

*Joint statement by Les Amis de la montagne and Héritage Montréal
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Expansion of the Montreal General Hospital on Mount Royal: a surprising development!

The mega-hospital projects of the Université de Montréal (CHUM) and McGill University (MUHC) have received extensive media coverage with regards medical, academic and financial issues. Yet the impacts of these vast complexes on the surrounding neighbourhoods have received little scrutiny. These impacts should be taken into account from the start of development. In medicine as in urban planning, it is better to prevent than to repair once the damage is done. Healing a city can take a long time and can be expensive, if not impossible.

Last June, in a re-direction that has surprised the community, the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) published full-page ads, including a computer-generated rendering of its plans for what is called the Mountain campus, with a new high-rise building beside the Montreal General Hospital. While citizens and private property owners must accept the heritage and urban constraints of the historic and natural district recently designated by the Quebec government, can a public project like the MUHC suddenly bypass them and ignore Mount Royal? Can the MUHC also be allowed to increase stresses to the neighbourhood?

Three weeks ago, MUHC authorities reacted positively to the Office de Consultation publique de Montréal's recommendations for its Glen campus. However, the MUHC has now decided to significantly expand healthcare on the current Montreal General Hospital site. Whatever the costs or the health services advantages may be, and they are not clear, the addition falls within the protected sector of the Mountain. For decades, citizens have been fighting to protect this symbol of Montreal against all kinds of developers, both private and public.

In 2000, the MUHC demonstrated exemplary behaviour when it established an independent committee chaired by Roy Heenan to carry out public hearings on the future of these buildings. The report recommended improving connections between the park and neighbourhoods by reducing the amount of buildings, parking lots and other obstructions on the Montreal General Hospital site. The commissioners noted: *"It goes without saying that no project should be authorised on these lands, nor an addition permitted that would have the effect of increasing the physical or visual obstacles between the park and the city."*

Not only is the project to increase infrastructure at the Montreal General Hospital site contrary to the recommendations of the Heenan Report, it also raises serious questions of consistency. While building a modern medical centre at the Glen site, why construct another high-rise on the mountain, in the middle of a heritage district? Shouldn't activities be integrated into the existing hospital's built volume, even if this means better dividing activities between the two campuses?

Public institutions like the MUHC have a responsibility to be good citizens and to set an example when developing in a residential neighbourhood, especially one that is a heritage district. The federal and provincial governments and the municipal administration must be consistent. The inherent complexity of large projects cannot excuse their developers and authorities from addressing questions related to urban planning, heritage and the environment before making decisions.

It is a privilege to be located within an iconic site like Mount Royal. A privilege that merits respect for the area as well as for the many people and organizations who responded in good

faith to invitations from the MUHC, the city, and the Ministry of Culture to contribute to public consultations on the Montreal master plan and the future of Mount Royal.

Before the MUHC goes further in its planning, it is essential that citizens and organizations concerned with Montreal and its mountain be able to express their points of view as part of an independent process according to the rules inherent in the process of public consultation. This consultation effort must include the proposed development and potential impacts on heritage, landscape and urban planning. There is no point in inviting the public to respond once all the decisions have been made and huge sums spent on studies. As a society, we no longer have the means to pay for such luxuries. In contrast, the MUHC project must be a model that responds to medical and academic concerns as it does to those related to heritage and sustainable development.

Signed,
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Les Amis de la montagne is a community-based, non-profit organization founded in 1986, dedicated to the protection, conservation and enhancement of Mount Royal.

Héritage Montréal is an independent, non-profit organization founded in 1975, dedicated to the preservation of Greater Montreal's urban, architectural, landscape and social heritage.