

Griffintown, July 11th, 2010

Mayor Dorais, Councillor Fournier and Councillor Thiébaud,

This letter concerns the process of adoption of the Lowney Phase 8-11 condo project in Griffintown. As you are aware, this project represents the first non-institutional residential development in decades within Griffintown, the birthplace of the industrial revolution in Canada with over two centuries of rich history.

On April 7th, promoter Prével took an excellent initiative and presented the project to their clients from other Lowney phases, receiving their feedback, both positive and negative. On April 28th, they returned to their clients with a new project which responded, at least in part, to some of the concerns raised.

On May 3rd, the Sud-Ouest borough held a public consultation on the project, where many significant concerns were raised. On July 5th, Councillor Fournier visited the site to discuss the preoccupations of residents for over an hour. Concerns were equally raised by area residents at the borough council meetings of April 6th, June 1st and, July 6th. On this final date, with the final project slated for adoption, no fewer than six citizens presented troubling concerns regarding Prével projects (Lowney and Impérial). When asked what changes the borough had imposed on the project since the public consultation, Councillor Fournier enumerated:

- building heights reduced by 5m on the first 6m of frontage on William Street
- revisions to balconies
- greenery/vegetation on William Street increased
- logistics of garbage collection for large projects to be investigated

However, the first two points had already been obtained during the client consultations with Prével. In other words, the only changes to the project imposed by the borough involve the addition of a few plants on William Street and the study of garbage removal!

The elected officials of the Sud-Ouest have failed in their duty to represent the population, ignoring their valid and pertinent concerns. Fortunately, the disenfranchised parties were able to take the matter into their own hands and demand a referendum, as they did, collecting more than the required number of signatures indicating their preoccupation with the zoning heights. However, Prével equally took matters into their own hands and collected 277 signatures (more than 50% of eligible voters) from Lowney residents renouncing their right to demand a referendum. While it is Prével's right to take such action, it is doubtful that the signatories understood the petition, given its legal language. Only 12 of these signatures came from the renovated centenary factories adjoining the Lowney 8 site while 265 came from the non-adjoining "new" constructions (an astounding participation of 264 signatures from 235 units!). Moreover, the Prével representatives collecting the signatures argued that this would allow for an accelerated process. However, at the council of June 1st, both Councillor Fournier and Mayor Dorais stated precisely the opposite in response to my question about the promoter's petition. The end result: Prével avoid a referendum on zoning heights and they anticipate beginning construction in the autumn of 2010* despite the fact that the borough documents specify Autumn 2011.

Nine days after collecting their last signature, Prével announced a pre-sale of Phase 8 to their clients. The pre-sale took place on June 19th, the day after their petition was deposited and stamped by the borough. Plans for all units and a rendering of the exterior, detailed to the colour of the brick, were

* Personal communication with Robert Rosenberg, Lowney Head of Sales

shown. Most curiously, the pre-sale took place more than two weeks before the required zoning changes were adopted by the borough, and premature to the PIIA architectural assessment! Are Prével taking an unprecedented risk or are they simply confident that the borough's indifference and inaction regarding residents' concerns will continue through the PIIA process?

In summary, Prével have taken an unconventional approach to the Lowney Phase 8 project, to the potential detriment of their reputation and integrity. They are free to make that choice. However, the duty of our elected officials is to represent and defend citizens, not promoters, and to plan for the long-term benefit and success of neighbourhoods and communities. As it stands, you have failed on both counts.

I would like you now to imagine an alternative scenario. Imagine that Prével asked their renowned architects, Cardinal-Hardy, to design a project that would integrate architecturally with the surrounding historic industrial buildings, equalling them in height, emphasizing the Lowney factory from which the project continues to draw its name and the Diamond Court* which formerly occupied the site. Imagine that the social housing component was integrated on-site along with a simple playground for young children (visiting and hopefully eventually residing in the neighbourhood). In this scenario, Prével would have a better product to sell to their clients and could avoid the pitfalls of proceeding in a controversial, albeit legal, manner. The borough council would retain the confidence of its citizens. And, most importantly, the residents of Griffintown, present and future, would benefit from a project truly conducive to long-term neighbourhood development (rather than just an increase in the tax base and the number of citizens).

Unfortunately we can no longer act out this scenario according to the above script, but we may still achieve the end result via the PIIA and the actions of our elected officials. All eyes are on you.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Dungen
Spokesperson, Committee for the sustainable redevelopment of Griffintown
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* Ironically (as it currently stands), Diamond Court was an innovative residential development that brought progress and hope to Griffintown when it was constructed in 1897 (see <http://griffintown.org/sites/diamondcourt/>)