

October 12, 2006

To: Members of the Commission de la présidence

**From: Jeff Itcush
Resident – CDN-NDG**

Respected Council Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this forum. I believe that this hearing, by its very existence, is demonstrative of the gradual but certain development of democracy within our city.

Though we can certainly mark progress in the democratic development of our city in the last few years, one could say that, at this juncture, we have a real opportunity to surpass the present. It is in this spirit that I present the following recommendations.

Representation by Population:

At present, there exists great disparity in the numbers of citizens per elected representative between various boroughs. Outremont, with a population of approximately 20,000 residents possesses seven representatives whereas CDN-NDG with 170,000 citizens has only six representatives. Adoption of the principal of *representation by population*, as found within other North American jurisdictions would bring all Montreal citizens closer to democratic parity.

Proportional Representation:

In its present form, Montreal's political structure tends to favour large political parties that can present candidates in every district. In addition, large parties with large fundraising capabilities, possess means that severely limit independent or smaller party candidates. In this light, a smaller party could garner 9 – 10 percent of the citywide vote and not have a single member in Council. Concurrently, this same reality could mean that some of the most capable candidates, as a result of their reluctance to affiliate with a "big time" party will be locked-out of our Council. Adoption of the principal of *proportional representation*, recently being explored by the Quebec government would certainly redress these concerns. Reducing personal donation limits to \$250 from the current \$1000 would also place independent and smaller party candidates on a more even playing field. A further analysis of public electoral financing could also address this issue.

Citizen Access to the Electoral Process:

Currently the infirm, disabled and people with pressing family commitments face unnecessary stumbling blocks vis-à-vis accessibility in Montreal general elections. Given the disturbingly low participation rate in the 2005 election, means of promoting greater participation should be considered. In light of this, I would like to recommend creating a *two day advanced poll period*. In addition, I would also recommend adopting *mail-in ballots for the infirm and disabled*. This is already standard practice in other jurisdictions.

Democratic Transparency and Greater Citizen Involvement:

At present, broad-reaching decisions, including those with financial implications, are made behind closed doors by Montreal's Executive Committee. This is an anachronism in the year 2006. A move posthaste to *public meetings of the Executive Committee* would adhere more closely to a semblance of Quebec's cherished tradition of responsible government.

In addition, citizens should have the *right to interact with any commission* before it presents its findings to Council.

At present, the quality of information available to citizens needs to be enhanced. Postings for public meetings, for example, are often found in less-than-prominent parts of local journals. Often, these postings are replete with "legal jargon". Such postings need to be *prominent and citizen-friendly*.

Interest in other levels of government has been promoted by way of the electronic media. Televising Council meetings on *Canal Vox* could promote greater transparency and citizen engagement in public policy in our city.

Citizen interaction with the Agglomeration Council is, at present, minimal. *Increasing the length of the citizen's question period to ninety minutes* would be a modest way of beginning to overcome this challenge.

Greater Minority Participation:

At present, visible minority citizens are woefully underrepresented within the ranks of our elected representatives. It is recognized that systemic and structural issues are interwoven with this problem. The city can be at the forefront of encouraging the engagement of a plurality of people within the public process by developing an *iron-clad visible minority affirmative action plan* for the City of Montreal. In addition, in boroughs where other languages are prominent *notices for public meetings could be posted in other languages*.

A General Commitment to Enhanced Democracy:

Currently some boroughs function much more democratically than others. The time is certainly right to establish and enforce *basic standards of democracy* in all boroughs.

Many thanks for the opportunity to present these recommendations to you.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Itcush

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Itcush', written in a cursive style.