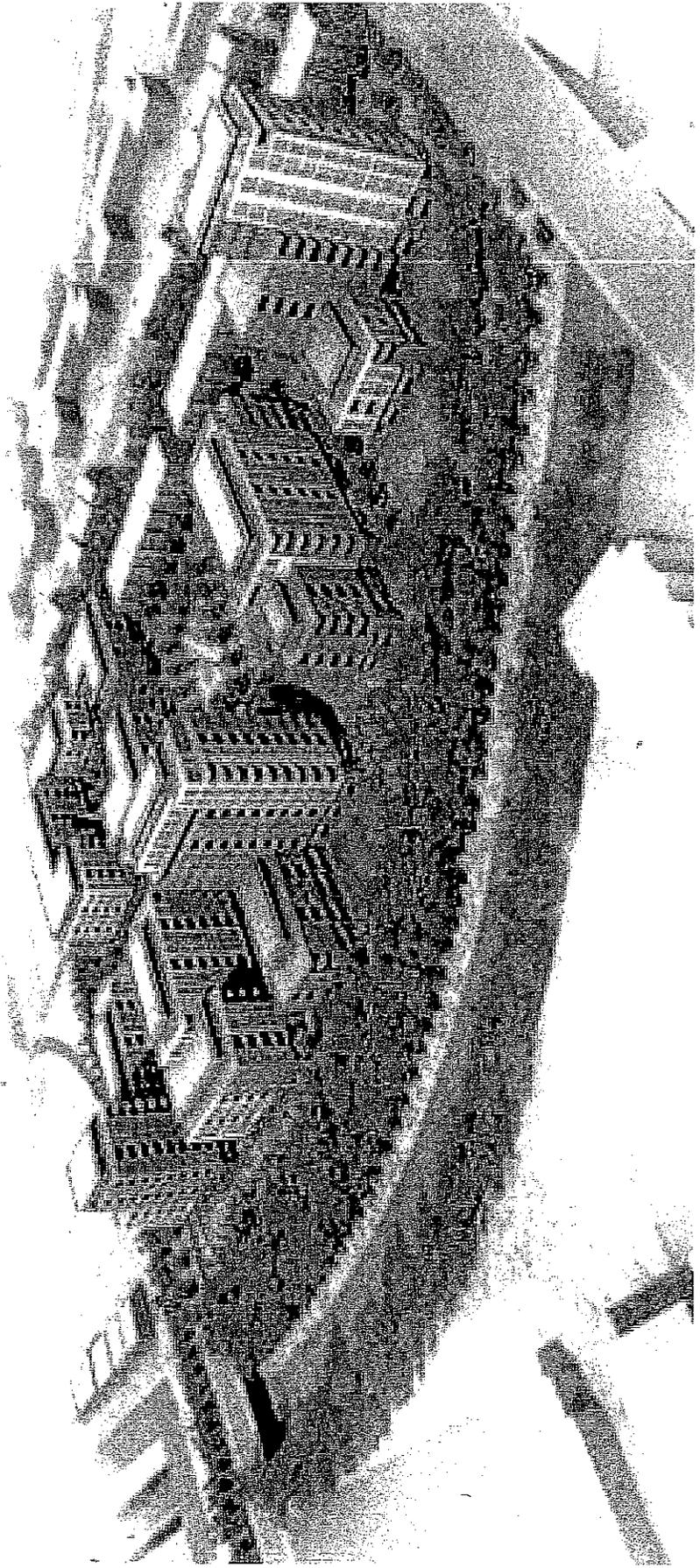
- A plan showing the location of major tourist attractions, both existing and planned, would be a welcome addition to your recommendations.
- As you know, the island of Montreal is the largest island in the Hochelaga Archipelago. Some recognition of this status would be nice to emphasize, as well as its history as the bottom of the glacial Lake Champlain.
- I'd also like to encourage you to include specific measurable results in your recommendations so that collaborations are easier to promote. The development plans of other jurisdictions include job creation goals and other economic drivers, and this makes them useful tools for residents, business operators, investors and tourists. It helps keep citizens and developers moving together and limits friction between them.

As a final comment, I was confused when comparing the agglomeration overall planning strategy maps with other jurisdictions. The maps showing nodes and corridors doesn't show how each of them relate to one another, for instance.

I'm also confused about how TODs will work, given the extraordinary traffic gridlock Montreal is currently facing.

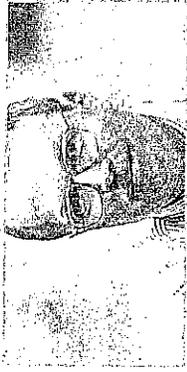
My colleague Sonja will comment in more detail about that specific measure.

Thank you for your time.



# Condo Conundrum

HIGH-RISES are going where they shouldn't, affecting life and soul of city



HENRY AUBIN

High-rise condo projects are popping up not just in downtown Montreal but in areas where tall buildings until now have been unknown.

In Côte des Neige's Namur-Jean Talon sector, for example, 12-storey buildings are sprouting near the SPCA. LaSalle is getting a 15-storey tower close to Carrefour Angrignon. A 16-storey project is in the works in Ahuntsic. And Griffintown is getting towers of up to 19 storeys.

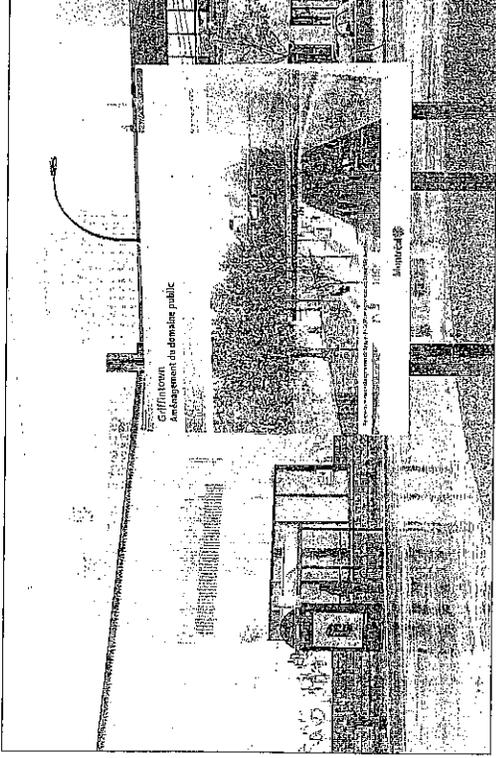
No one questions the wisdom of building residential towers in downtown Montreal that are even bigger than these, seeing how downtown is already Manhattan-ized. But is the scattering of high-rises across other parts of Montreal Island the best way to go?

Certainly, tall buildings make sense for developers: The more housing units you can stack on top of a given piece of land, the more the profit.

Certainly, too, the spreading of high-rises across the island or off of it (Boisbriand on the North Shore is getting a 16-storey condo tower) conforms to the metropolitan region's new development strategy. The Quebec government this week approved this plan, which the Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal had composed.

If that 184-page strategy can be summed up in a single word, it would be "densify." That means each municipality should concentrate its own development near public-transit routes instead of spreading it thinly. The projects I've mentioned tend to qualify.

But the development strategy fails to explore whether or not high-rises are the best way to densify. Nowhere does it reflect the idea that more human-scale projects might make for more pleasant communities.



VINCENZO DALTO THE GAZETTE

In Griffintown, towers will reach up to 19 storeys. UQAM professor David Hanna says the ideal height limit for areas like Griffintown should be eight floors.

Myke Hodgins, past president of the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects, says, "The most beautiful, livable neighbourhoods are made up of buildings of up to five storeys." He opposes a zoning change that would allow a 14-storey condo on the Lachine Canal.

Steven Cohlmeier, president of Cohlmeier Architects, which has designed residential and office buildings in several countries, observes that the empty spaces around big buildings often produce a "coldness of the street environment." The exception is when big buildings are set back from the street and smaller buildings that have ground-floor stores fill the intervening space. Vancouver's "needle" condo towers employ this method with success, he notes, but there's almost nothing like that here.

He cites Outremont, the Plateau, Point St. Charles and Westmount as "wonderful examples of how to build." Their larger residential buildings, some of them about a century old, tend to have from four to six storeys. Developers today could use those communities as models, he says, but too often they don't.

His son, Daniel Cohlmeier, also with the firm, points to Paris, where a traditional height limit of seven floors has made for famous esthetics and a high quality of life. Barcelona is another example

wind than larger structures. Richard Bergeron, the Projet Montréal leader who once taught urban planning, says that if he becomes Montreal's mayor he'd stress construction of residential buildings of from three to eight storeys.

David Hanna, the UQAM professor who would be overseeing Montreal's urban planning today if he and Vision Montreal's Louise Harel had won their respective elections for councillor and mayor in 2009, is on the same wavelength. He says "eight (floors) is considered an absolute limit in urban planning where old neighbourhoods with narrow streets (such as Griffintown) are concerned."

Peter Trent, the Westmount mayor who recently scaled down a proposed luxury condo building on Greene Ave. to six floors, says: "The myth is that you have to build upwards to have density, but it's not true." Paris, he says, punctures this myth forcefully.

Indeed, Daniel Cohlmeier points out that a clustering of several low-rise buildings near metro stations could provide almost as many dwellings as high-rises that are surrounded by empty space, and could occupy little more land.

It is excellent that Montreal region's new strategy will encourage a new era of density. But politicians with power over zoning and



# Urban 'sprawl' gets a bad rap

**POLICIES TO LIMIT LAND USE** raise housing prices and reduce discretionary income that would be better spent boosting the economy

**Wendell Cox**



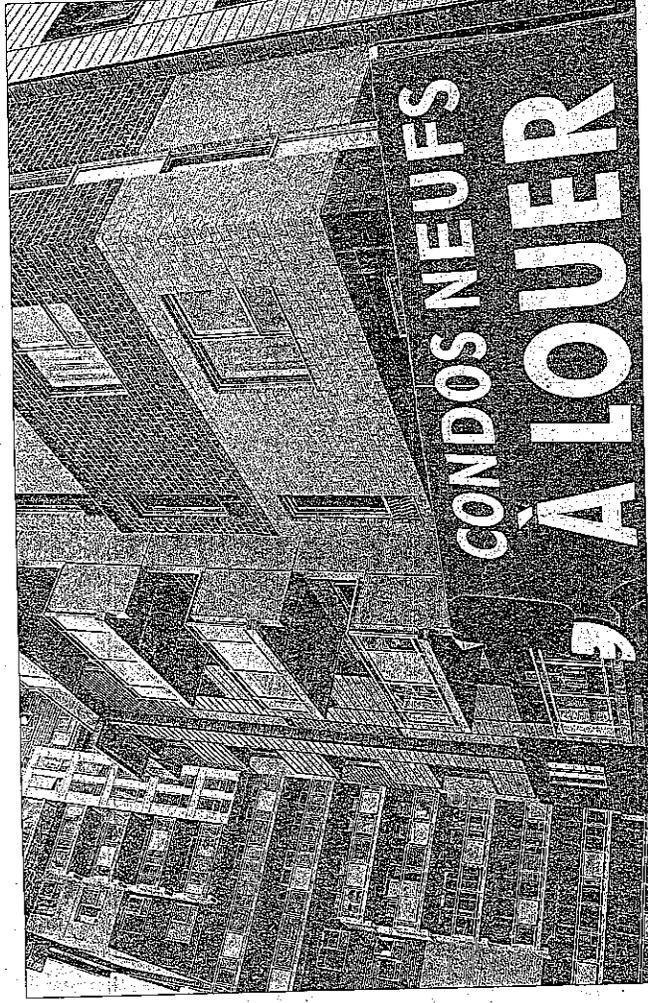
is the principal of Wendell Cox Consultancy/ Demographics of St. Louis, Mo., a firm that specializes in urban public policy, transport and demographics. He is the author of the study *Mobility and Prosperity in the City of the Future*, recently published by the Ottawa-based Macdonald-Laurier Institute for policy research. macdonaldlaurier.ca.

The prosperity and competitiveness of Canadian metropolitan areas is being undermined by bad policy in housing, land use and transit.

Canadians spend more time commuting to work than in most other world metropolitan areas, note the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Canadian Urban Transit Association and other agencies.

For example, Toronto's one-way work commute averages 33 minutes, while Montreal and Vancouver are at 31 minutes. By comparison, highly congested Los Angeles is only 27 minutes, while much more sprawling (and less transit-dependent) Dallas-Fort Worth is 26 minutes.

Long travel times are a concern since the ability to travel quickly throughout the metropolitan area contributes substantially to economic growth. However, the very policies being pursued by Canadian metropolitan areas, including the Montreal metropolitan region's real metropolitan land-use plan, are likely to increase travel times, reduce housing



Most new residential development in Montreal is slated for highrise, multi-unit buildings along transit corridors. But the idea that people in these buildings will use transit instead of cars is "nonsense," writes Wendell Cox.

the only place transit can provide service that competes with automobile travel times. Despite their dominant skylines, downtowns account for fewer than 15 per cent of jobs in major metropolitan areas. Transit is not a viable option for nearly all of the other 85 per cent of jobs.

World experience indicates that higher density is associated with more intense traffic congestion. Worse, the more intense traffic congestion brings with it health consequences because, as traffic slows down and becomes more congested, air pollution emissions become more intense.

"Compact cities" policies are not necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. A report by the McKinsey Corporation, co-sponsored by environmental and industry groups, found that sufficient emissions reductions could be achieved without reducing driving or living in denser housing. Studies show that the potential for reducing emissions is from better automobile fuel technology and that "compact cities" policy has only a small dividend (though at huge expense).

The emphasis of urban policy has been misplaced. The issue is not sprawl, it is economic opportunity — the very reason cities exist. Making metropolitan areas more competitive requires greater mobility and it requires higher discretionary incomes. It isn't only Canadians who live in Montreal, Toronto and other large metropolitan areas who are affected by these policies. Because of the importance of cities to the national economy, these ill-advised policies are a national issue.

ens to relegate large numbers of younger households to permanent renter status. If Montreal's young people are looking for a government policy worth protesting against, this would be it. The higher house prices reduce discretionary income that would otherwise be spent on other goods and services, growing the economy.

It gets worse. A more radical strain of such policy is now emerging. Most new residential development is slated for highrise, multi-unit buildings along transit corridors. An example is Montreal's plan that requires 40 per cent

by such policies in Vancouver, which has the worst housing affordability of any major metropolitan area outside of Hong Kong in our annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey. House prices there now exceed 10 times the average income. That's more than three times the normal ratio when "compact city" policies are absent. Similar policies have driven housing prices up relative to incomes more than 60 per cent in both Toronto and Montreal.

The result is an unprecedented intergenerational transfer of wealth that threatens the economic growth of the metropolitan area. Principally, these policies seek to stop the expansion of urban areas (deplorably called "sprawl") with the use of green belts and urban growth boundaries, which largely prohibit new development outside the present urban footprint. The policies are described as necessary to achieve sustainability, which is untrue. Simply put, rationing land raises housing prices. This is illustrated with a vengeance

DARIO AVOLA, GAZETTE FILE PHOTO