

Montreal, June 15, 2017

Division des élections, du soutien aux commissions et de la réglementation

Re: The Hasidic community of Outremont

Although the Hasidic community of Outremont formally has equal rights, we feel that our community is continuously the target of discriminatory attitudes and practices. In particular, we believe that in the past years the borough of Outremont repeatedly enacts overly strict interpretations of bylaws or passes new bylaws that have serious negative consequences on the quality of our daily lives. We offer you the following examples to exemplify our point.

Outremont has a very restrictive bylaw (the most one in the western world, as far as we know) regarding the time a sukkah can stay standing during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot.

Outremont is the only borough in Montreal that has engaged in ticketing the vehicles rented by schools to transport young and children during the Jewish holiday of Purim, even though the celebration of the festival lasts about twenty hours once a year.

Outremont has a bylaw restricting processions accompanied by music and singing. This bylaw affects the Hassidic community processions, for example, during a New Torah Scroll event or the bonfire for the celebration of Lag Ba'Omer. As a result, our processions are now held in Mile End (Plateau borough).

Outremont has passed a resolution in council banning the ceremony of the burning of the bread on the private property of a member of the Hassidic community, even though the fire department stated there was no problem. This ceremony occurs for only a few hours a year, the morning before Pesach. As with our processions, we now perform the ceremony in the Plateau, a borough that has worked hard to find solutions through dialogue, not bylaws.

Most recently, Outremont passed a bylaw restricting the construction of new places of worship on avenues Bernard and Laurier. Because the construction of new places of worship was already banned everywhere else in Outremont, our borough currently holds a total ban on new places of worship. To make it clear, our community can not open any new places of worship ANYWHERE in Outremont. Despite the fact that we are rapidly growing community and going to synagogue is an integral part of daily routine.

Although we make up more than a quarter of Outremont's population, we feel that we are not considered legitimate Outremont citizens, but an outside group that must be "accommodated" – or not. It is okay for people to not agree with our way of life. We know we are different and don't expect everyone to be okay with that. It is not okay, however, for them to take away our civil rights because of such.

We are not an illegal community, we do not flout laws, and we are not lobbyists. All we want is to be able to live our way of life in peace and harmony with all our neighbors. The last thing we want is conflict. But our mayor and the majority of the councillors persistently say no to dialogue every time we ask, including during public consultations and the question period at the monthly city council meetings.

Even Montreal Mayor Coderre's "Vivre-ensemble" is ignored by his representative in Outremont.

We have submitted this brief in the hopes that the city of Montreal will take a better look at what is happening in Outremont and help put a stop to the discrimination and harassment we face. The tension is steadfastly rising, and our community is suffering as a result, as well the Outremont community as a whole. We are aware that more work needs to be done on our part, we know that we can do better, but the borough has a lot of work to do, too. For the future of all of the children in Outremont, we must find a way to coexist peacefully, and we need the city's help. Please.

Recommendations:

- Public research to support or refute the efficiency of the bylaws affecting our community (for example, do synagogues on commercial avenues negatively affect business?). Valentina Gaddi, from the University of Montreal, did her research thesis on the controversies surrounding Purim, Sukkot and the place of worship bylaw. We recommend the city use her data to make better, more informed, decisions that affect us.
- Creation of a "Comité consultatif sur les relations intercommunautaires." Even though the mayor promised it during her campaign and different citizens repeatedly asked for it over the past four years, no inter-community committee has been formed.
- Mediation to decrease the tensions between the Hasidim, city councillors and individuals working in the borough.

- Sensitivity training and education about the Hasidim for city councillors and individuals working in the borough.

- Collaboration and dialogue between the city councillors and individuals working for the borough and the Hasidic community before passing bylaws and making important decisions that concern us.

Sincerely,

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