



Chambre de commerce
du Montréal métropolitain
Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal

December 10, 2008

Claude Fabien
Commission Chair
Office de consultation publique de Montréal
Cours Mont-Royal
1550 Metcalfe Street, Suite 1414
Montréal, Quebec H3A 1X6

Subject: Brief submitted by the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal as part of the consultation on the Maison de Radio-Canada modernization project and site development

Dear Mr. Fabien:

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal was interested to learn of the project to redevelop the area in and around Maison de Radio-Canada and is pleased to submit its comments on this initiative of importance for Montréal.

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal has some 7,000 members from the Greater Montréal business community. Its mission is to analyze and understand economic issues and to champion and back related initiatives in the community. It also supports its members by offering an integrated range of services and proposing ideas to help the city, its 110,000 businesses and 1.8 million workers who together drive the Quebec economy, achieve their full potential.

To begin, the Board of Trade would like to commend the quality of the project and the relevance of the documents produced. The special care taken by the promoter to ensure the project blends into its surroundings should be taken into account in this public consultation.

Since it believes that all development projects need a framework and guidelines in order to maximize the benefits for the city, the Board of Trade feels that **wealth creation and sustainable, quality urban development** are two factors that merit consideration before carrying out projects of this nature. Moreover, the Board of Trade has also identified certain **conditions for success** that could potentially be the deciding factors as to whether this project goes ahead.

It is within this context and with a view to assuming its role as an involved, responsible economic player that the Board of Trade submits the following recommendations and comments:

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1. Promote wealth creation

The Maison de Radio-Canada modernization project and site development—made necessary by the broadcaster's new television and multimedia production activities—are required in the near term because the infrastructure was built some thirty years ago and some of the facilities are approaching the end of their useful life.

The directors of Radio-Canada feel that the best way to finance this initiative is to sell the land around the building, currently used for parking, to promoters who will ensure a coherent development. The proceeds would be invested to modernize Radio-Canada's facilities.

A creative plan, this partnership between a Crown Society and the private sector—subject to strict and transparent governance—will allow the project to be self-financing and revitalize the eastern part of downtown Montréal, near the business district.

Besides giving Montréal contractors an opportunity to showcase their expertise, this project is also an opportunity for the city to increase the value of land with excellent development potential and thus substantially boost its tax revenues.

Just as the Quartier international de Montréal did for the area north of Old Montréal (designed by Daoust Lestage architecture et design urbain, the same firm retained by the promoters of the Radio-Canada project), around Palais des congrès, the Radio-Canada project will encourage development of the area and perhaps the restoration of certain adjacent buildings.

In this regard, the Board of Trade would like to point out the attention the promoter is paying to developing the lots in a coherent manner, thus adding value to the whole. That said, breaking the project down into phases will allow the promoter and contractors to ensure the project is completed despite the economic and logistical constraints that will arise along the way. And since the current economic uncertainty could greatly affect projects of this type, the Board of Trade believes that proceeding in phases will create a leverage effect in that the initial phases will generate the synergies required to launch the subsequent phases. Spread out over ten years, the promoter will have the tools to create as many spin-offs as possible.

In the end, many sectors will benefit from the many spin-offs generated by the project. Besides filling their property tax coffers, the different levels of governments will collect revenues as a result of the land sales and the increased economic activity generated by the project. As such, given that these spin-offs will help create wealth for Montréal, the Board of Trade strongly supports this initiative, particularly since it will densify the areas close to downtown and enhance the value of existing urban infrastructures.

Quality of place

Besides the major benefits for the city's development, another key aspect of this project is the increased value of adjacent land. The south side of the Radio-Canada site is next to the entrance of the Ville-Marie expressway, exposed to heavy, noisy traffic. This part of the expressway is an extension of Notre-Dame Street, which is undergoing a major modernization in a project spearheaded by the Ministère des Transports du Québec and the City of Montréal.

In the Board of Trade's opinion, the work required to upgrade these roads and ensure the sustainable development of the surrounding areas merits careful thought. Such an initiative would resolve the divide in the heart of the city and would go a long way to improving the links between downtown, Old Montréal and, in many places, along the shores of the St. Lawrence. This analysis is critical because covering the expressway would free up land for development that would greatly improve the quality of the area between Palais des congrès and Jacques-Cartier bridge.

While it admits that this is a complicated and costly project that involves many stakeholders, the Board of Trade believes that studies should be conducted in short order to determine the feasibility of covering the expressway, since this will directly affect decisions concerning riverfront projects.

As such, the Board of Trade suggests:

- That the Ministère des Transports du Québec and the City of Montréal must demonstrate transparency and present the plans and redevelopment strategies for Notre-Dame Street and the Ville-Marie expressway that include covering up the expressway;
- That studies be conducted on different ways to cover the expressway, i.e., by constructing tunnels (that can withstand buildings on top of them) or by covering it with concrete slabs (on which gardens and parks could be created, taking into account the possibility of integrating the necessary underground infrastructures to allow permanent covering of the expressway in the future);
- That the studies indicate the location of the access ramps for the construction projects underway: the Quartier de la santé, the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (CHUM), the Viger train station/hotel, and the Radio-Canada modernization and site development.

2. For sustainable, quality urban development

Besides being a major initiative for the development of the eastern part of downtown Montréal, the Radio-Canada modernization and site development project is commendable because it will make Maison Radio-Canada's facilities and site more suited to their surroundings.

This redevelopment will also revamp an urban plan that dates back to an era when the automobile was the preferred method of transportation and that to this day adversely affects riverfront neighbourhoods. For example, today no one would consider building an office tower with 1,000 above-ground parking spaces so close to the business district. This project will also create continuity in the urban landscape, i.e., between projects currently underway such as the CHUM, the Quartier de la santé and the Viger train station/hotel.

Built environment

In addition to being located in an area of Montréal close to downtown and that already has major infrastructures – which favours urban densification – the project involves some construction that will meet the sustainable development standards of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) organization, a factor that enhances the project's viability and appeal.

It bears mentioning that a number of other major initiatives such as the CHUM, the Quartier de la santé and the Viger train station/hotel redevelopment, as well as residential development projects, are underway or under study near the site, and it is within this context of redeveloping and requalifying an entire part of the city that this project should be examined.

The Board of Trade also notes that insofar as the eastern part of downtown Montréal is presently quite fragmented and not appealing to investors, the project, which seeks to reconnect the urban fabric, will create spatial, social and economic continuity with the riverfront neighbourhoods that are currently cut off from the Maison de Radio-Canada site. Indeed, in the Board of Trade's view, while the proposed densities will fulfill the promoter's profitability requirements, they will also create an attractive urban environment with appeal to families, young professionals and people with small budgets. At the same time, the promoter has deliberately chosen to create a multi-purpose social and functional mix on the site by integrating different types of dwellings – a formula that is still rarely used in Montréal. This blend is a good way to create a dynamic, prosperous neighbourhood and qualifies as sustainable urban

development. However, to be successful, the promoter must insist on first-rate architecture for all the different types of dwellings – social, affordable, middle class and luxury.

Indeed, the promoter has also come up with an innovative twist that could very well encourage young families to move to this new neighbourhood because it plans to reserve the first few floors of the buildings for families and to create special access to interior courtyards and green spaces.

That said, the Board of Trade feels special attention should be paid to harmonizing the 10-storey buildings planned with the existing apartment buildings that are no more than three storeys high. The fact is that by erecting tall buildings, we risk repeating the same mistake of creating one more barrier between the riverfront neighbourhoods and the Maison Radio-Canada complex. So, although the project will reconnect the area's urban fabric, we must make sure that the architectural features of the new buildings blend in as much as possible into their environment.

Moreover, the Board of Trade considers that by opting for top-quality architecture, this project has the potential of becoming a landmark, where modern buildings will be seamlessly integrated into a heritage site.

Urban development

Radio-Canada has expressed a desire to transform René-Lévesque Boulevard into a prestigious tree-lined thoroughfare with new public transit and active transportation facilities. Since the area around the future Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (CHUM) will have much the same requirements, we must ensure that all these elements are uniform from one project to the next.

Moreover, The Board of Trade has noticed that the promoter has deliberately designed a multi-purpose development, an element that makes the project all the more viable and that will revitalize and reconnect an important sector of Montréal with the residential and commercial milieu in which it is located, not to mention further the city's economic development.

3. Conditions for success

Although the Board of Trade considers this project beneficial for Montréal, it has identified certain conditions it feels must be met if the project is to succeed:

- The agreements between the promoter and the buyers of the land must be transparent and close ties must be forged with the riverfront neighbourhoods and partners;
- Ties must be created between the different bodies to conduct feasibility studies on covering the Ville-Marie expressway;
- Special attention must be paid to architectural features so as to ensure the new buildings blend in with the existing residential environment.

In closing, given that this project will likely generate substantial economic spin-offs and is part of a sustainable urban development vision and since it appears to be in line with the other projects in the area and will help rehabilitate a fragmented part of the east end of downtown, the Board of Trade believes that a concerted effort should be made to see it to fruition.

Faced with an ambitious project, the promoter is proving to be innovative. And because quality begets quality and the project seems to meet the criteria of excellence, the Board of Trade cannot help but hope for its success. Not only will the Montréal urban landscape improve, so too will the city's economy.

We are available to help in any way we can.

Sincerely,

Roger Plamondon
Interim President and CEO