

Public Hearing on Côte Saint-Luc's Master Plan Revision - Minutes

Date and Time

The hearing was held at City Hall on Wednesday, October 26th, 2022. It began at 7:05 pm.

In Attendance

Panelists: Charles Senekal (Director of Urban Development), Tanya Ambramovitch (Associate City Manager – Urban Strategy)

Moderator: Jacques Bénard (H+K Strategies)

Minutes: Elizabeth Robertson (H+K Strategies)

City officials and staff: Councillor Dida Berku, Melanie Rothpan, Darryl Levine, Tammy McEwen

Between 10 and 12 people attended the meeting over the course of the evening.

Introduction

The moderator welcomed participants and introduced the panelists. He gave an overview of the City's pre-consultation process to date, which has included two public information sessions, an open house, and an online survey. The survey will be open until October 31st.

The moderator then explained the parameters of the hearing. Of the four people who had submitted briefs to the City, three had chosen to present them in person. Each presenter will be given 10 to 15 minutes to share their brief. After each presentation, the panelists will be invited to ask questions.

Two people in attendance who had not submitted briefs asked to share their thoughts for the Master Plan as well. The moderator set time aside for them to speak after the scheduled presentations.

Citizen Briefs

Note: The following is a summary of what each presenter said at the hearing. The full briefs are available on the "Engage" section of the City's website.

Nathan Elberg

Mr. Elberg disagrees with several aspects of the City's vision for Côte Saint-Luc. He believes officials should focus on fixing current issues rather than planning ambitious development projects. In his opinion, increasing population density would damage the nature of the city. The focus should be on single-family homes instead of condominium developments with an obligatory number of low-cost units. He spoke of the disadvantages of underground parking and of the "15-minute city". Mr. Elberg also shared several suggestions to make the city more walkable, including fixing sidewalks and introducing by-laws to prevent vegetation and cars from encroaching on sidewalks. He would also like to

see the sidewalks on certain streets widened and suggested the City could make this change on Guelph by turning it into a one-way street.

The panelists pointed out that many families in Côte Saint-Luc cannot afford single-family homes and asked how their needs could be addressed. Mr. Elberg suggested townhouses as an alternative and mentioned the importance of reducing red tape for developers in order to reduce building costs. Panelists also asked Mr. Elberg what he thought about the idea of splitting single-family home lots into two. He replied that it would depend on where and how it would be done.

Panelists were interested in Mr. Elberg's suggestions for making the city more walkable. They took note of his suggestion for making certain streets one-way in order to make room for wider sidewalks but added they would have to look into the effect of such a measure on traffic circulation more generally.

Mr. Elberg was asked for his thoughts on how the City could address the future needs of families and seniors. He replied that it is important to think about housing for seniors. For example, it could be beneficial to allow homeowners to build "grandparent houses" on their lots to house older relatives.

Later in the hearing, Mr. Elberg added it was time to revisit the idea of developing the Meadowbrook Golf Course. Golf courses are not environmentally friendly, and a development would provide additional housing for Côte Saint-Luc.

Mr. Dean Mendel from Kehilla Montréal

Presenting on behalf of Kehilla Montréal, Mr. Mendel spoke of the need for affordable housing in Côte Saint-Luc, describing it as a crucial step to improving the lives of citizens. He asked Council to take measures to improve the lives of citizens living below the poverty line. Specifically, he called for at least 10% of housing in new developments on shopping centre sites to be social housing and an additional 10% to be affordable housing. At least 25% of these social and affordable homes should be designed for families. The organization would like the City to adopt a by-law requiring developers to meet these standards.

Kehilla also recommended the City form a committee with representatives from the developers, community organizations, and citizens to meet regularly during the process of preparing the Master Plan. The purpose of the group wouldn't be to intrude on the process but to check in along the way to make sure everything is on track. Mr. Mendel added that Kehilla would be happy to contribute.

Mr. Mendel spoke of the success of Kehilla's 68-unit social affordable housing project on Caldwell Avenue and added that their waitlist for social and affordable housing units is growing. The organization is looking at new funding models to support future initiatives.

Panelists asked Mr. Mendel how Kehilla came up with their numbers (i.e., 10% social and 10% affordable housing in new developments) and whether they thought those percentages should be distributed equally across developments. Mr. Mendel replied that Kehilla had looked at best practices. They found that Montreal's 20%/20% attribution is difficult for developers to attain. The 10%/10% attribution seems more reasonable to them. An equitable distribution of the percentages would mean no one developer would be penalized. Kehilla's target number for social and affordable housing in Côte Saint-Luc is approximately 500 units in the next 10 years.

When asked to elaborate on the percentage of social and affordable housing units Kehilla would like to see dedicated to families, Mr. Mendel replied that currently in Montreal, developers are asked to aim for affordable units priced at \$1,090/month. When developers build these units, they tend to build them as smaller apartments for single people and couples. There needs to be more affordable homes for families.

It was pointed out that there is sometimes an issue of social acceptability when it comes to social housing, with some people concerned about the deterioration of the buildings over the years. Mr. Mendel replied that there is a perception that low-income tenants don't take care of buildings. This perception isn't true. Kehilla's tenants take pride in their residence and community. In fact, lower-income buildings are often in better shape than more expensive ones. Also, organizations like Kehilla are committed to long-term upkeep in order to make sure quality is maintained. It is part of their holistic approach to improving people's lives.

Panelists asked about best practices in terms of integrating social and affordable housing into a development. Mr. Mendel said that this type of housing can be distributed throughout the property or concentrated in one building. Both options work. However, Kehilla prefers the concentrated approach because it helps create community.

Finally, Mr. Mendel was asked if Kehilla's strategy also includes renovating older buildings. He replied that it does, although this approach takes more time since the units in those buildings are occupied. You typically need a large donor pool to carry the cost of the building for an extended period of time while waiting to be able to turn units over to families in need.

Harold Forester

Mr. Forester began by thanking the City for giving residents the opportunity to share their views. The first part of his presentation focused on the quality of the roads in Côte Saint-Luc, both in terms of repairs and construction. He asked for better standards and quality control on road repairs and for the City to change its bidding procedures on road construction to make contractors responsible for their work for a certain period of time. According to Mr. Forester, insisting on contractor guarantees in the bidding process could set a precedent for road construction across the province.

Mr. Forester also asked the City to challenge the City of Montreal's proposal for the Cavendish Extension to have only one lane in each direction. In his opinion, single lanes in each direction would be inadequate. He recommends the City perform an in-depth traffic study to determine the projected traffic load and number of traffic lanes that will be required.

In addition, Mr. Forester would like to see traffic design enhancements to make traffic more fluid. This would not only reduce delays for drivers but also reduce greenhouse gas emissions. He would also like to see alternate routes for commercial traffic and an extension of existing bus routes. An in-depth traffic study would allow the City to find out how best to address these concerns.

Mr. Forester closed his presentation by asking the City to implement standards and by-laws regarding noise control (for example, standards for individual exterior air-conditioners). Acoustic specialists could be brought in to assist with this initiative.

The panelists asked Mr. Forester what a perfect street that is safe and comfortable for drivers, pedestrians, and the people who live on it would look like to him. He replied that he appreciated the main streets in Florida that are six lanes wide, include slip lanes, and only have intersections at major crossings. This design keeps traffic moving at a steady pace. He would also like to see better synchronization of traffic lights and other measures that increase traffic fluidity.

Panelists asked Mr. Forester to elaborate on his concerns about road paving standards. He replied that because the bidding system favours lower bids, contractors will always choose the cheapest material unless the City explicitly states the quality it requires.

Mr. Forester was asked about his thoughts on public transit and whether he would use a fast, comfortable, clean mode of public transit that would take him from Cavendish Mall to Namur Metro if it were available. He replied that he would, but he believes he is in the minority. He knows a lot of elderly people who would not consider taking public transportation because they have been using cars their entire lives.

Additional Comments

Two people in attendance who had not submitted briefs asked to share their views on the Master Plan revision. They were each granted speaking time.

Sharon Freedman

Ms. Freedman agreed with Mr. Mendel about the need for affordable housing and said she thinks the new developments could be exciting for Côte Saint-Luc. However, she has concerns about the density of high-rise condominiums. She believes they contribute to congestion and are harder to maintain over the years. Instead, Ms. Freedman would like to see smaller buildings separated by courtyards, similar to what she has seen in Italy and France. She added that smaller constructions are prettier, safer, and easier to maintain than high-rises.

Ms. Freedman said Côte Saint-Luc is a pretty city and new developments should include a variety of buildings that are pleasing to the eye, including affordable single-family homes with gardens.

In terms of public transportation, Ms. Freedman is concerned about the needs of an ageing population. While she would use transit herself, she worries it won't be appropriate for elderly people who are frail or suffer from dementia.

The panelists pointed out that density is what pays for affordable housing and asked whether she would accept a certain level of density if it meant being able to include affordable housing. Ms. Freedman understands the need for flexibility and wouldn't mind a couple of higher-density buildings closer to the road, as long as they look good. She added that she would like to see at least one, two, or three affordable housing buildings.

Panelists also noted it is possible to achieve density with lower buildings. For example, Paris is one of the densest cities in the world. Ms. Freedman agreed that what she envisions is a variety of quality designed buildings that allow for public space interaction. She also said she would not mind paying slightly higher taxes if it meant having nice, smaller buildings.

Michael Schafter

Mr. Schafter began by saying how much he enjoys living in Côte Saint-Luc. He appreciates the services it offers and the work of its Councillors.

Mr. Schafter said he understands smaller buildings are not as profitable for developers as high-rises. However, high-rises often aren't built with families in mind. His solution would be to include more family homes in high-rises. He offered the example of a two-story family home within a high-rise building. He also wants to see more underground parking.

In terms of reducing taxes, Mr. Schafter said Council should ask the provincial government to allow homeowners to deduct the interest from their mortgages on their taxes. He also suggested requiring speculators to pay a 10% surcharge on each unit they buy. That money could then be put toward building affordable housing.

Finally, Mr. Schafter proposed moving the CP rail yards to make way for new housing developments.

Conclusion

The moderator thanked the presenters for sharing their views.

Residents were invited to participate in several upcoming workshops organized by the City. These workshops will cover a variety of topics related to the Master Plan, including housing, commerce, mobility and connectivity, and the Westminster Corridor. Residents must register to participate. They can do so by going to the "Engage" section of the City's website.

The hearing concluded at 9:10 pm.