

CONSULTATION PUBLIQUE A OUTREMONT

PORTANT SUR LA POLITIQUE DE STATIONNEMENT ET DE CIRCULATION DE L'ARRONDISSEMENT D'OUTREMONT

PARTIE 2 – AUDITION Des Memoires et Opinions

MEMOIRE de Earl Krams

It was in May of 2019 when the Mayor of Outremont, my mayor, the mayor I voted for, Philip Tomlinson (here after referred to as the Mayor) scheduled a press conference to announce a change in the parking and circulation regulations for vehicles in the borough of Outremont. I was surprised by this news because there was no mention of a new project of this kind in the Mayor's electoral platform. No project of this kind had been presented at a regular or special Outremont Council Meeting. A news reporter speculated that this type of plan had been promoted by a small group of Projet Montreal borough Mayors led by Luc Ferrandez. It had not been implemented previously because there was disagreement within the elected ranks of Projet Montreal. Consequently, the executive committee of Projet Montreal had delayed its implementation, quite a few times. Only our Mayor decided to go ahead and implement his radical plan. At the time, Outremont already had a mixed model according to the special needs of different sectors of the borough. There were parking meters in high density commercial areas where residents who lived nearby could purchase specifically numbered vignettes which would guarantee them a parking area near their homes and there were specified limited two (2) hour parking zones for non-residents. Resident permit parking was also available in other potentially high density areas (eg. near the main campus of the University of Montreal). Other residential areas of the borough had no restrictions on street parking except as in all of Outremont when street cleaning or snow clearing regulations were in effect. For non-residents on these residential streets there were specific limited two (2) hour parking zones. Although, there were no substantial complaints about the current model, nonetheless modifications to the existing model could have been proposed to improve it. This was not the approach that was chosen by the Mayor.

THE MAYOR'S PROJECT

The Mayor in his presentation stated the following concerns

- 1) Climate change, greenhouse gas effect and the impact vehicle use and circulation had on the increase in carbon in the atmosphere
- 2) The safety of pedestrians and cyclists.
- 3) The increase in the number of non-resident car users.

The above are all laudable concerns.

HOW DID THE MAYOR PROPOSE TO ADDRESS HIS CONCERNS

- 1) Abolish specific sector vignettes and implement a Universal vignette system throughout Outremont. Parking meters would still remain in effect but everywhere else in Outremont a Universal Vignette system would be in place from 8 am until 22 pm. Those without vignettes (non-residents) could park anywhere in Outremont, except where parking meters were installed, for 2 consecutive hours free and thereafter could purchase a daily rate at 10\$ or a monthly fee at 100\$.
- 2) Reconfigure numerous streets. There would be no more alternate side street parking. Some streets would have parking on both sides. As well, on certain streets directional changes were made from north to south and vice versa, as well as from two way to one way. Sometimes even the same street might be two way directional for some time only to switch to one way directional partway through. There would also be no stopping or no parking on streets where parking was allowed only on one side of the street.
- 3) Develop and implement new dedicated bicycle paths linking the Main University of Montreal Campus with that of the new University of Montreal Campus.
- 4) Install and greatly increase the number of speed bumps throughout the streets of Outremont
- 5) Plant more trees with revenue from vignette fees
- 6) Hire a specialist to study and monitor the effect of greenhouse gas effects in Outremont

SOME OF THE REASONS WHY SO MANY DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS HAVE BEEN SO CRITICAL OF THE MAYOR'S PROJECT

- 1) There was no systematic consultation with stakeholders (residents, merchants, professionals, institutional representatives, seniors, associations, et al.) prior to the presentation of the project.
- 2) There were no professional experts involved in the project nor were there specific expert reports
- 3) There was no specific committee established where representatives of residents, merchants professional representatives et al. might participate and present their hands on knowledge
- 4) There was no individual clearly identified to develop and lead the implementation of the plan, a project manager.
- 5) This project was not in the political platform of the Mayor's political party prior to his election. It came as a surprise.
- 6) The project appeared to have been developed in secret and was in contradiction to the Mayor's Party's pledge of transparency and community involvement. "Doing Politics Differently"
- 7) There was no clear plan of action established to implement the plan
- 8) There was no credible budget established to implement the plan
- 9) There were no clear evaluation modalities (quantitative and qualitative) of the project (eg. regular progress reports to the monthly Outremont council meetings).
- 10) The restriction on the number of visitors a resident can have per year without having to pay an additional sum of money
- 11) Privacy concerns about what information is required to provide for each resident's visitor
- 12) Charging residents for 12 months of vignette use when the system is projected to be in place for 8 months before renewal
- 13) Significant negative impacts on different associations (Club de Bridge de Outremont, Club de Patinage etc.) religious institutions, merchants, professionals, seniors, those who work in Outremont (eg. teachers, childcare workers, et al.).
- 14) Discrimination between those who live in properties with private parking and those who do not have access to private parking.
- 15) The extensive large yellow signage, at least two (2) per street advising vehicle drivers of the new parking regulations and payment procedures. I presume at some point these will be removed. How will visitors to Outremont know how to make any additional payments, so as to comply with the new regulation.

THE MAYOR'S REACTION TO STAKEHOLDER CONCERNS

When confronted with the initial reaction to the Project, The Mayor would not agree to postpone the plan and put in place some of the above suggestions. The mayor agreed to only make some piecemeal modifications, what he refers to as “bonifications”, to the plan as it was being partially implemented. Actually, the date for implementing the full plan kept being delayed. The Mayor in May of 2019 and thereafter, said the project could not be delayed because time was of the essence. He argued that the new University of Montreal Campus would be opening in September and that students and staff would need additional parking spaces. He stated that his new plan would allow for this. This is clearly an example of cognitive dissonance. Why is this so? An objective of the Mayor's plan is to reduce car circulation in Outremont, yet he proposes to offer more parking spaces to non-residents anywhere in the borough for two (2) consecutive hours free and then charge a price for more than two (2) hours of parking. As well, the Mayor proposes to offer a reduced rate for low income users. Ironically, this latter measure might incentivize non – residents (eg. students) to increase the use of their vehicles. The administration of the University of Montreal has made a conscious decision to limit the amount of parking available on its new campus (MIL). Their goal is to encourage students and staff to use public transportation and bicycles. There are two metro stops within walking distance to the MIL. These are the Outremont Metro stop, corner Van Horne and Wiseman, a ten minute walk to the MIL and the l'Acadie Metro Stop on Beaumont Street just across the street from the new MIL Campus, in the borough of Park Extension. The borough of Park Extension has not modified substantially its parking regulations. It still operates with resident specific parking vignettes and designated free time limited sections for non – residents on streets close to the MIL campus. This is similar to the previous regulations in Outremont. The Mayor's project seemed incoherent and even contradictory to many residents. Is it an ecological project? Is it a way to increase the revenue of the borough? Now we are in February and the plan has just started to be implemented, eight (8) months after the original presentation of the project and there are still discussions going on with different stakeholders. Many of the concerns of different stakeholders have not been addressed and resolved. The Mayor refers to his Project as a “work in progress.” It seems at times that it is actually a draft document. The Mayor to his credit is willing to now meet with different stakeholder groups. He is listening to issues and concerns he never anticipated in his original plan. Unfortunately, it seems that he is not able to easily address the concerns of the different stakeholders because significant funds have already been spent to put the plan in place (eg. new signage throughout the borough). Agreeing to sensible modifications, would probably reduce the anticipated revenue. It is unfortunate, that our Mayor did not chose to develop a “Green Plan” for Outremont, as the Mayor of Westmount has recently announced. In Westmount, there will be a systematic consultation process with different stakeholders, clear reporting mechanisms prior to the implementation of the plan and throughout the process (refer to the La Presse Article “Westmount Reve D'un Virage Vert” by Suzanne Colpron, February 9, 2020), Outremont although not identical to Westmount's reality has much more in common with it then it does with Plateau Mont Royal's.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Declare a Moratorium immediately on the Mayor's project until significant modifications are made to the project.
- 2) Establish immediately an Evaluation and Monitoring Committee of the Mayor's new project. The membership of the committee should be composed of stakeholder representatives. These members should be non-partisan, credible representatives of the different stakeholder groups and be available to work on a voluntary basis and at an intensive pace. A staff member of the city should also be nominated to this committee and could possibly be its chairperson. Expert specialists could be added to the committee on an ad hoc basis. The mandate of the committee would be to immediately identify current problems with the project, recommend modifications, evaluate the current project overall and make recommendations to the Outremont City Council taking into account the Mayor's goals in his project. The committee chairperson should provide a written status report at each monthly regular council meeting. The committee should be provided with a small budget to facilitate its functioning.
- 3) Suspend immediately any additional major expenditures until the evaluation of the Project is completed that would include the installation of new speed bumps which may have the unintended effect of increasing vehicle carbon emissions.
- 4) Suspend the decision to hire an expert on Green House Gas Effect until the Project has been re-evaluated. Then negotiate with Montreal that Outremont would like to hire a Green House Gas Effect expert as a pilot project which could serve as a model for the city as a whole. Consequently, ask the Central City of Montreal to pay for the hiring of this expert.

SOME SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR THE EVALUATION AND MONITORING COMMITTEE TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE MAYOR'S GOALS AND IMPACTS ON DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS

- 1) The pros versus cons of a universal vignette system versus sector specific vignette system
- 2) Universal regulations for parking as opposed to sector specific
- 3) Four (4) hours versus Two (2) hours free parking
- 4) No free parking versus some limited free parking
- 5) Reporting of Visitors per visit to a centralized data base as opposed to eg. paper vignette installed in vehicle on each use
- 6) Limitations on number of visitors without payment as opposed to no limit and no payment.
- 7) Examine how those who work in Outremont or need to attend special events in Outremont (Associations, Religious Institutions, etc.) might be accommodated without significant cost and to the detriment of the individual, the organization and the residents of Outremont
- 8) Examine in detail the different sectors of Outremont's needs reference parking, circulation, and security for pedestrians and bicyclists.

CONCLUSION

I have lived in Outremont for almost 35 years. I grew up in Outremont. I attended primary and secondary school in Outremont. When I pass by Guy Drummond School, The old Strathcona Academy, now part of University of Montreal, and Outremont High School it brings back many fond memories. I have owned a condo in Outremont and I now rent an apartment in Outremont. My daughter was born in Outremont. In all, my years of living in Outremont I have not attended an Outremont Council Meeting until after the Mayors May 2019 announcement. Maybe I should have. I got to meet more of my fellow "Outremontais." I became more aware of many of the issues in Outremont. Ironically, this has been an unintended positive consequence of the Mayor's new Project. I have often spoken to my friends and family about how great it is to live in Outremont. How this small municipality, with its rich history, with its extensive representation of political actors in our shared story, with its beautiful architecture, with a location which is quite urban but still is very residential, with its green space and parks, so close to the mountain and also so close to downtown Montreal, Outremont the smallest borough in Montreal is a jewel. Perhaps the most unique borough in Montreal. Unfortunately, in the past few years Outremont has very often been in the popular press for fractious issues. But it does not need to be so.

I am disappointed that the Projet Montreal Administration in Outremont has not stayed true to its words, in its actions. Words matter but actions matter even more. I voted for Projet Montreal because I thought it would follow through with a new way of doing politics. Transparency, dialogue, and community involvement were core values of Projet Montreal. In the Journal Metro of October 20, 2017 edition where mayoralty candidates were questioned about their position on “la circulation”, the Mayor stated the following ;

“L’arrondissement doit consulter ses citoyens pour recueillir leurs préoccupations, surtout concernant la circulation. Nous organiserons des consultations dès notre première année et grâce à notre position favorable à la ville centre, nous serons bien positionnés pour recevoir des réponses. »

The Mayor’s Project for vehicle parking and circulation has not stayed true to the above pledge. It is not a good example of “doing politics differently”, in fact it represents a completely opposite way of operating. It is an old command style way of doing politics. The Mayor presented himself as a unifier, as someone who would bridge divisions in Outremont. That’s a good thing. Yet Outremont is evermore rife with division because a Project was developed without the values of transparency, dialogue and community involvement. A power point presentation is not a substitute for a comprehensive plan. Outremont is once again prominent in the media as a fractious borough. It does not have to be this way. Outremont the smallest borough in Montreal has a wealth of capable residents. Residents who are not anti-ecology but who desire to put forward a coherent, systematic, vehicle parking and circulation plan which will make “Les Outremontais” proud and it will be part of an innovative “Green Plan”. A plan which can serve as a model for the rest of Montreal, Quebec, and even perhaps the world. An opportunity has been lost, perhaps only postponed. Let’s learn from the errors of our way. Let’s stop a cut and paste approach. Let’s begin to lift the clouds over Outremont. Let’s agree to make significant modifications to the Mayor’s Project. Let the Mayor return to his stated core values and let us once again shine a bright light over Outremont, a borough we can all once again be proud of.

Respectfully submitted

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Resident of Outremont

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