



March 13, 2009

Ms. Jocelyne Beaudet
Committee Chair
Office de la consultation publique de Montréal
Cours Mont-Royal
1550 Metcalfe Street, Suite 1414
Montréal, Quebec H3A 1X6

Subject: Opinion of the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal with respect to the public consultation on the building at 1420 Blvd. Mont-Royal

Dear Ms. Beaudet:

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal was interested to learn of plans to redevelop the building at 1420 Blvd. Mont-Royal, and we wish to share with you our views concerning this initiative. These views relate primarily to two important considerations: the responsible financial management of the Université de Montréal and heritage development.

The financial situation of the Université de Montréal

The Board of Trade is concerned about the ability of Quebec universities to offer first-rate research and educational activities. Consequently, we are preoccupied with the impact that the financial situation of universities may have on their success and ability to fulfill their mission.

The Board of Trade recognizes that Quebec universities, particularly those in Greater Montréal, face major challenges in terms of maintaining their built heritage. Many of their pavilions are composed of aging buildings requiring significant investments to maintain and upgrade them.

At a time when they must operate on shoestring budgets, these institutions must manage their finances effectively. In our opinion, the allocation of budgets devoted to fixed assets and their maintenance must thus be done in a responsible and pragmatic way.

The Board of Trade understands that the Mother House of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, purchased by the university in 2003, is no longer part of the development plan it reformulated following the acquisition of the Outremont switching yard, a site better adapted to the university's future development. It thus appears to us that making significant – unplanned – investments in renovating and bringing up to standard an old building that no longer meets the university's needs is incompatible with the university's means and mission.

Heritage development

For many years and with regard to many different development projects, the Board of Trade has supported initiatives designed to protect and enhance our heritage. And we believe that the redevelopment of the building at 1420 Blvd. Mont-Royal has the potential to be a high-quality project.

In addition to being of significant heritage value, the building is located within the historic and natural borough of Mont-Royal and offers unrestricted views of both the city and Mount Royal Park. The developer should capitalize on these assets to add value to the project and also allocate some components of the project for public use, particularly the chapel and the woodlands between the buildings and Mount Royal Park. In short, the project could make an enormous contribution to the quality of life and place of the sector, considering that, for the moment, the building is practically unoccupied and inaccessible.

The Board of Trade considers that many public authorities and mechanisms have been established in Montréal to govern changes made to the function of heritage buildings. It appears to us that existing regulations governing such projects provide sufficient heritage protection and will ensure that the site's potential is appropriately developed.

Conclusion

These mechanisms – especially those established for this sector of the city – should therefore ensure the respectful development of the heritage of the building at 1420 Blvd. Mont-Royal, whether its owner is private or institutional.

While aware of the importance of preserving the heritage of this building, the Board of Trade believes that the Université de Montréal should not be obliged to ensure the protection of a building that is not fully in line with its educational mission. Considering that the university must manage its budgets very carefully, it would be inappropriate to force it to undertake such a project.

From this perspective, the Board of Trade is in favour of the proposed change to this building's function. It even sees this transfer of ownership as an opportunity for the building to be redeveloped and enhanced by a specialist in the field whose primary mission is construction. It will then be up to the regulatory framework and the relevant authorities to assure the public that the new owner will develop it in such a way that fully respects its heritage value.

In conclusion, please be assured of the Board of Trade's full co-operation in contributing to the development of the metropolis.

Sincerely,

Michel Leblanc
President and CEO