

**SOCIAL HOUSING STRATEGY FOR
THE CITY OF MONTREAL**

**VARIOUS PROPOSALS FOR THE
SOLUTION TO THE SOCIAL
HOUSING CRISIS IN THE CITY OF
MONTREAL**

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Dear Councillors and Mayor:

For a Montreal Social Housing Strategy, especially for the South-West of Montreal: St-Henri, Little Burgundy, and other Low-income districts in Montreal as well as throughout all the boroughs, rich and poor, in the City of Montreal

The following proposals were initially sent to the Committee on the Canadian National Housing Strategy formed by the Federal Government. However, the various proposals are aptly applicable to the issues of social housing in the city of Montreal and especially to the South-West borough of St-Henri, Little Burgundy, Ville Emard, etc as well as to other low income districts and boroughs throughout the city. This, of course is also more applicable to the other more affluent areas and boroughs of the city and this in order to create a dynamic mixture of social classes of all income groups and brackets as well as the mixing of ethnic, racial, and religious groups living in harmony together. This mixing would in effect go a long way to preventing and avoiding social class, racial and ethnic **apartheid** and marginalization of the urban environment. I believe that the city of Montreal can **adopt and adapt** any or all of the following proposals and carry them out to fruition. However, in order to do this it would be essential to initiate a full and open public discussion and debate within the wider public and within the administration of the City of Montreal, including all of its councilmen and councilwomen on this endeavour. Especially important would be the airing of these issues through the mass media, both through the press and through television interviews about the following proposals in order to jump start this pressing and pertinent debate and

therefore take various concrete and practical steps to deal with these pressing problems. The City of Montreal can therefore become the first city to advance these proposals and make Montreal the **first city** in Canada and **North America** to eliminate the phenomenon of **homelessness** by making concrete availability of **permanent** rooms, apartments and shelters, with modern kitchenettes and showers, to those homeless who would want to use them. Also the City of Montreal can in due course and after a democratic internal debate, adopt, adapt and apply any or all of these proposals according to Montreal's and the various boroughs' prevailing housing conditions and their specific urban circumstances.

My proposals on the National Social Housing Strategy are, therefore, the following:

- 1) To eliminate homelessness in Canada, it would be necessary to activate a tri-partite governmental program of funding and assistance involving the federal, provincial and municipal governments along with participation of the private sector to convert various abandoned public buildings under different federal, provincial or municipal jurisdictions into social housing for homeless and low-income people. These buildings would be abandoned public buildings such as post offices, schools, hospitals, warehouses, fire-stations, CBC buildings, and other buildings on public land, but otherwise underused or abandoned. The federal government would match

funding and assistance with provincial and municipal governments. As there are approximately 300,000 homeless people across Canada, the private sector should be encouraged to provide whatever assistance and funding it is willing, even their own private abandoned buildings; all these would be matched with government tax benefits, tax reliefs, tax write-offs, etc. which would go to assist in this endeavour. In a northerly country as Canada, it is a national shame that homelessness exists, and a target would be to eliminate homelessness just as Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries have done. The City of Montreal could, therefore, study and learn from these Scandinavian countries on how they have eliminated general homelessness in their own countries. As many of these homeless people suffer from a variety of addictions, or illnesses, it would be appropriate to set up in the residence a permanent clinic with nurse/s and with one or several social workers to take care and assist them in supervising medical assistance and provide assistance in finding the proper government or private training in order to become economically independent again and eventually move out into the wider community and rent apartments on their own. Therefore, training programs and centers should be available and encouraged, even as part of living in for some of these residents in these subsidised apartments. There will always, however, be those that will need these rooms or apartments on a semi-permanent basis or even

permanent basis, because of their particular unfortunate circumstances. Priorities, however, ought to be given to single mothers with children, Native peoples, visible minorities, chronically unemployed, or those with little skills, elderly and other vulnerable groups.

- 2) The former public building, let us say a school or post office or even public warehouse, etc. in Montreal could be converted into a mixed housing project for low and middle income families, mixed with a special section for the homeless who would be especially screened for families with children, a nursery, etc. If the particular building is not a municipal holding, but the particular building in question is under control by another government agency be it provincial or federal, the city of Montreal could try and reach a reasonable accommodation to obtain it and convert it to a community complex with sections for low and middle income families, homeless families and individuals, handicapped people, temporary housing for refugees and even primary multilingual day care centers, primary school, community center, and other similar facilities. In general, special apartment buildings should be used to house the dire homeless with special needs, be it alcoholism, drug addiction, mental illness, chronic incarceration, etc. with a clinic center to provide medical treatment and social workers to look after them.
- 3) Another example is for the City of Montreal in conjunction with the Canadian Federal Government and

the Provincial government to jointly draw up plans to convert the abandoned Royal Victoria Hospital into a major community complex that would include apartments for low income families, a section for homeless people, nurseries, libraries, clinics for outpatients, sports complex and swimming pool for all social sectors, multicultural and multilingual schooling, primary and secondary for locals and for new Canadians and refugees. A section of the hospital could even be turned into temporary housing for new refugees. A vocational school for training in various trades and occupations for homeless and low-income people, chronically unemployed, single mothers, Native peoples in the city, etc., could also be set up. The Angus family, the descendants of George Stephen (Lord Mount Stephen) and his cousin Lord Donald Smith (Lord Strathcona) who were the railway barons of the Canadian Pacific Railway and who initially bought and granted this land to be used as the Royal Victoria Hospital, insist that the community benefit from the Royal Victoria since the Charter that their ancestors and founders gave for its founding stated that it should benefit the whole community and not be for profit. It was established as a Charity and Elsbeth Angus, the great grand-niece of George Stephen and her other cousins, descendants of the two founders insist on it be honored as such. She further insists that the MUHC and the city would be ignoring the family's position at their own peril: that legal

precedents elsewhere such as in Canada, Britain, Ireland and Europe have ruled in favor for entailed endowments. What better way, then, for what I have just outlined above for the City of Montreal in conjunction with the Federal and provincial governments to jointly work, fund and create the above mentioned project of the former Royal Vic and this with the legal support and assistance of the Smith and Angus Family. The City of Montreal should therefore approach Elspeth Angus and discuss this project with her. As well this would further provide a **great example and template** for governmental cooperation at all levels for similar projects on solving the housing problem throughout Canada and creating mixed community complexes in other cities across Canada. Montreal could be a world model and template for other cities in the world.

- 4) Mixed housing, however, is essential in order to avoid the disaster of the high tower social building experiments for low income people where they quickly turned into nests for crime, drugs, prostitution, and vice, and had to be eventually abandoned in Great Britain and elsewhere. Mixing of the social classes (low, middle and upper classes including the educated professional classes), races, ethnic groups and religions with adequate availability of good public schooling, decent jobs, parks, and other conveniences are necessary to develop healthy communities.

- 5) An important element in the conversion of these former government buildings into social housing would be the introduction of Green Technology for energy efficiency. Smart Windows, Solar Panels, Geo-thermal heating, Led lighting, induction (magnetic) cooking stoves, etc. must be incorporated in order to avoid Green-house gas emissions and lower energy bills both for the residents of these housing complexes and for the City of Montreal. Also Urban Organic Vegetable Gardening and Parks should be created in and around these Social Housing Complexes to provide local vegetables, fruits even honey to the communities.
- 6) Priority must be given to social housing for native peoples living off reserves. And, thus social housing in Montreal should take this population into consideration.
- 7) The City of Montreal should come into an understanding with the provincial government to implement a surtax of 30% on housing by foreigners who are buying homes in Montreal and in Quebec in general in order to obtain a Canadian passport or are simple laundering ill-gained money or using it to avoid taxes in their home countries, those especially from China and some from various Middle East countries are prominent, but nationals of other countries are equally involved. They are heating the prices in the housing market making it unaffordable to all Montrealers. A tax of 30% could be imposed on those Montrealers who buy second or third homes for speculative purposes. A Condition could be that they also

stay and live in these homes for a minimum of at least 10 years as their primary residence in order to avoid the tax.

I believe that these are just a few of the ideas that should be presented and debated in order to solve some of the housing issues facing Canadians and Canada.

For further details and elaborations on these and other issues, Please feel free to contact me

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