

# Southern Décarie Design Brief

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## The Advanced Urban Laboratory



Urban Studies Programme  
Concordia University

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# 1. Introduction

The *Southern Décarie Design Brief* is the result of a collective work conducted in the Advanced Urban Laboratory of the Urban Studies Program at Concordia University during the academic year 2001-2002. The Brief epitomizes the students' contribution while putting the emphasis on the final stage of their work: the policies and urban design proposals for the southern Décarie highway area. The class mandate was twofold: first to assess the conditions prevailing in the study area, as a prior step to developing urban design and policy proposals during the second semester of the year-long collective project.

The first section of this Brief concisely introduces the Advanced Urban Laboratory. It discusses the general principles at the heart of the Lab's work, and highlights the key principles and concepts of "good city form" embedded in students' policy and design proposals. The second section presents a broad overview of the study area: the Southern Décarie Area along with some background information. The third part of the Brief deals with policies and design proposals for various sites within the area.

## 1.1 The Advanced Urban Laboratory

The Advanced Urban Laboratory is a one-year studio in urban planning and design. During the first semester, students focused on the historical, social and economic factors that have contributed to the genesis and growth of the built environment of the southern Décarie highway area. They also assessed the environmental and experiential qualities of the urban space in the area by using different survey techniques. Great emphasis was finally given to develop a better understanding of the urban morphogenesis of the area through a series of morphological analyses.

At the end of the first semester, students were asked to assess collectively the Strengths and Weaknesses of the study area and to then establish a list of *Aims and Objectives* that should be pursued in priority in preparing site-specific urban design projects and in outlining planning policies for the area. Their conclusions will be presented in the second part of this report.

All this preparatory work lead to the second academic semester during which, through successive group work mandates, students developed various site-specific urban regeneration projects, and outlined policies that would complement the urban design projects while contributing to the making of a more sustainable environment in the Southern Décarie Highway Area.

## 1.2 Urban Design and Sustainable development

Urban design has numerous definitions; some are more comprehensive than others, some take a more restrictively defined perspective, reflecting narrower orientations leaning toward city beautification schemes for instance. The Advanced Urban Laboratory adopts a wide perspective, and embraces this definition by Michael Southworth<sup>1</sup>:

"Urban design is defined here as that branch of city planning that focuses on the analysis, design, and management of environments with particular attention to the experiential qualities of place. It addresses the environmental needs of various groups of users in terms of how they perceive, value and use places" (Southworth, 1990, p.3).

If a city is to be defined as both an assembly of people and as a physical entity- the latter made of a natural substratum and the built environment itself- then, urban design's aim is to create, manage or preserve the best possible physical environment to support human activities.

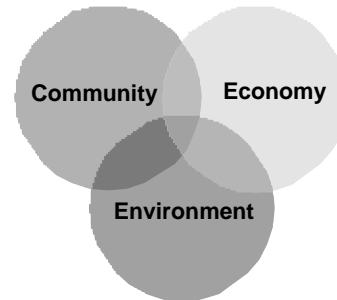
"Sustainable development" principles provided an underlying theoretical framework to guide the action of the Urban Laboratory.

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<sup>1</sup> Southworth, Michael (1990) *Theory and Practice of Contemporary Urban Design a Look at American Urban Design Plans* Working paper / Institute of Urban and Regional Development, University of California at Berkeley ; 510.

In the cornerstone report “Our Common Future,” the UN appointed Brundland Commission defined Sustainable Development as meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (Brundland Commission Report, quoted by Roseland, 1992)<sup>2</sup>

Sustainable development theories seek to develop a holistic approach integrating three fundamental dimensions contributing to the making of the human habitat: the economy, the social (community) and the environment (natural and built). The approach is often synthesized in a graph in which the economy, the social and community matters, and the environment are displayed as interwoven while given equal importance. (See Fig. 1.1)



**Figure 1.1** A graph symbolizing sustainable development

In the context of urban design, one can turn toward various “sustainability indicators” developed in the literature to assess the current situation in a city or a neighbourhood, and as benchmarks to fashion proposals for the future. Among numerous indicators are:<sup>3</sup>

**Economic Indicators**

- Diversified commercial activities
- Variety of use, mixed uses
- Services and utilities used to their full potential
- Availability of jobs at a walking/commuting distance (by public transit)
- Presence of a vibrant high street in the neighbourhood

**“Socio-Economic” and Community Life Indicators**

- Cultural and recreational facilities
- Crime rate/personal security
- Play areas for children
- Proximity of school
- Sport facilities
- Libraries
- Health-care facilities

**Environmental and Transportation Indicators**

- Clean air and soils
- Noise
- Biological comfort: sun, wind, snow
- Green space
- Location of public transport facilities (400m max between home and major bus route and metro)
- Reduced car-dependence by choice of option modes, etc

**Built Environment and Aesthetic Indicators**

- Community design - sense of place
- Connections with cultural and natural heritage
- Sound distribution of residential, commercial and community facilities
- Variety of housing types/variety of tenure

<sup>2</sup> Roseland, Mark (1992) *Toward Sustainable Communities. A Resource Book for Municipal and Local Governments* Ottawa, Ont. : National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy

<sup>3</sup> List adapted from: Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront (1992) “Examples of Indicators of Quality of Life for a Healthy Community,” in: *Regeneration, Toronto’s Waterfront and the Sustainable City: Final Report*, Toronto: The Commission Ed. and from Urban Task Force (1999) *Toward an Urban Renaissance*, London (UK): E&FN Spon. Categories are by the author.

### **Administrative and Institutional Indicators**

- Public involvement in making community decisions
- Role of community organizations
- Heritage preservation scheme
- Socio-economic mix (avoid social exclusion)

### **People/Environment Relations Indicators (experiential indicators)**

- 24-hour/4-season use of public space
- Variety of architectural expression, visually rich environment
- Use of public space – to seat, play, walk, etc
- Permeability
- Walking is the natural and pleasurable means of access between activities
- Feeling of safety

## 1.3 Urban design and the making of urban form

In relation to physical planning and design more specifically, the work conducted in the Advanced Urban Laboratory is based on three basic principles: the city should be “built within the city;” the city should be “built upon the city,” and the public space is the backbone of city fabrics.<sup>4</sup>

### **Building the city within the city**

In line with very modest demographic growth, the development of the city should take place in the already urbanized areas. The use of the existing infrastructures should be maximized, and within the limits of sound and sustainable development, city sites should be developed to their full potential.

### **Building the city upon the city**

Every city has its own “physiognomy,” its own “genius loci,” which is the result of secular processes of interwoven building practices and social uses of the built environment by a local population. The city should be built in these inherited urban forms. Interventions should be based on the knowledge of the rules governing the organization of the urban fabrics in which one intervenes, but also in accordance with secular processes of which these fabrics are the results.

### **Public space is the backbone of city fabrics**

Every urban design intervention should have the creation of high quality public space as pivotal point. The mere accumulation of private fragments will never create a unified and intelligible whole. Good city form requires a strong frame holding the different parts together. This frame is provided mostly by the public space network, made of streets, places, belvederes, public parks and gardens, etc.

The quality of public space is defined by its intelligibility and practicability for users. A good public space would, therefore, be legible, permeable, and appropriable by different categories of population.

The quality of public space is defined by its intrinsic qualities as well as by the physical qualities of the “private” space that frames it. Therefore, architecture and city form are interrelated and ought to be considered as part of a whole, that is, as part of a common system.

### **The city is a dynamic system**

In 1931, the urban planner and theorist Gustavo Giovannoni expressed his view while there had been a heated debate in Italy between the “innovators” and the “conservationists” over the future

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<sup>4</sup> These three principles are inspired by the work of Albert Levy and Vittorio Spigai (1989) *Il Piano e l'architettura della città : ipotesi per nuovi strumenti = Le plan et l'architecture de la ville : hypothèses pour de nouveaux instruments*, Venezia: Cluva Editrice

of the Italian city. He asserted that one of the important tasks of modern urban planning was precisely to go beyond the dichotomy between an urban planning practice preoccupied solely by innovation to meet the new contemporary needs and an urban planning practice devoted first and foremost to conservation and heritage preservation.<sup>5</sup>

Giovannoni stated firmly that both preoccupations should be addressed simultaneously on the basis that new urban extensions are taking place in an already “historicized” environment that impacts on the aforementioned and that ancient and older parts of the city continuously undergo substantial transformation throughout history. Giovannoni’s ideas were very influential. They had a profound impact on the work of architects-planners and theorists Saverio Muratori, and Gianfranco Caniggia, which in turn greatly influenced the urban planning and design practice of the last thirty years in Italy and France.

Building upon Giovannoni’s ideas, the Advanced Urban Laboratory has considered the city as a whole, as a system of relations that evolves in time. It implies that a city is more than the sum of its parts, which implies that a transformation in one part impacts the whole and is very likely to have effects on the other parts. Moreover, a city fragment cannot be understood properly, nor the object of a judicious intervention, if the relations of this fragment with the whole is not adequately analyzed at different scales. Likely a fragment cannot be understood properly, if not seen as the temporary result of a historical process.

## 2. Southern Décarie: An Overview

### 2.1 Background

The Décarie highway is the primary feature of the area at the centre of this study. To put it bluntly, the very presence of the highway and more precisely its obvious negative impacts on the nearby urban fabrics are at the origin of the choice of this study area for an urban regeneration project.

Although, the construction of the highway had such an important impact on the later evolution of the surrounding neighbourhoods, it is quite interesting to note that at the origin of the urbanization of the whole southern Décarie highway area stands the public transportations innovations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The area would meet the definition of a North American “streetcar suburbs” as described by Sam Bass Warner.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 2.1** Décarie Autoroute; a scar in the urban fabric of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce

Agriculture took place in the Southern Décarie area since the late seventeenth century, but prior to the extension of the public transport facilities two centuries later, the area remained a distant, peripheral location in relation with the center of the city.

In the late eighteenth century, William Powell created what would become the Villa-Maria estate. By the 1850s, the whole area was occupied by seventy families of farmers only. In the 1860s, a very modest village arose in the shadow of the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce church whose construction started in 1851. At the same period, another modest community was settling at the intersection of the Chemin

<sup>5</sup> Giovannoni, Gustavo (1998) *L'urbanisme face aux villes anciennes*, Paris: Seuil. Original edition: *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova*, UTET Libreria, 1931.

<sup>6</sup> Warner, Sam Bass (1962) *Streetcar suburbs: the process of growth in Boston, 1870-1900*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962

du Coteau Saint-Pierre and the Montréal-Lachine railroad at the eastern limit of the present Glen Yards.

It is the construction of the tramway lines that initiated the subdivision of the area. At the turn of the twentieth century, a tramway line, the “Montreal Park & Island Tramway” was running around the northern edge of the mountain to link the Parc Avenue and Mont-Royal intersection to the small Snowdon Station situated at the intersection of Chemin Queen-Marie and the present Décarie highway. In 1908, a new line was built on the Décarie Boulevard to connect the aforesaid line to an east-west line running along at the limits of Westmount and leading directly to the city business district. This new direct public transit connection led to the urbanization of the study area. By the third decade of the twentieth century, most of the area was developed.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 2.2 Map of Southern Décarie Area

The construction of the Décarie Highway started in March 1965. The building of the motorway ended right in time so that the new alignment with the Trans Canada highway could grant an access to the site of the World Fair of Montréal in 1967. The construction of the highway system combined with a steep demographic growth contributed to the (sub-) urbanisation of the entire island and beyond. It contributed to change drastically both the distributions of the population and the geography of the economic activity, such as the development of industrial parks and large shopping centres along the expressways.

It was initially decided to build a sunken highway at an average depth of 7 to 8 meters to have the highway cross the densely populated Snowdon area without masking the urban landscape. The scheme was to allow a maximum of 90,000 vehicles to disappear from sight. Today over twice that number of cars use the expressway daily. Consequently, this link has become the most congested and heavily used in Québec, as some 178,000 vehicles use it daily. Moreover, the projected repercussions on the environment in form of air and noise pollution have also doubled. By contemporary standards, the Décarie Highway trench is a scar in the Island of Montréal. There have been implications on the physical, social and economic fabrics, such as including socio-economic aspects, transportation, commercial and economic problems.

<sup>7</sup> Michèle Benoit and Roger Gratton (1991) *Pignon sur rue : les quartiers de Montréal*, Montréal: Guérin



**Figure 2.3** Décarie Highway, facing South.

The metro network was extended with the opening of a new section going from the Lionel-Groulx to the Côte-Vertue station in the late 1980s. Three of the new stations were situated within the study area: Vendôme, Villa-Maria and Snowdon. The Snowdon and the Vendôme stations are hubs, the former connecting the orange metro line to the east-west blue line, and the latter connecting the metro system to a commuter train line. These recent developments re-positioned the Southern Décarie area within the realm of the primary public-transit network, not without similarities with the conditions prevailing at its first development.

The main objective of this report is to develop urban planning design proposals based on the analysis of characteristics and needs of the Southern Décarie Area. The challenge faced by the Advance Urban Laboratory was twofold. It consisted first in elaborating planning and design proposals respectful of the inherited urban form and apt to reinforce what Giovannoni or Levy and Spigai call the “permanence of the plan” after an expression coined by the French urban planner and historian Pierre Lavedan. In doing so, the challenge was also, secondly, to acknowledge through the same proposals the new contemporary relations that the urban fragment constituted by the southern Décarie area now maintains with the urban organism as a whole. That is, for instance, to acknowledge that the area, once situated at the periphery, is now centrally located in a much-enlarged metropolis.

Before dealing with the proposals, it is useful to consider the Strengths and Weaknesses analysis conducted by the class for the entire Southern Décarie area. This analysis is summarised in the following table.

## 2.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Southern Décarie Area

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Close proximity and good access to downtown</li> <li>▪ Good access to public transit</li> <li>▪ Mixed land-use</li> <li>▪ High density residential housing</li> <li>▪ High permeability</li> <li>▪ Social-economic diversity</li> <li>▪ Many schools located within or in close proximity of the area</li> <li>▪ Large public open green-space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Décarie acting as a dividing line (splits area in 2)</li> <li>▪ Struggling low-end retail, along or nearby Décarie</li> <li>▪ Traffic</li> <li>▪ Lack of green space east and in the northern area of Décarie expressway</li> <li>▪ Noise/air pollution along Décarie expressway</li> <li>▪ Housing availability (low vacancy)</li> <li>▪ Some of the housing stock is run down</li> </ul>

**Table 2.1** Strengths and Weaknesses

## 2.3 Major Issues

Based on the analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the area, the class collectively identified six major planning issues. They involve dealing with social, economic, and environmental impacts of the Décarie Expressway, and more generally, with the preconditions for a better social cohesion within the community, and with the quality of the built environment (the urban form and the architectural fabric). Each issue will be discussed briefly. The issues identified by the group are, in decreasing order of importance:

1. The Décarie Highway, which poses major problems in the area on many levels
2. Community building and better integration of different communities
3. Traffic



4. Housing Availability (Cost and Quality)
5. Consolidation and reinforcement of commercial streets
6. The need for additional green space

The Southern Décarie area has been divided in four sub-areas for the purpose of this study. They are *Snowdon*; *Monkland/Villa-Maria*; *Sherbrooke* and the *Glen Yards*. Six groups of students divided the task among themselves. Two groups worked on the Snowdon area. Two other groups worked on the Monkland/Villa-Maria area. In some cases, two proposals have been developed for a same site allowing comparisons. Finally, one group worked on the Sherbrooke sub-area, while the other concentrated on the Glen Yards sector. Naturally, each group addressed the said “major issues” differently depending on the specific conditions of the sites on which they were working.

### **Dealing with Six Major Issues**

At the very outset, the class observed that the Décarie highway poses the most important problem in the area. Addressing the question of the current layout of the highway was, therefore, a most pressing issue because of the impact of the highway on the environment, the community life, and even on the local economy.

A sunken open-air highway lined with two service roads and situated in the middle of a densely occupied urban territory obviously raises serious environmental concerns. The levels of noise and air pollution are quite high in the immediate surroundings of the highway. The pedestrians suffer from the pollution as well as from the “wind tunnel effect” which creates very harsh bioclimatic conditions during the winter. The intensity and speed of automobile and trucks floodtide on the service roads constitute a threat in itself. Social-economic issues are also at stakes.

The poor environmental conditions created have noticeable consequences on the economic value of the built environment. Students have observed that the rents are lower along Décarie than they are along Chemin Côte-Saint-Luc for instance. It is easy to conclude that the inhabitants settling along Décarie are a population with lesser economic means and lesser housing options. Other analyses pointed out the prevalence of low-end struggling businesses along or in the immediate vicinity of Décarie. Another impact of the Décarie highway is that its construction cut a community by the middle. The community never fully recovered, as it will be explained later on.

In accordance with these considerations and others, five of the six groups developed proposals dealing directly with the physical layout of different sections of the sunken highway. Their proposals range from fully covering Décarie between Chemin Queen-Mary and Chemin Côte-Saint-Luc for instance, to partially covering nearby Monkland Avenue, or to the construction of “bridge buildings” along Chemin Queen-Mary and Sherbrooke Street to re-establish the continuity of the streets. In each case, the quality of the public space was the cornerstone of the proposals and although circulation was part of the equation, priority was given to the pedestrian over the car.

When the highway was about to be built in the sixties, the N.D.G. community made representations to save the church and the school on Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Avenue from destruction. Traditionally, these institutional buildings have been at the “heart” of the neighbourhood. As a result of the local population’s complaints, the highway was built in a tunnel and the monumental church was spared, but many residential streets were cut in half and the spatial organization of the neighbourhood was forever altered. As a direct consequence, a once unified community started to evolve distinctively on each side of the highway.

Such an evolution would not necessarily have been a problem in itself had not it been of the pernicious fact that the community institutions ended up unevenly and somehow oddly distributed. One group of students spent a lot of energy, trying through an elaborate mix of

policies and design proposals, to contribute to re-unifying the community and to having these fragmented urban fabrics make more sense for the inhabitants.

The theme of “community building” is perhaps one, the most evenly distributed among the six planning and design teams. The wide socio-economic and cultural diversity in the southern Décarie area has been seen as an asset to be actively preserved and encouraged.

The concerns for reducing some of the economic disparities were generally addressed by the teams through measures to actively support and reinforce local commercial activity, and therefore, local job creation. Most efforts pertaining to community building sought to develop a better integration of the different communities. This was accomplished through the planning of shared new - or improved existing community facilities; shared new public spaces designed to be appropriated by different categories of populations; and very specific measures meant to increase permeability and to “de-enclave” pieces of fabric (in Circle Road and around the Villa-Maria Grounds for instance).

Great thought has been given to the traffic and transportations problems in the study area. It is probably fair to say that this is the area where the students’ perception and understanding of the problems most greatly evolved during the course of the year. After their first visits to the site, students were inclined to articulate the problem as being one of traffic or congestion. Realizing that they were faced with the unavoidable and somehow expected side effects of any urban highway: on which, or from which, thousands of vehicles got in or out through a few points of access, it became clear that no easy solution would be in sight. The highway being there to stay, and considering that it is very unlikely than the use of car would drop drastically in the coming years, the problem took the form of a difficult dilemma. How, in such a context, to redevelop an urban fabric and heal the scar by creating high quality permeable public space without providing any new incentive to the use of car and while, if possible, alleviating traffic congestion?

Despite the complexity of the transportation issues at stakes, the students addressed this dilemma very convincingly and developed solutions, sometimes very subtle, sometimes more drastic when the conditions were calling for it.

For instance, one group devoted itself to an area destined to experience a great increase in vehicular traffic. This group chose to focus on the Glen Yards site in order to assess what would be the impacts – positive and negative - of the planned McGill University “mega-hospital” on its surroundings. At one point, the group became particularly and rightly concerned with the massive impact of such a large complex on vehicular traffic on the nearby residential fabrics unless very drastic and costly measures were taken to reorganize the street system as well as the railroad and train station. Their design proposal offers a very elegant solution not solely dealing with the technical aspects of a difficult transportation problem, but addressing rather the complex question of how to properly integrate a large piece of specialized urban fabric within a predominately residential one, by putting the quality of the public space at the centre of their preoccupations.

The solutions regarding transportation issues put forward by the said group and by the other groups working on other areas were twofold. First, every team has manifested a strong commitment to public transit. In some instances, like on Chemin Queen-Mary or in the Glen Yards area, they developed concrete measures to improve public transit.

Secondly, all teams tried to alleviate the friction between automobile and other means of transportation, and in particular between automobiles and pedestrians. However, most of the proposed measures would do so, not by segregating the different modes of transportation, but by creating better environmental conditions for pedestrians/public transit users through a better design of the public space of the street and of its immediate surroundings. In a dense urban environment such as in the study area, already well served by the public transit system, well designed, safer, more accessible and livelier environments for pedestrians are likely to encourage people to “walk” their neighbourhood and to use public transit. And somehow paradoxically, more

inhabitants do not necessarily mean more cars on the streets. In some instances, a denser environment, if designed with the quality of the streetscape and of the public space in mind, contributes more to the use of environmentally friendly modes of transportation than to car traffic.

When thinking of the quality of the urban space that would be created by the transformation of a portion of the Décarie highway into an urban boulevard framed by new six-storey high condominium and apartment buildings, and comprising a large green mall in its center (with a large fountain turned into a skating ring in the winter as in one proposal), one can see how appealing would be the ten minutes walk or so needed to go from any point of the renewed area to one of three already existing local commercial streets or to one of the two metro stations.

The class expressed concerns about the availability of housing, especially for a population with lesser economic means, particularly in a context where major investments to improve the quality of the built environment are very likely to encourage gentrification. Such a gentrification is probably unavoidable when measures are taken to correct the very environmental conditions that caused the surrounding buildings to lose their economic value with the side-effect of becoming accessible for people with limited housing options. Although some concrete policy proposals were made by the students in favour of social housing to counter-balance gentrification, this is certainly an area where more thinking would be needed to meet the intentions initially expressed.

A strong commitment, as demonstrated by very concrete policy and design proposals, was made by all groups to consolidate and reinforce existing commercial streets. These streets are seen as a particularly important asset for the quality of the neighbourhoods' life because of their contribution to the local economic vitality, as a space for socialization, and as a sustainable option to the heavily car-oriented commercial offerings of the suburban malls. Nevertheless, this "commitment" is not blind in that, based on both theoretical arguments and empirical findings made by the students, a distinction was established between the commercial streets appropriately situated at the center of their neighbourhood, and the commercial areas, designated as such by the zoning regulations, and situated on heavy transportation streets that generally suit local businesses poorly. The details of the proposals reflect such a distinction.

The need for additional green space was spontaneously identified by the students-planners/designers at their first visit to the site. Their final proposals reflect this preoccupation with the suggestion to create of a large urban park over Décarie, as well as a place along Monkland Street over the sunken highway, the creation of a north-south green pathway to increase permeability for pedestrians between Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Avenue and Monkland Street, and finally, by the creation of a public street to frame the currently introverted "institutional garden" of Villa-Maria offering it to the public appreciation.

### 3. Sub-Areas: Planning and Design Proposals

#### 3.1 Snowdon

##### **3.1.1 Background**

For the purpose of this study, the limits of the sub-area called Snowdon have been established at Chemin Queen-Mary to the north, Chemin Côte-Saint-Luc to the south, and Victoria Avenue to the east and Clanranald Street to the west. The sub-area covers about half of the Snowdon electoral district, which extends to the north along the Décarie highway.

Snowdon's district population consists of 19,000 residents and 40% of these residents having foreign background; 53% of Snowdon residents speak English, while 27% speak French. The community is quite young with more than 30% of the populace in between the ages of 15 and 34 years old. Seventy-five percent of the 9000 households or so in the Snowdon district rent their dwellings. On average, the Snowdon community seems relatively prosperous with an average

income of more than 40,000\$ and a household average income of more than 52,000\$. But these figures hide important disparities between various sectors' average income. Looking at the brighter side of this situation, one can note that the area brings together people with mixed cultural and socio-economical backgrounds, which is reflected by a variety of types of housing.

The Snowdon sub-area is situated near the geographic center of the Island of Montreal. It is in close vicinity of a major university, numerous public and private schools, and five hospitals.

Leaving aside the highway itself, there are three major routes in the Snowdon sub-area: the Décarie highway's twin service roads, Chemin Queen-Mary, and Chemin Côte-Saint-Luc. The most commercial and pedestrian activity occurs on Queen-Mary, while the Décarie highway's service roads are the ones that are high in vehicular volume, resulting in unpleasant environment for the pedestrians and danger due to over-speed.



Figure 3.1 Residential Fabric in Snowdon

The area is very well connected to the CBD by metro, bus and roads. Furthermore, the new “Cité Scientifique” on Royalmount and the high-tech jobs pole situated in the nearby borough of Saint-Laurent have an easy access by car, while the significant development of office space lead by the Telecom giant Ericsson in the northern part of Boulevard Décarie is easily accessible by metro. The planned McGill University Heath Center (MUHC) in Glen Yards will bring thousands of jobs within a few minutes metro ride (the issues surrounding the construction of the mega-hospital will be discussed in section 3.4).

### 3.1.2 Snowdon's Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Metro access</li> <li>▪ Queen-Mary as a centralizing nodal axis with a concentration of local stores</li> <li>▪ Minimal vehicular traffic (except Queen-Mary and Décarie)</li> <li>▪ Many institutional buildings</li> <li>▪ High density</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of permeability</li> <li>▪ Unfriendly and potentially dangerous environment for pedestrians along and nearby Décarie</li> <li>▪ Buildings along Décarie are run down</li> <li>▪ Décarie is a dividing axis and a barrier</li> <li>▪ Crime/safety issues around Snowdon Metro</li> <li>▪ Potential for socio-economic segregation</li> </ul>

Table 3.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

### 3.1.3 Specific Objectives for Snowdon

- To create a safer environment
- To reduce the level of noise and air pollution
- To create more green space
- To facilitate community coherence and interaction
- To strengthen the commercial activity in the area by increasing the number of residents and workers

### 3.1.4 Design and Policy Proposals for Snowdon

Two groups of students worked on this sub-area. The backbone of the various proposals they made for Snowdon was, in both cases, to cover the Décarie trench and to convert the twin service roads into an urban boulevard. In their proposals, the trench itself becomes the median of the boulevard and is converted into a large green mall. Once the decision to cover the trench was made, the two groups concentrated on the design of the boulevard and its immediate surroundings as well as on the new conditions created for the three east-west axes crossing the new boulevard. These axes are Chemin Queen-Mary, Chemin Côte-Saint-Luc and Snowdon Street.



Figure 3.2 New Décarie Boulevard, Plan View (Option A)

### Décarie Highway

The Décarie trench is a dividing barrier that prevents better cohesion between two neighbourhoods by minimizing local socio-economic interaction. It affects permeability, produces noise and degrades air quality and visual atmosphere. Moreover, it generates undesirable micro-climatic conditions with a wind-tunnel effect that increases local wind forces and exposure to precipitation. The objectives for improving the “trench” and its immediate surroundings are:

- To help increase the social and cohesion of neighbourhoods within the vicinity
- To provide high permeability between the two sides of the trench for pedestrians.
- To maximize green space coverage to provide desirable micro-climatic conditions

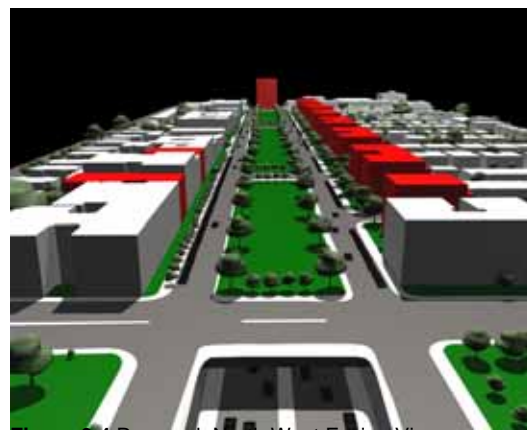
- To evaluate if covering the trench could provide significant leisure and recreational opportunities in the space gained.
- To provide recreational and cultural activities for students after school in the Décarie area.
- To raise the built environment quality along Décarie to its full potential in relation with its desirable central location between Westmount and N.D.G.

### **A Large Green Space over the Décarie Highway**

To solve the problems or at least minimize the effects of the trench and of the split urban fabric created by the Décarie highway, the key proposal is to cover the expressway and turn its surface and service roads into an urban boulevard, and to build or install structures that will restore the surrounding urban fabric.



**Figure 3.3** Current North West Facing View



**Figure 3.4** Proposal, North West Facing View (Option B)

The covering of the Décarie Highway between Chemin Côte-Saint-Luc and Chemin Queen-Mary would be very costly but it is assumed to be highly beneficial environmentally, economically and socially for the area. It is expected that the creation of such a green space would not only improve the quality of life for residents in the immediate vicinity, but also bolster development, both residential and commercial, in and around the proposed urban boulevard.

This portion of the Décarie highway has much potential for redevelopment and to attract investments from both public and private sectors. The plan attempts to unlock constrained opportunities in the area by building on excellent metro accessibility, by making good use of existing abundant empty lots, and taking advantage of the huge open space resulting from the covering the Décarie highway.

### **Housing along New Décarie Boulevard**

The Snowdon area would greatly be benefitted from a new high quality housing development. This plan suggests the acquisition of land on the eastern side of the new Décarie Boulevard to build condominiums.

On that side of the site, the Décarie service road is currently framed by the lateral facades of small duplexes as a result of demolitions made in the 1960's for the construction of the highway and of its eastern service road. To frame the newly created park and boulevard, the plan is to purchase few houses (5-6) at the end of each block to replace them by larger condominium buildings with their address on the boulevard. The condominiums should be 5 or 6 stories high to fit with the scale of the boulevard and to frame this public space effectively. Many of the residents

of the new condos will gain a beautiful view of the Mount Royal. An alleyway is planned behind every condominium building to provide access to underground parking for the residents.



**Figure 3.5** Current North Facing Perspective View



**Figure 3.6** Proposal North Facing Perspective View (Option B)

In both options, eight buildings are to be constructed on the eastern side of the boulevard, between Queen Mary and Cote St. Luc, for a total of 336 new units (6 x 48 units and 2 x 24 units). At an estimated cost of \$250,000 per unit on average, the added real-estate value amounts to 84 million dollars for the eastern side only.

The western side of the new Décarie Boulevard already has some good quality residential and commercial buildings whose scale would be compatible with the new urban boulevard. Some of these buildings lack maintenance: their lowered economic value, which is the direct consequence of the poor environmental conditions have dissuaded investment. These are very likely to be renovated following the construction of the boulevard. There is also a potential to build thirteen new buildings on empty lots or by replacing existing run down buildings. These buildings could serve multiple purposes: two office buildings, one community centre, and ten condominium complexes are being proposed in the option “A”.



**Figure 3.7** Framing the Décarie Boulevard South Western Side

In this scheme, 160 condominium units would be added on the western side of the street. These units represent an added real estate value of 40 million dollars.

In the option “B,” the designers have suggested to build a “bridge building” in the form of a ten to twelve storey-high office tower over the highway, along the northern side of Queen-Mary. Such a building would frame the public place to the north, while closing the visual perspective. It would also re-establish the continuity of Chemin Queen-Mary and eliminate the bad environmental effects of the highway for the pedestrians. It is alleged that, with the close vicinity of the Snowdon metro station and the large quantity of parking space available along the boulevard, an interior parking is not needed for this small tower.

The estimated real estate value added to the new Décarie Boulevard is \$124 million dollars for new residential constructions only, to which one should add the value of 2 or 3 office buildings,

one community center, and investments in renovation of the remaining existing buildings.<sup>8</sup> The taxes generated by this new development would contribute to pay back for the construction costs of the boulevard.

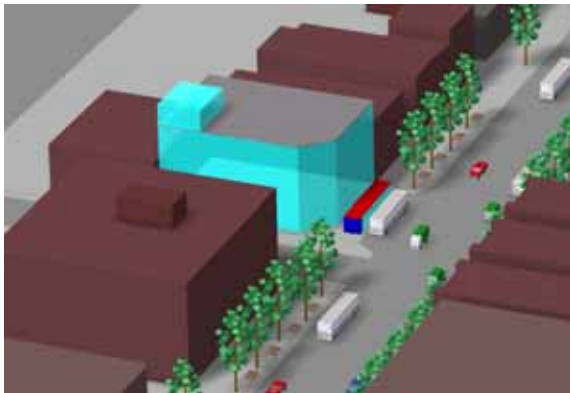
### **East-West connections: Chemin Queen-Mary, Chemin Côte-Saint-Luc and Snowdon Street**

Other proposals are made to revitalize Chemin Queen-Mary, Chemin Côte-Saint-Luc, and Snowdon Street.

#### **Queen Mary**

Specific objectives for the revitalization of Chemin Queen-Mary between Victoria Street and Clanranald Street are:

- To create more businesses on Queen Mary
- To improve inter-modal passenger flow and vehicular traffic control (bus and car conflicts)
- To increase the capacity of waiting areas and prevent blockages of the sidewalk space
- To facilitate the entry and egress of buses from inter-modal stops at the metro station
- To connect the activities of the two sides of the highway.



**Figure 3.8** Improvements around Snowdon Metro Station

Queen Mary stands as the principal commercial sector with an abundance of small and medium enterprises; some of which have also settled on the southbound Décarie Boulevard, corner of Queen Mary. Anchor stores have been reluctant to set up shops because of the unstable nature of the market in the district. The street holds a constant flow of pedestrian, attributable to the Snowdon metro station. Nevertheless, the volume of traffic and the noise and air pollution generated by the highway creates a repelling environment for pedestrians.

Many public transportation connections surrounding Snowdon Metro create a large amount of pedestrian traffic. Enhancements could be made to the waiting spaces at street level to ease the flow of the pedestrian, and to improve boarding. The construction of bus shelters is proposed. The eastbound bus users would need a bus shelter on the southwest corner of Queen Mary and Ponsard; the already existing bus shelter in front of Snowdon Metro should be expanded. Changes are also needed to reduce the difficulty buses currently have when merging with vehicular traffic after leaving the metro station.

#### **Côte-Saint-Luc Road**

The idea behind the proposal is to turn the portion of Côte-Saint-Luc west of Décarie Autoroute into an avenue framed by rows of trees. New larger buildings that would properly frame the street should replace many small buildings. This is the major design concern in regards to this area. The scale of the existing residential buildings in the eastern portion of the street can be used as a reference. On the said side of Chemin Côte-Saint-Luc, at the limits of Westmount and N.D.G. an empty lot is available for redevelopment. The replacement of the unsightly gas station at the corner of Bonavista Avenue and Côte-Saint-Luc Road should be envisioned. The majority of the new buildings proposed on Côte-Saint-Luc would be moderate to high value condominiums. With the MUCH hospital coming, a fair increase in demands for such housing is foreseeable. To ease car and pedestrian circulation in the area, Jacques Avenue will be closed to vehicular traffic and become a pedestrian street, which will be paved differently to make it more inviting. Avenue

<sup>8</sup> These figures are there to provide a point of reference, a precise calculation of the costs and revenues should take into consideration the cost of the houses to be removed from the eastern side of the Décarie Boulevard for instance.



Earnscliff will be open to connect with Côte-Saint-Luc, and rue de Terrebonne will be closed because it is a dangerous zone for pedestrians as well as being one that serves no important purpose for cars. Also, Avenue Coolbrook will be opened.

### **Snowdon Street**

In the option “A,” it is proposed to open a dead end street to make the Circle Road area less isolated. Snowdon Street is the best street to open up because it is the only street that extends on the western side of Décarie if one excludes Queen-Mary and Côte-Saint-Luc. By opening up the dead end street to Circle Road, only one house would have to be removed. This would create more permeability, a much-needed quality to open up the Circle Road enclave, sometime described as a “proto-gated” community. Similarly, both team’s proposals suggest to extend Ponsard Avenue, making it cross the proposed Mall, to increase permeability for both pedestrians and motorists. Furthermore, having two intersections between the Côte-Saint-Luc and Queen-Mary stretch would contribute to slow the traffic down.

As a means to bring residents together and to encourage the use of the new park, the option “A” proposes to erect a small building in the middle of the boulevard’s hall, along Snowdon street, to house a little café and its exterior terrace as well as public facilities for those who use the park, and the ice rink made in the large fountain during winter.

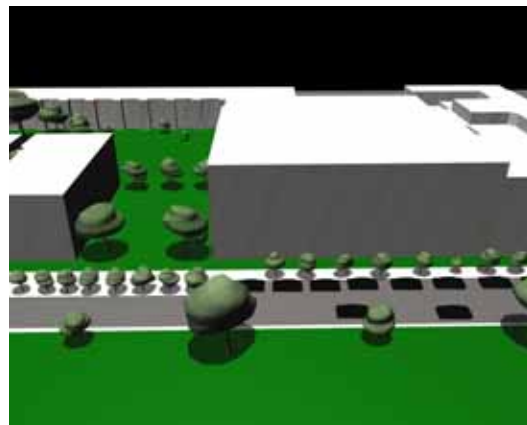
### **A community centre for Snowdon**

While the actual crime rate is low in the area, the perception by the general public might be different since, in the absence of any other option, youth choose the metro station surroundings as a common meeting and gathering place after school. According to a few newspaper articles on the matter, the perception seems to range from nuisance to a feeling of insecurity.

Covering up Décarie expressway and opening the dead-end street encourages better relations among Snowdon communities. Building a new community centre would be the frosting on the cake. It would, furthermore, create a gathering place the Snowdon’s youth. The option “B” identifies a building that could easily be converted in a community center. This building, situated on the western side of Décarie, currently houses a car dealer. It is built in concrete and includes an interior multi-level garage space. The scheme proposes also to convert the dead-end street situated next to this building into outdoor community facilities such as a basketball court and an outdoor stage for performances.



**Figure 3.9** Car Dealership and Dead End Street



**Figure 3.10** Conversion in a Community Center

## Policy implications of the proposals

To proceed with these proposals would involve several public consultations with general populace and would require approval by both the municipality—the City of Montréal and the province of Quebec’s Municipal Affairs division.

Both the City of Montréal and the province of Quebec must continue to commit to and promote sustainable development initiatives, taking into account the equilibrium of environmental, social and economic factors of the area.

- Environmental management is the first key in greening the city. The proposed urban boulevard implies the greening of Décarie by means of planting a trees and transforming it into a full fledged park. The immediate result would be to alleviate the environmental impact of the highway on its surroundings as well as to allow the redevelopment of this already urbanized and well serviced area to its full potential.
- Social objectives are the second element the local government must deal with in order to achieve sustainability. The safety in the area will be much improved if the Décarie were covered up, by alleviating environmental hazards. Furthermore, building a new park and a community centre would improve the quality of urban life in the area while providing new gathering places for a variety of social groups.
- Economic objectives are the third element. The commercial sector in the area (i.e. along Queen Mary Road and along the Décarie service road) would be greatly strengthened with a surge of new capital influx and investment in new housing development, bringing a new population to the area.

## 3.2 Monkland/Villa Maria

### 3.2.1 Background



Figure 3.11 Facing South West on Décarie Boulevard

The second sub-area “Monkland/Villa-Maria” is bordered by Chemin Côte-Saint-Luc to the north, Oxford Street to the west, Avenue Notre-Dame-de-Grâce to the south, and Victoria Street to the east. The Villa-Maria area is centrally located within the island of Montréal and thus it experiences superior connectivity with the central business core and the second largest employment pole to the north in the Saint-Laurent Borough.

Monkland/Villa-Maria area has diversified cultural and socio-economic people from various backgrounds. Twenty-five percent of the residents have a mother tongue other than French or English. Family units differ in size

and composition, ranging from parents with young children/teenagers, students, elderly couples and “empty nesters.” Residents that students’ have spoken to manifested a strong connection and a sense of pride to their neighbourhood. This is particularly true in the “Monkland Village” area.

There is a wide range of styles of buildings in the Monkland/Villa-Maria area. Some buildings include single detached units, duplexes, triplexes, and quadruplexes, apartment complexes, and large institutional buildings. Although there are some structures dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most of the structures were constructed in the twentieth century. Mixed tenure is the rule; there are residents that own homes, others that rent.

The most prominent features in the area are the Villa-Maria estate and private school for girls, the “Monkland Village” around the animated commercial street of the same name and the old matrix route known as Boulevard Décarie. Monkland Street is the main commercial artery in the Monkland/Villa-Maria area. The commercial section spans a length of four blocks, between Girouard Avenue and Harvard Avenue, and is easily accessible from any point in the neighbourhood. There are also some commercial activities on the old Décarie Boulevard. The Villa-Maria metro station is the major pedestrian hub. These prominent sectors of the sub-area are also the specific sites the two teams of students planners/designers chose for interventions.

### 3.2.2 Monkland/Villa Maria’s Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
Vibrant Commercial Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Already exist on Monkland Street</li> </ul>	Lack of Permeability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Between Metro Station and the other side of the Expressway</li> <li>▪ On Chemin Côte-Saint-Luc</li> </ul>
Easy Access to Downtown <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Villa –Maria Metro station</li> <li>▪ Décarie Expressway</li> </ul>	Décarie as a Barrier <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inconvenient and unsafe for pedestrians to cross</li> </ul>
Green Space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lots of empty space to plant trees and grass</li> </ul>	Noise and Air Pollution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Along the Décarie Highway</li> </ul>
Many Institutional Sites	Traffic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ At the intersections of the Main Streets such as Côte-Saint-Luc and Décarie Boulevard</li> <li>▪ On Monkland Street</li> </ul>
Public Transit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Metro Stations</li> <li>▪ Good bus lines</li> </ul>	Housing conditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ By the side of the Expressway</li> </ul>

Table 3.2 Strength and Weaknesses

### 3.2.3 Specific Objectives for Monkland/Villa-Maria

From the identification of strengths and weaknesses of the sub-area, following objectives were derived for Monkland and Villa Maria:

- Rethink the Décarie highway area (in particular, the Monkland intersection and the metro station area).
- For the Villa-Maria estate: look at the opportunity to build new houses as well as to manage and control the development (pressures are currently high for piece-meal development).
- Increase the safety of circulation for both cars and pedestrians.
- Protect and reinforce the commercial activity on Monkland.

Proposals have been developed for four sites in the Monkland/Villa Maria sub-area: the Décarie highway nearby the metro station; the Villa-Maria estate; Monkland Street and the old Décarie Boulevard and “village” area.

### 3.2.4 Design Proposals



Figure 3.12 The Monkland/Villa-Maria Sub-Area

#### Villa-Maria Metro Site

The Villa-Maria metro station finds itself at the edge of the neighbourhood. It is situated at the intersection of two of the most important roads in the area: the old Décarie Boulevard and Monkland Street. The station is a great generator of pedestrian activity. Although it is located in close proximity to many residences, businesses and institutional areas, the immediate surroundings of the site lead to a feeling of isolation and lack of safety. This is mostly due to the adjacent expressway. The Décarie highway creates harsh environmental conditions, especially for pedestrians, and it cuts the neighbourhood in two. Another aspect contributing to the sense of isolation is the neighbouring introverted Villa-Maria estate against the outwall of which stands the metro station. However, there is great potential to correct these problems.

#### Objectives

- To create a safer environment for pedestrians
- To develop public open space for pedestrians
- To reduce automobile traffic speed
- To re-design Décarie southbound service road to make more efficient use of land

#### Design Proposals

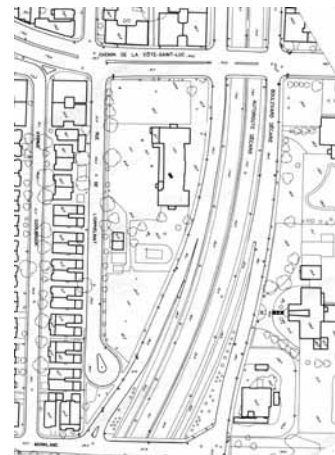
There are similarities in the proposals developed by the two teams working on the Décarie highway and Villa-Maria metro station site. Because of the width of the highway in this area, both teams rejected the idea to cover completely the expressway. Rather they propose to cover it partially. The designers' proposal is to extend the Monkland overpass towards the north, to create a 35 by 50-meter large paved public square. The public square would be located directly in front of the current metro exit, across the northbound Décarie Boulevard.

This proposal would reduce drastically the negative impacts of the highway for the pedestrians in terms of noise and air pollution. In the option "A," it is also suggested to erect a wall on the southern side of the Monkland overpass, to reduce sound pollution and protect pedestrians going

to, or coming from the metro station, from both exposure to air pollution as well as the wind-tunnel effect that creates harsh conditions in winter. The proposal suggests that a work of art covers the wall, to plant trees on the enlarged sidewalk in continuity with trees to be planted along Monkland Street to the east.



**Figure 3.13** Décarie Highway and Villa Maria Metro Station Area (Option A)



...and Current Layout

Covering a portion of the Décarie highway is also the occasion for both teams to reorganize and improve the street network in the area. Many circulation problems and use conflicts between pedestrians and motorists arose from a bad integration of the highway's entrances, exits and twin service roads and the local street network. Currently, the old Décarie Boulevard, for example, becomes a one-way street at the level of the Villa-Maria metro station where it turns into the northbound Décarie expressway service road.

On the western side of the highway, the service road ends-up on Monkland Street at a right angle, forcing the drivers who wish to continue to the south to turn on Monkland Street, up to old Décarie Boulevard or to Girouard Street to the west.

Both options on the table propose a far better solution, which consists of creating a large intersection connecting old Décarie Boulevard to Monkland and then directly to both highway's service roads. The figure created, a large intersection, can be described or pictured as a "half-runabout." The plan re-establishes the continuity of the old Décarie Boulevard, by connecting it with what would now appear as two local streets (instead of two service roads). These streets would in turn transform into the twin double-lanes of the large urban boulevard to be created to the north of Chemin-Côte-Saint-Luc (as described in a previous section). The scheme would smooth the traffic, as a single coordinated set of traffic lights would be enough to control the Monkland/Décarie intersection. Furthermore, the enticement to turn on right for motorists going south would be greatly reduced, discouraging the traffic from using the residential portion of Monkland Street.



Figure 3.14 Villa-Maria Metro Station Area (Option B)

In order to slow down traffic crossing the Décarie/Côte-Saint-Luc intersection and the new Décarie/Monkland intersection, it is proposed to narrow the former Décarie east and west service roads 3 to 4 meters.

To gain space over the highway in order to build a public space requires costly modifications of the current on-ramp and off-ramp. It was estimated that the off-ramp entrance from the Décarie Expressway should be receded by 50 meters to allow clearance for the extension of the Monkland overpass and that the on-ramp entrance to the Décarie highway should be receded by 70 meters.

To help paying back for the investments, but more importantly, to frame properly the new urban place and streets created or modified, both teams proposed to redevelop the tract of land west of the southbound Décarie service road. Currently, this area is an institutional property. It is underdeveloped because of the nuisance created by the expressway and its service road, and also because of its awkward

configuration. Gaining some space on the expressway clears enough room to make the site very interesting to redevelop. It is important to note that all the space gained on the expressway is used, in both options, for a public place and a public street only: no new buildings are constructed over the highway. This way, construction costs will remain standard for the private developers called in to invest.

Both design schemes propose a mix of residential and commercial buildings and in particular mix-use buildings with stores on the ground level to frame the proposed place. In both cases, the designers try to recreate an urban block with a coherent syntax – where surrounding streets are properly framed by buildings. But because of the size and the unusual depth of the resulting block, both teams had to explore ad-hoc solutions, which consist in integrating a public park in the middle of the block in option "B," and in sorting out the building in a U shape organization, to make good use of the depth of the lots, in option "A." In both cases, the schemes implied transforming De l'Orphelinat Street into a back alley or a "back street" providing access to exterior and interior parking.

To reduce the noise coming from the remaining open section of the expressway, recommendations were made to plant trees: especially, dense cedar ornamental trees in the design of the highway balustrades, for instance.

The whole plan would result in eliminating the sense of isolation that one currently gets from the Villa-Maria metro station, turning the area surrounding an isolated and uninteresting pedestrian hub into a nicely crafted public space. It would also turn what are now two service roads into two busy, but pleasant local streets properly framed by trees and/or buildings.

### **Villa-Maria Estate**

The Villa-Maria Estate, with its large private institutional grounds, constitutes a site of great importance for the sector. The estate has beautiful gardens, but it is an introverted private property, which represents a large break in relation to the surrounding residential fabrics

Over the years, pieces at the periphery of the original estate were sold, which led to the enclosure of its main features: the old school buildings and gardens. When looking at the Villa-Maria estate on a plan, one finds that all but a small portion remains visible and accessible from the public street network. Along Chemin-Côte-Saint-Luc is a succession of residential towers and large institutional buildings turning their back to the gardens, of which only a small section remains visible from this street. Along the other edges of the estate lies an almost uninterrupted succession of houses turning their back to it. Only the main entrance remains, situated on the old Décarie Boulevard and beautifully extending the axis of Monkland Street in a tree lined alley. A secondary entrance exists on Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Avenue (Westmount Avenue). It is “guarded” by the imposing Congrégation Notre-Dame convent.

A conversion of the institutional building situated on Décarie service road at the verge of the grounds into a condominium building framed by 48 townhouses is currently underway, illustrating the pressures for piece-meal development facing the large institutional properties in N.D.G. in general, and the Villa-Maria estate in particular.

### **Objectives**

- To ensure the integrity of the institutional core, while assessing at which conditions some development could be envisioned for the future.
- To increase permeability (lots of people are crossing the private property to go from one side to another, and in particular to reach the metro)
- To evaluate the possibility to develop a public use of the grounds and/or to increase its public visibility.

### **Design Proposal**

The redevelopment scheme proposed by one team for the Villa-Maria ground is ambitious, but it is realistic, and it is an elegant solution to allow some sort of controlled development, as opposed to piece-meal development which occurred in the past (and a very recent past in the case of the development around the institutional building on Décarie).

One can even go one step further and consider that this proposal corrects some errors of the past. Currently, as has been said above, the beautiful institutional gardens of Villa-Maria are framed by residential and institutional buildings backyards. It doesn't have to be this way. There are numerous examples in Montreal where institutional buildings and their gardens are framed by public streets (think about the Grey Nuns Sisters Convent on René-Levesque, or the Hôtel-Dieu on Pine Avenue). In such cases, the private gardens are contributing to “greening” and beautifying the city, even when the public has no direct access to it.

The basic but strong idea underlying the proposal is to slightly reduce the size of the gardens in order to build a public street that would reframe it. This street would assist to build a row of new houses. Each house would have its facade oriented towards the Villa-Maria private school for girls with the intention to frame the school and correct the previous syntactic problems (were the school was facing backyards).

The proposal suggests turning a portion of the tree-lined alley situated in the axis of Monkland Street into a public street, up to a large private green space that would serve as a buffer in front of the school. The street would then split in two streets meant to re-establish some permeability, by connecting the former to Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Avenue and Chemin Côte-Saint-Luc respectively.

The semi-detached single-family homes would be two-storeys high and built on large lots. Design guidelines would be put in place to protect the value of the development and allow for good return for the institutional vendors. Such guidelines should be coherent with the character of the adjacent Westmount's residential streets that lie just east of the site.

The Villa-Maria grounds would still retain a portion of their private accessible road; reachable through three gated entrances. These gates would frame the passage into the private space, as well as underlined the significance of the historic Villa-Maria structure.

In keeping with the continuity of the site, the new housing development will be built with the intention to enhance its unique character. The transformations are meant to create a subtle transition from city busy streets to a quiet private institutional garden.

The integrated approach expects to present the idea that a place is not only spatial but temporal as well. That is to say it tells a story of its own history, something this project wants to preserve, in creating a place where the past and the present are overlaid in a most sustainable and appealing manner.

#### ***Policy Implications of the Proposals***

The realization of this project necessitates the involvement of the public and private sectors, namely, developers and private landowners (Villa-Maria school), the latter by way of selling parcels of their land. The city should control the development through design guidelines and by overseeing the subdivision.

Modification of zoning to allow residential use would be necessary, along with "large lot" zoning. This type of large lot zoning is typically done through what is known as fiscal zoning. The provisions of fiscal zoning require houses to be of a certain size in order to raise the tax base. This should be done to ensure good returns to investors.





Figure 3.15 Villa Maria Institutional Grounds

### Monkland Street

This street is the major commercial street of the Monkland/Villa-Maria area. The vibrant commercial activity, which is comprised of retail stores, restaurants and cafes, is Monkland's greatest economic strength. Moreover, it is strategically located at the centre of what is now known as "Monkland Village" neighbourhood and well maintained by public transit lines leading to Villa Maria Metro.

### Objectives

- To consolidate the commercial activity
- To sustain pedestrian activity
- To reinforce the sense of community



**Figure 3.16** Monkland Street Greening Scheme

In respect of Monkland Street, the main proposals take the form of policies rather than design. These policies insure the vitality and the authenticity of the street. According to the planners/designers, Monkland is successful, as it has been developed by local merchants for local residents. If big chain businesses are encouraged to get in to Monkland, it will not only change the face of the street, but there would be a risk for maintaining smaller businesses.

#### ***Policy Proposals***

- To establish control over changes on the street to keep a certain visual unity.
- To ensure that the by-law concerning land-use will protect the authenticity of Monkland Street.
- To instate a yearly festival on the street that could promote the street business as well as reinforce the sense of community in the area.
- To encourage the merchants association of Monkland Street to form a committee that could participate in planning the future of the area.

#### ***Design Proposals***

- Street lights
- Trees
- Defined pavement

The goal of these few proposals is to embellish Monkland Street to make the street more inviting to pedestrians. To encourage the merchants to install terraces at their storefront, it would be interesting to help defining the space by putting a different pavement on the sidewalk for instance.

### **3.3 Sherbrooke/Côte-Saint-Antoine**

#### ***3.3.1 Background***

The Sherbrooke/Côte-Saint-Antoine area did not see urban development until the 1900s, being primarily farmland. With the introduction of the streetcar, distant areas became more accessible and development began in outer suburbs. The Notre-Dame-de-Grâce area was subdivided and the present day street grid was laid down. Through the years, it progressively became an attractive residential suburb and a viable option to Westmount.

However, with the introduction of the Décarie Expressway, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce's urban fabric was scarred. The eastern section of the neighbourhood was alienated from the community's historic centre and the repercussions are still being felt today. Nevertheless, the expressway has also had few positive ramifications, making the area more accessible to the outer suburbs as well as the CBD.

The area is primarily residential with the housing stock made up of single-family and duplexes detached, semi-detached and town houses. The main commercial streets are Sherbrooke, running east/west, and Décarie Boulevard running north/south. Sherbrooke also doubles as a major vehicular throughfare. This diversity creates both strengths and weaknesses for the area.

### 3.3.2 Sherbrooke/Côte-Saint-Antoine's Strengths and Weaknesses

#### Strengths and Weaknesses for the Southern Sherbrooke Area

\*The strengths and weaknesses are presented in order of decreasing importance from top to bottom. The issues are further divided into site specific (S) and those affecting the entire area (A)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public Transport (A)</li> <li>▪ Mixed Land Use (A)</li> <li>▪ Density (A)</li> <li>▪ Many Institutions (schools, etc.) (A)</li> <li>▪ Underdeveloped Land (S)</li> <li>▪ Community Green Space (A/S)</li> <li>▪ Housing Mix (A)</li> <li>▪ Diverse Street Hierarchy (A)</li> <li>▪ Permeability (A)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Décarie Interchange (S)</li> <li>▪ Sherbrooke as both a heavy traffic and local commercial street (S)</li> <li>▪ Traffic (noise, pollution, danger) (S)</li> <li>▪ Housing (S)</li> <li>▪ Loss of Historic Core (S)</li> <li>▪ Housing Facing the Highway (S)</li> <li>▪ N.D.G. Park (real or perceived danger) (S)</li> <li>▪ Permeability (Westmount) (S)</li> </ul>

Table 3.3 Strength and Weaknesses

### 3.3.3 Specific Objectives for the Sherbrooke Sub-Area

The major issues concerning the Sherbrooke area are:

- Community building (assess potential for redevelopment of certain available, well-located sites within the area and investment in existing infrastructure).
- The friction created on Sherbrooke by its conflicting functions as a commercial street and as a heavy transportation road.
- Conditions created by the Décarie interchange/overpass.
- Traffic (noise, pollution and real and perceived dangers).
- Housing.

#### Objectives

- To consolidate and enhance the spirit of community already present in the area.
- To harmonise the conflict between transportation and commercial activity on main thoroughways.
- To encourage private development both commercial and residential.
- To reduce pollution and noise.
- To create friendlier pedestrian environment.
- To promote use of public transport.

Four sites of particular interest have been retained for specific planning and design proposals. These sites are: Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Park and surrounding sites (Church and Cinema 5); Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Avenue nearby N.D.G. first Church; the old Décarie Boulevard, and Sherbrooke Street in the sector of the Décarie overpass.

### 3.3.4 Design and Policy Proposals for the Sherbrooke/Côte-Saint-Antoine Sub-Area

The planning and design proposals for the Sherbrooke/Côte-Saint-Antoine sub-area is to intervene in the community facilities network. Such a network already exists in the area and is quite developed, but spatially speaking, the construction of the Décarie expressway has fragmented it, and the various community facilities ended up awkwardly distributed in relation with the population.

The local community has lost its historical institutional and commercial centre around the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce church and old Décarie Boulevard. These places still exist but, being cut by the highway, they make no sense anymore as a central point of convergence within the neighbourhood. As a consequence, some old institutions remained where they were but new ones started being clumsily distributed.

Therefore, the main aim of the proposal is to re-introduce an order and a hierarchy, trying to make sense for the user of an otherwise spatially disorganized network of community facilities. The proposed scheme is to reveal the existence of the network by making it physically apparent through the design of an “institutional and community pathway system.”

An important aspect of the proposal is to enlarge the “institutional centre” of the neighbourhood by developing another institutional/community pole around the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Park on Sherbrooke Street. By doing so, the geographical centre of the institutional centre shifts to the west, better reflecting the new population distribution.

At the center of the new N.D.G. Park pole would be a new city hall for the newly created Côte-des-Neiges/Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Borough. Realizing that the N.D.G. Park was situated at the geographic center of the new borough, and being sensitive to the representations made by the local population to transform their abandoned church into a public building, the planning team recommends transforming the church in a new city hall. The details of this and description of other proposals will be presented later.

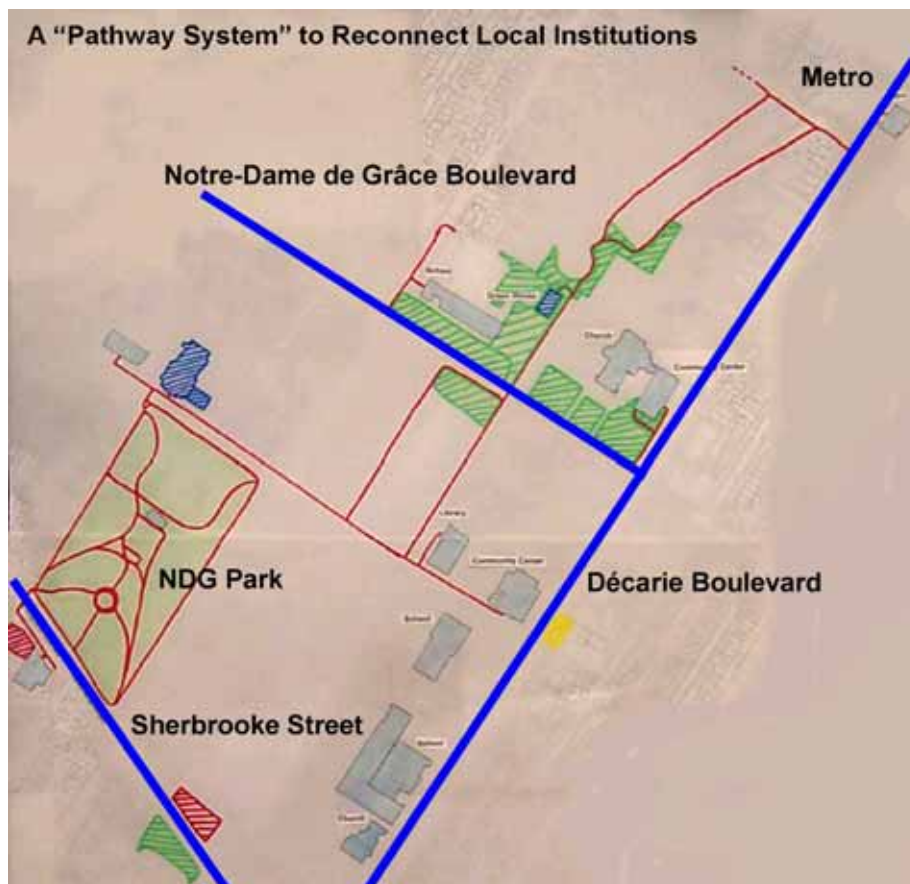


Figure 3.17 Sherbrooke/Côte-Saint-Antoine Sub-Area and Proposed Pathway System

### Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Park and its Surroundings

#### Objectives

- To consolidate and enhance the spirit of community
- To encourage private development, both commercial and residential
- To increase safety for pedestrians, especially children
- To promote this particular site as a community hub within the entire sub-area

### **Proposals**

- To re-develop the church on the corner of Marcil as a Borough City Hall and community centre. Provide services for the entire community and the adjoining school.
- To promote community-oriented commercial activity on Sherbrooke facing the park such as community pantry restaurant, CLSC, employment office, integrated within regular commercial enterprises.
- To encourage clustering of existing community services already in the area with a balanced commercial mix.
- To promote joint ventures between new community centre and Cinema 5 show space, possible utilising the park space (community theatre in the park for instance).
- To install green medians along Sherbrooke between Oxford and Girouard to calm traffic and help to reduce noise and pollution.

Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Park is located off Sherbrooke Street between Oxford and Girouard. This location is the geographic centre of the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and Côte-des-Neiges borough and is easily accessible, due to its proximity to principal arteries and bus routes.

On the northern end of the park there is a church, formerly known as St Augustine of Canterbury which closed recently. The church would be sold to a private developer to convert it into condominiums, similar to the Villa Veritace development off Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Avenue. The community in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce was appalled by the lack of sensitivity to their “Patrimoine Religieux” and formed a group to save the church. The group wanted to see the church turned into something beneficial to the residents of N.D.G.

The students-planners' proposal is to convert the church into a borough city hall for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and Côte-des-Neiges. The location of the park, directly in front of the church, would be an ideal place for the city to hold functions and community events for the borough. They also propose to create a daycare facility in the presbytery. Currently Notre-Dame-de-Grâce is lacking 300-day care spot. The presbytery is the ideal space, its size and park access add to the appeal of the site. The park has an ideal infrastructure for children in the 1 to 6 age group with two sectioned off areas one for infants and another for young children as well as a large playing field. The presbytery grounds themselves contain a large garden area, which is ideal for children's activities.

The interventions proposed for the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Park itself are minimal. They include a variety of interventions meant to adapt specific areas of the park to the needs of various categories of users (children, teenagers, seniors, etc.).

The stretch of businesses across from the park, on the southern side of Sherbrooke Street, should be reinforced and developed. This could happen next to the newly renovated Cinema 5 show space. The space should open in the next two years and provide a stage that can be rented out for shows as well as being used as a movie theatre. It is proposed to seize the opportunity to revitalize the neighbouring complex. Tax incentives should be made available for service and entertainment type businesses and community-based businesses which should consolidate there; such as the local CLSC and employment office. These tax incentives would also encourage new owners to improve the facades of their buildings. To increase accessibility and appeal of these enterprises, proposals encourage the creation of ground floor terraces that could, in the summer, be expanded to the sidewalk.

A “pedestrian versus vehicle” conflict characterizes the southern side of the park where the conflicting role of Sherbrooke as both a commercial and transportation thoroughfare must be addressed. Traffic calming measures should be implemented on Sherbrooke along the park by introducing a green, tree lined median in the center of the street. On the corner of Oxford Street, the western edge of the park, the sidewalk would be widened, a cross walk created, and a pedestrian-controlled light system installed.

Finally, the entire community node would be integrated within the larger pathway system to be implemented within the study area. This would link Cinema 5, the paths within Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Park and the Borough Hall and Presbytery to the other interventions and the areas already existing community infrastructure (see figure 3.17).

### **Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Avenue**

#### **Objectives**

- To encourage community use of space
- To encourage ecological awareness through the garden
- To encourage a connection between the school and adjoining garden spaces
- To use garden as a buffer zone for pollution (air and noise) from the expressway

#### **Proposals**

- To create a community garden and a greenhouse as well
- To promote integration of the garden and greenhouse into natural science program of the elementary school
- To plant pollution absorbing vegetation along the Décarie side of the garden.

### **Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Garden**



**Figure 3.18** N.D.G. Gardens and Greenhouse along the Pathway

The Notre-Dame-de-Grâce public plot space is located on Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Boulevard and is situated directly in front of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce school. It is located on the southern border of the covered section of the Décarie Expressway. The garden offers plots of land that can be rented by people in the community to grow vegetables, plants, flowers, etc. Unfortunately, the plots are poorly maintained and during the winter months, they are both dirty and unused. The

existing fenced in area will be converted to an open park, a section of the larger local park system that is proposed.

The area has many publicly owned (by the city and various institutions) green spaces that have the potential to form a sizable park if united. The green spaces in question include pocket parks situated in front of the community centre on the corner of Décarie Street and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Avenue; part of the church and presbytery lawns; the public plots on the southern side of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce; the land running between Villa Veritace and the school; the park at the dead end on Grove Hill and the green strip that extends along the back of houses up the eastern side of the expressway. Local residents have used “unofficially” the green-strip along the expressway as a pathway between the Villa Maria metro station and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Avenue, passing between N.D.G. school's property and the Villa-Veritace development. This pathway is not properly maintained and often intimidating due to lack of lighting and visibility.

The students/planners proposed to capitalize on these untapped potentials by consolidating the individual green spaces into one large linear parkway, which would run from Décarie Boulevard in the east to the edge on Notre-Dame-de-Grâce school in the west and would include both the existing fenced in area (rentable plots) on southern side of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce boulevard and the pocket park surrounding the dead end of Grove Hill street to the north, continuing up to Monkland on both sides of the Décarie highway. The proposed scheme would require the acquisition of a small section of the school's playground to expand the existing green area between the school itself and Villa-Veritace. A greenhouse that would serve both the community and the school, would be built along the landscaped pedestrian path linking Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Avenue and Monkland Street.

### **Décarie Boulevard and “Village”**

#### ***Objectives***

- To promote further integration of commercial and residential spaces
- To create a "Monkland"-like environment along Décarie
- To promote green space along the street to enhance commercial activity
- To improve cleanliness along the street improving run down facades

#### ***Proposals***

- To provide subsidy for improvement and integration of facades along the street
- To plant trees along the sidewalk
- To re-evaluate zoning along Décarie to allow for terraces
- To insert medians in the most heavily commercial areas, if space permits it

Décarie Boulevard is located to the eastern side of the Décarie highway, perpendicular to Sherbrooke Street. The community infrastructure already present on Décarie would first and foremost be integrated into the larger pathway system, joining Décarie to the system both on Côte Saint-Antoine and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Boulevard. The pathway system and the proposed park on Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Boulevard would better integrate the commercial activities on Décarie within the neighbourhood at large, making the many facilities in the vicinity more accessible.

It would be appropriate in keeping to the area's character to reinforce the mix of ground floor commercial activity with second floor residential units that is predominant along Décarie Boulevard between Côte Saint-Antoine and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Boulevard. This type of mixed use creates commercial activity with a strong user base in the immediate vicinity.

Currently, there is an empty lot at the corner Côte-Saint-Antoine and Décarie Boulevard. This lot is scheduled for development into condominiums, but it would serve the community better as affordable housing. This would be complementary to the mixed tenure policies being proposed here. There is a serious lack of low cost housing in the city of Montréal as a whole and specifically in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, and any initiative in this sense should be actively supported.

### **Sherbrooke and the Décarie Overpass**

Two proposals were developed along Sherbrooke Street near the Décarie expressway. One project takes place on the eastern corner of Décarie Boulevard, and the second one on the Décarie expressway overpass, literally. These schemes are much larger-scale endeavours when compared to the other community-based projects in this sub-area. The group came to the conclusion that these sites required a different approach. Situated at the intersection of the Décarie Expressway and Sherbrooke Street, one of the main access roads to the CBD, the area is already a very intense and busy urban node. Without passing any judgement on past planning decisions, it is no surprise to find robust tall buildings there, considering the intensity of traffic.



**Figure 3.19** Sherbrooke Street and the Décarie Overpass Area

The two projects were also influenced by the proximity of the future mega hospital. On top of contributing to increasing the level of activity in the area, the M.U.H.C will create a demand for more office space, due to the many paramedical services and private doctor practices, which will tend to locate in the vicinity of this mega centre.

#### **Objectives**

- To reduce pollution and noise
- To create friendlier pedestrian environment
- To address wind tunnel area
- To facilitate traffic movement
- To create a connection between east and west

#### **Proposals**



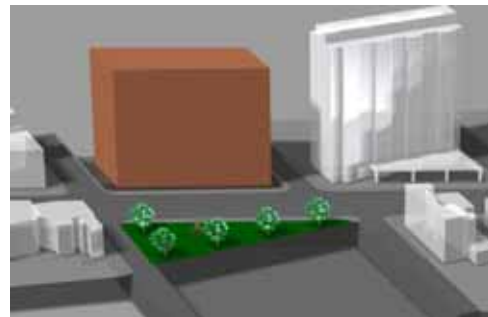
- To build a wind barrier
- To synchronize traffic movement through "urban wave" traffic lights and in stop signs
- To improve shelter for public transport on Sherbrooke

On Sherbrooke Street, and on these particular sites, as mentioned previously there is a clash of pursuits. This clash comes from the simultaneous presence of heavy through traffic and a certain level of pedestrian activity generated by the dense residential neighbourhoods in the immediate surroundings and the commercial activities located on Sherbrooke, which desperately need such pedestrian flows. The scale of the space creates a relatively hostile environment for pedestrians. It is arguable that this is caused less by the scale of the buildings themselves, than by the large open spaces created by the Décarie highway and by unfortunate decision to built small one-storey high commercial buildings on large lots, in sharp contrast with the tight succession of taller buildings with ground floor stores. The large holes in the streetscape create unpleasant environmental conditions for the pedestrian, including a strong wind tunnel effect in the case of the overpass.

The projects envisioned here, try to find the proper balance to re-establish continuity on the street level for the comfort of the pedestrians, while proposing "robust" buildings to resist the local environmental conditions (tall office buildings with their closed controlled environment are less affected by traffic noise from the street and highway for instance), and while keeping in mind to reduce the conflict between cars and pedestrians.

One of the ways this would be accomplished is by framing Sherbrooke Street along the Décarie expressway overpass. The framing of this portion of the commercial street allows for a better transition from one side of the overpass to the other. A continuous street façade on the northern side of Sherbrooke will be created to mitigate the effects of the current break along Sherbrooke. Placing a large office tower with a facing pocket park on the overpass is meant to meet this goal.

It is proposed to build a 32 meter high structure on the northern side of the Sherbrooke overpass. The building would be compatible with the surrounding building height. Stores, along the street, would occupy the ground level. This ground level activity is an important feature to this area because it allows for the continuity of commercial activity along Sherbrooke; thus, extending the link across the Décarie trench. Behind the stores and on top of them would be three floors of interior parking, and seven floors of offices.



**Figure 3.20** Building Over the Décarie Overpass

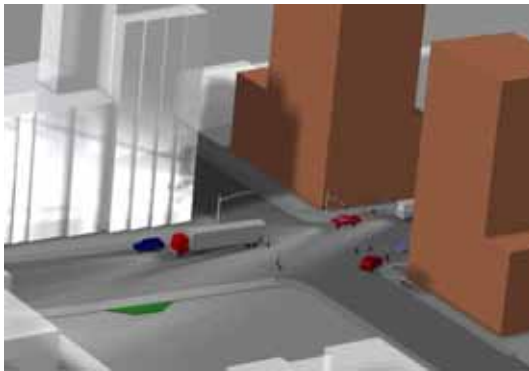
The second site of intervention is Sherbrooke Street at the corner of the Décarie Boulevard and more specifically, the north-eastern and south-eastern lots. A gas station and a take-out restaurant currently occupy these two lots. Both of these establishments are located on the back end of their respective lots. Consequently, they leave a fairly large amount of open space between themselves and the sidewalks. These large open spaces break the continuity of the visual and physical corridor of the street. The interventions wish to restore the continuity of the street facades.

In addition, these two lots are located at an important point of entrance to Montreal's inner city. When one exits the Décarie north expressway on to Sherbrooke Street, one of the first views that one usually gets of the city's landscape is the KFC restaurant and the gas station. This view is not necessarily the most appealing, especially for tourists and visitors. Such a piece of urban fabric is more characteristic of a suburban strip than of the otherwise animated inner city Montreal's commercial streetscape.

Thus, in addition to providing a more pleasant pedestrian experience, the intervention is also meant to enhance the visual experience and aesthetics of the corner. In order to meet those two goals, it is proposed to erect two office towers that would fill in the open spaces more appropriately and stand out from the urban fabric by their architectural quality and their symmetry. The twin buildings would both have a base that is 15 meters high topped by a thinner tower, which would extend up another 27 meters. The buildings will once again contain commercial activity on the ground level and office space on the upper levels. The towers will create a visual statement such as an archway, which would emphasize the theme of being the gateway to the core of the island of Montréal.



**Figure 3.21** Eastern Corner of Sherbrooke Street and Décarie Boulevard



**Figure 3.22** East and North Corners of Sherbrooke Street and Décarie Boulevard After the Intervention

## 3.4 Glen Rail Yards

### 3.4.1 Background

The fourth sub-area, the Glen Rail Yards site, is located in the southern Décarie sub-area of the borough of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce/Côte-des-Neiges, in the City of Montréal. The study and design proposals were pursued in light of the slated redevelopment of the Glen Rail Yards site as the home of the new M.U.H.C. hospital (McGill University Health Center). The mega hospital proposal (by McGill University and the Quebec Government) raises a number of issues relating to the potential and constraints of the site. Firstly, the location of the site raises a number of questions regarding accessibility and traffic generation. Secondly, is the question of the impacts that can be expected on local infrastructure, services and residents.

The construction of a mega hospital in a mostly residential neighbourhood of Montréal will have an enormous impact on nearby Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and Westmount Borough's residents. It is inevitable that the mega hospital will generate a significant amount of traffic. At present, the street infrastructure leading to the site is incapable of handling an important additional load of car volume. Local services, such as restaurants, bank branches, pharmacies, grocery stores and postal outlets, are not sufficiently numerous or are inexistent in the immediate area. The influx of large amounts of people coming and leaving the hospital (patients, visitors and hospital staff) will have significant impacts on local infrastructure and services.



**Figure 3.23** The Glen Rail Yards Site

It can be expected that certain people working at the hospital complex might want to live close by. This will add pressure to the local real estate market, as housing prices are predicted to go up due to an increase demand for housing in the general area. Ultimately, the lower end sectors in the area may experience gentrification and tenants will be pushed out, while a stronger middle-class will move in.

An increased demand for housing can also be anticipated. It will translate into the construction of new residential units on vacant land that would increase the number of residents in the area. Such a development

ought to be carefully planned, and it seems that lots of efforts have been put in the planning and design of the hospital itself, but much less consideration was given to the surroundings of the location. A hospital of this scale is a major piece of specialized fabric in a city, and the relations between such a fabric and the surrounding predominantly residential fabrics ought to be closely examined at different scale and from different points of view (transportation, quality of the public space, permeability, to name but a few).

Currently, the site is almost completely cut off from its surroundings by a cliff, and by railway tracks used by the Agence Métropolitaine du Transport (AMT). The only street leading into the site is Décarie Boulevard, which is a one-way thoroughfare running towards the north alongside the site. Furthermore, pedestrian traffic is limited by the fact that the only public right-of-way leading to the site and accessible to pedestrians, the Décarie Boulevard, goes through an underpass. The underpass can be seen as a barrier: its environment is a security issue. In other words, the proposed site for the MUHC, as it stands today, is poorly accessible to both motorists and pedestrians.

### **3.4.2 Glen Rail Yards Strengths and Weaknesses**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vendôme Metro is a transportation node</li> <li>▪ Located next to two highways</li> <li>▪ Glen Yards is a large tract of usable land (more than needed for the M.U.H.C.)</li> <li>▪ Vacant lots at De Maisonneuve and Claremont available for development</li> <li>▪ Relatively high density housing</li> <li>▪ Close proximity to downtown</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Narrow one way streets</li> <li>▪ Railway tracks are a huge barrier to Glen Yards</li> <li>▪ Dilapidated housing units in the area</li> <li>▪ Low vacancy rates in apartments</li> <li>▪ Street infrastructure already used to capacity</li> <li>▪ Vendôme used to provide with capacity at current level of service (bus/metro/train frequencies)</li> </ul>

**Table 3.4** Strengths and Weaknesses

### **3.4.3 Specific Objectives for the Glen Yards Area**

#### **Major Issues**

The construction of the MUHC is by far the most important issue in the area, but other related issues arise from the former. This development will affect the entire southern Décarie area and beyond, but has obviously highest implications within the Glen Rail Yards/Vendôme area immediate vicinity. Traffic is bound to increase on Sherbrooke and Décarie and one might fear that traffic will also impact on side streets affecting the quality of life in the residential areas. The inter-modal metro and train station of Vendôme, already very busy could also experience congestion. What is to be feared is an overload on the existing transport infrastructure.

On the other hand, the development will create an opportunity for economic development. Many of the thousands of people that will be working in the area, will want to locate nearby. Development will significantly change the housing stock in the area. There are already new developments going up, but literally hundreds of units could be needed to house the possible populace increase in the area. The expected combination of massive public and private investment in the area justify and call for doing things right. Complementary investments will be needed in transit system and other services to serve the new population working and living in the area, for instance. Doing things right starts with good planning, not only of the site itself but also of its surroundings.

#### **Specific Objectives**

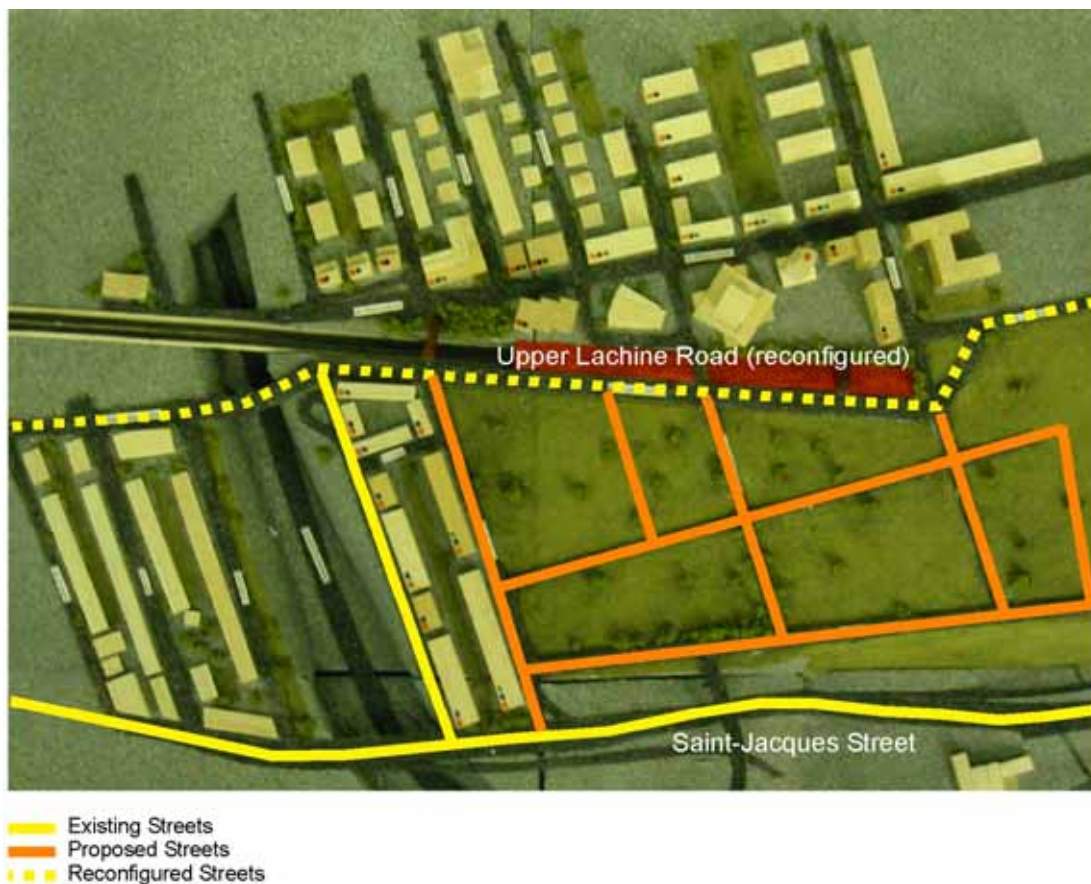
- To try to control the impacts of the construction of the M.U.H.C. hospital on the local area, starting by making the site itself accessible through a well-planned integration to its surroundings.
- To study the connection the M.U.H.C. site to all forms of public transit presently available in the general area, such as the Vendôme metro/commuter train/bus station.
- To study the restructuring of the road network in a manner which would accommodate additional volumes of vehicular traffic.
- To identify areas to be developed or redeveloped for residential and mix-use purposes.

#### **3.4.4 Design and Policy Proposals for the Glen Yards Sub-Area**



— MUHC Campus  
— Central Green Space

**Figure 3.24** Glen Yards Sub-Area and Proposed Plan



**Figure 3.25** Street Modifications to Glen Yards Site

The most important problem of the Glen Rail Yards site is by far its poor accessibility. The site is an enclave cut off from its surroundings by the topography and by rail lines. The question is not merely a technical one. To provide good punctual accesses to motorists and pedestrians would not solve the real problems.

The real issue is about how to integrate this large institutional piece of urban fabric into the existing residential fabrics surrounding it. For example: how and where to put the new services needed for the thousands of people converging to the area every day? Where and how could additional dwellings be built in the area to meet the demand and help reduce the pressure on the transportation systems? And more importantly: how to avoid building an introverted mega-structure? The complex could be made accessible by car, metro or train, but the transportation systems will soon get congested if the complex is planned solely as another “destination.” Building a hospital of this scale is not simply about adding new buildings to the cityscape.

The answer to all these questions is simple but the implementation of the solutions is complex. The M.U.H.C. has to be designed as any other piece of the inner city, and good design principles require that the site be developed around good quality public space. The two most important qualities of the public space in such a context are its legibility and permeability. People should be able to walk easily to the site from as many points of access as possible, and should be able to stroll comfortably through it using its public street network: enticing people to get there by foot or bicycle. Good permeability also helps alleviate the effects of vehicular traffic, as this traffic could percolate through the site or around it instead of being concentrated on few points of access.

The overall urban form of the M.U.H.C. should be easily legible, or understandable, for the users. A clear hierarchy of streets within the site and a sound implementation of buildings would contribute to such a quality.

Having considered the various aspects previously mentioned, the student planners/designers team came to identify a key action absolutely needed in order to “de-enclave” the site: sinking the rail lines in the immediate vicinity of the M.U.H.C. Although very costly, this is an absolute precondition to creating much needed permeability.

A second crucial element of the scheme consists in breaking down the hospital in four parts to create a campus-like organization around a central green: thus allowing the site to be innervated by public streets.

### Sinking the Rail Line

The first step to increase permeability of the area and accessibility to the site was to sink the rail below grade for the entire length of the M.U.H.C. site. The rail would begin to descend immediately after it crosses the Décarie Expressway on the west end. This can be seen in figure 2. On the east side of the site, there is sufficient amount of space for the rail line to increase back up to grade. On the west side of the site, the rail slopes at approximately 3%. In either direction, Montréal’s commuter trains can handle this decrease/increase in track elevation. This can be seen in figure 3 below.

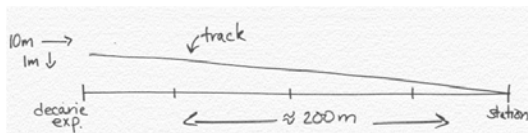


Figure 3.26 Slope of Train Line

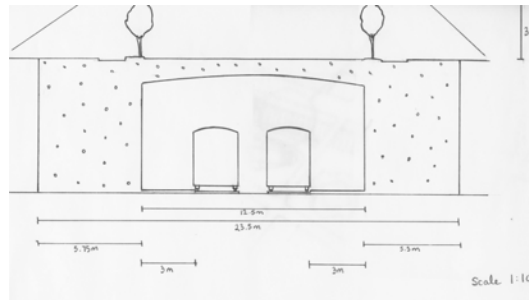


Figure 3.27 Train Tunnel

### Diverting Upper Lachine to the South Side of the Tracks

As a means to create good connections between the site and the existing street system, it proposes to re-route Upper Lachine road and make it an urban boulevard framing the hospital campus (see in figure 3.25).

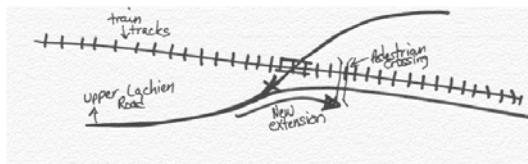


Figure 3.28 Lachine Road Diversion

There was ample space in the site to be able to dedicate its northern edge to a wide boulevard with pedestrian infrastructure. The rails being sunk, there is a possibility to connect the re-routed Upper Lachine to Sainte-Catherine Street, providing a much needed an east – west corridor to access the site.

### North – South Connections across the Rail Lines

Three new connections to the site are planned in the continuity of Vendôme Street, Marlowe Street and Claremont Avenue. Claremont is the widest street in the area. It would easily tolerate increased traffic and it is a natural gateway to a major institutional site as the new hospital campus. These three streets would intersect with New Upper Lachine and extend all the way to new “Cliff Road” (described hereafter) (see figure 3.25).

### **New Site-Specific Streets**

It proposes to create a new street at the edge of the site along the cliff: "Cliff Road." This street would connect to Décarie Boulevard, Vendôme Street, Marlowe Street and Claremont Avenue. Cliff Road would permit better distribution of automobile traffic within the M.U.H.C. site as well as offering a connection point for a Décarie off-ramp. Finally, it is proposed to create "M.U.H.C. Road," as an east-west street which would bisect the whole campus.

### **New Décarie Expressway Off-Ramp**

In order to provide site access from the Décarie expressway (south bound) a new off-ramp is introduced that would lead directly into the site. This off-ramp would enter through the south side of the site and connect to Cliff Road in the axis of the prolonged Vendôme Street. (note that a correction was made to the proposal seen on figures 3.24 and 3.25, which do not show the the off-ramp as connecting to Vendome Street).

### **M.U.H.C. Park**

The general area surrounding the M.U.H.C. site has a lack of green space. The proposal is to creating a new public park in the center of the M.U.H.C site (see figure 3.24). The park is located in close proximity to the Vendome metro station and would be fairly large. The park plays the role of the central green of the campus in accordance with the historical precedents of such an institutional spatial model. It will be frame by the trees-lined Upper-Lachine Boulevard, as well as by the streets Vendôme, Marlowe and M.U.H.C. The park will be accessible to the employees, patients and local residents to use (one can think of a small central stage that could house a little orchestra in summer and of an ice rink in winter). Furthermore, the central park would make the spatial organization of the campus immediately understandable for the users as all buildings would have their address on the park.

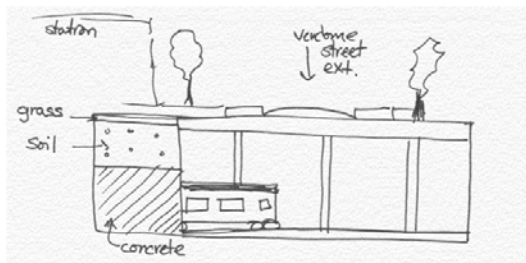


Figure 3.29 Sunken Rail Line

### **Underground Train Station**

The sinking of the rail lines forces the development of an exterior underground rail station covered by an attractive roof. The roof would create a nicer environment for commuters. It will also act as a sound barrier for the noise caused by train engines. The new extension of Vendôme and Marlowe streets would cross over the roof as bridges.

### **Extra Pedestrian Access to the Site**

Sidewalks are planned along all the streets going to the site. A pedestrian bridge is also proposed in the axis of Décarie Boulevard.

### **East End of Site Modifications**

The transformations proposed to the railroad and to the street system in the area make the site east of Claremont Street available for redevelopment. At present, the cliff and the rails cut off this site. It is proposed to loop M.U.H.C. Road down into Cliff Road creating a crescent to be developed for a residential use.

### **Economic Feasibility of the Project**

The M.U.H.C. project, which will be undertaken by the province of Québec, is expected to cost over \$1.5 billion. The added design proposals, although very expensive, are entirely necessary if the government insists on using this particular property. While the proposed restructuring on the road network and rail infrastructure in and around the site adds to the cost of the project on the



Figure 3.30 Décarie Boulevard, the only current pedestrian access to the future M.U.H.C. site

one hand, it is argued that these transformations are absolutely necessary to make a success of the M.U.H.C.

But on the other hand, these costs can be partially offset by money made off of new developments, through an increase in the tax base. These new developments will be made possible by an integrated planning. They do not only represent an economic contribution to the area's economic development, but they would contribute to improving the overall quality of the project and the area as well. For example, the new complementary residential, commercial and mix-use developments will contribute to reduce the pressure on transportation as more people working at the M.U.H.C. would be able to walk to work and or to walk to different services made available in the area.

New developments will take place surrounding the M.U.H.C site as seen in figures 3.24 and 3.25. Each single block will undergo redevelopment. The tax revenue was calculated by using the proposed 2002 tax rates. The only lot of land scheduled for redevelopment in which the team did not provide any development proposals for, and thus any values for, is the site directly east of Claremont Ave. which is presently included within the Glen Rail Yards site. We suspect that this site could be used for high-end condominium development.

In general, the buildings would be mostly residential with commercial and retail activity reserved for the ground floor. Buildings on the northern side of de Maisonneuve would range from four to eight floors. Buildings along Prud'Homme and Décarie would be from six to eight floors. The four-storey office building south of de Maisonneuve and immediately west of Vendôme station will be demolished to make way for a twelve storey residential tower. The large block of land at the corner of Claremont and de Maisonneuve, just east of the Air Canada building, will contain three high-rise developments. Two identical residential towers reaching twenty floors and an office tower twenty-five floors (equivalent to thirty residential floors). These proposed towers are compatible with existing buildings to the east and west.

- Total square footage of the proposed private developments: 2 035 195 sq. ft.
- Total value of proposed buildings: \$272 441 267.
- Total tax revenue from the proposed buildings: \$5 367 088.

If the Westmount section of the Glen Yards (west of Claremont Ave.) is developed into high-density/high-end condominiums, approximately \$3,000,000 in tax revenue could be received per year.

#### **Policies and Jurisdiction**

In order to create all the developments and infrastructure changes that have been proposed, both the zoning and FAR will have to be changed on several lots of land. Furthermore, buses will have to be re-routed and the railway tracks will be altered. Several parties will have to co-operate in order for this project to materialize successfully:

- Governments: the City of Montréal, the Province of Quebec
- Transportation Agencies: Agence Métropolitaine de Transport, Société de Transport de Montréal
- Canadian Pacific Railways (owner of the railway tracks)
- M.U.H.C hospitals
- Borough councils

## **4. Conclusion**

The process of city-building is complex. It entails not only an examination of physical considerations but also the social, economic, environmental and transportation issues implied by physical plans. In urban design, one must contend with all of these issues and the interrelation between them to develop designs that can be adopted and sustained in the long-term. To do so however, such issues must be discussed and negotiated with the local stakeholders – the government, property-owners and residents – who are directly impacted. The visions and needs



of these actors must be identified and integrated into the design process in order to ensure effective implementation.

The report, which is presented here, can be viewed as a stepping stone for this larger process. It is a summary of the projects developed by students in an academic setting to contend with the present challenges facing the Southern Décarie area. It is an incomplete exercise as there have been no voices of the locality and the community has been left out of the decision-making process. However, this exercise has identified real issues and in some instances, proposed elegant solutions. The reader will have to make his/her own judgments as to the value of the various students' proposals, but if the summary serves to nourish a wider public debate, then this, in itself, is a contribution.

## 5. Appendix



Figure 3.31 The Planning and Design Team

### 5.1 Team 1 – Snowdon (Option A)

#### ***Team Members***

Pui Shan Chan  
Mark Rubino  
Wai Ling Sit  
Vartan Soulakian  
James Turriff

#### ***Contents***

- Snowdon (Option A).pdf

### 5.2 Team 2 – Snowdon (Option B)

#### ***Team Members***

Dan Blais  
Lee Boros  
Jake Dulay

Alexander Kravec  
Sandra Trantino

**Contents**

- Snowdon (Option B).pdf
- Condo Development.avi
- Intersection.avi
- Park.avi

5.3 Team 3 – Villa Maria

**Team Members**

Murlene Ceus  
Mark Codogno  
Sylvia Gadzinski  
Ann Romanowski  
Carrie Segal

**Contents**

- Villa Maria.pdf

Team 4 – Villa Maria

**Team Members**

Beatrice Jonah  
Irene Leung  
Jen Ying-Chang  
Charles Zeitoune

5.4 Team 5 – Sherbrooke

**Team Members**

Monica Di Lorio  
Claire Frost  
Meishel Mikhail  
Mark Mitev  
Sophie Tellis

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Sherbrooke.pdf  
Appendix A-1; A-2; A-4; A-5; A-6; A-7.

5.5 Team 6 – Glen Yards

**Team Members**

Geoff Cole  
Joel Davies  
Barry McLaughlin  
Marc Ouellet  
Victor Schinazi

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Glen Yards.pdf  
Site Tour.avi