



Secteur Griffintown

**Analyse pour l'Office de consultation
publique de Montréal**

Presenté par le Comité pour le sain
redéveloppement de Griffintown

Le 9 février, 2012

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Publique de Montréal**

Presented by the Committee for the
Sustainable Redevelopment of Griffintown

February 9th, 2012

The Committee for the Sustainable Redevelopment of Griffintown and its Mission

The Committee for the Sustainable Redevelopment of Griffintown (CSRG) is a community organisation whose members live, work and/or own property in Griffintown. The CSRG's mission is to promote the redevelopment of Griffintown based on:

- respect for the neighbourhood's history, drawing upon it for inspiration
- respect of the existing and historically significant street grid
- respect for the architecture and construction materials specific to the neighbourhood
- respect for the environment and use of sustainable practices
- reasonable density at a human scale
- durable development for the new century

The CSRG promotes local projects and endeavours such as the Griffintown Cultural Corridor and the Griffintown Horse Palace Foundation.

The CSRG maintains the website **www.griffintown.org**

OCPM Secteur Griffintown 2012: Historical Context

While a complete history of Griffintown is outside of the scope of this brief, the period from the mid-20th century to the present day is relevant to this discussion. During that period, the neighbourhood suffered decay from its industrial past. Expo '67-era projects contributed to the creation of parking lots rather than urban renewal. Decried an industrial area, the neighbourhood stagnated¹ for four decades until 2008 when major development plans were thrust onto the agenda. In the span of three and a half years since the approval of the controversial Griffintown Secteur Peel-Wellington PPU (Projet Particulier d'Urbanisme), today there are over 7000 new residential units in development (Figure 1).

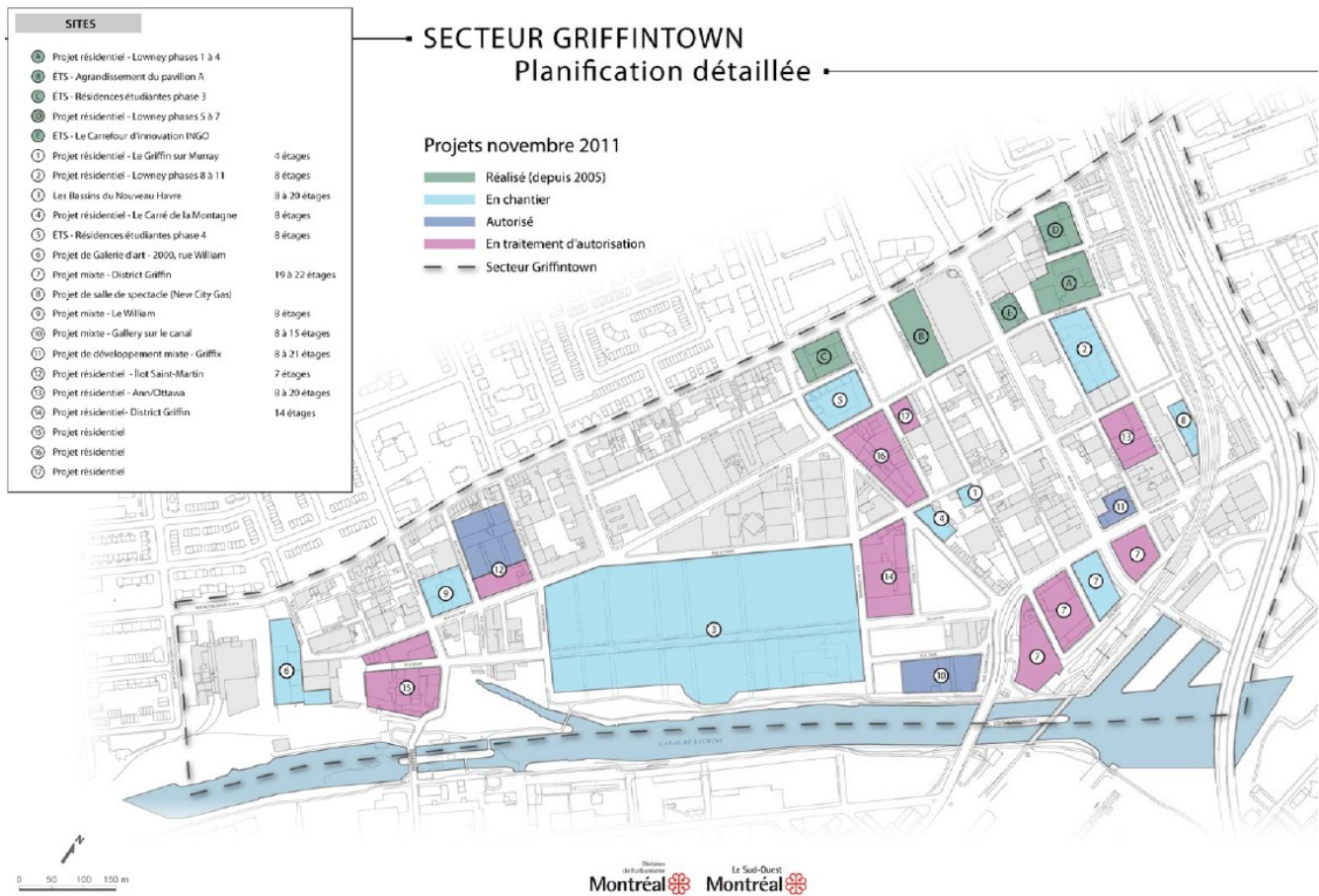


Figure 1. Projects in Griffintown (Source: OCPM)

Consider the current OCPM mandate for Griffintown:

- Step 1:
- présenter un état de situation sur le secteur et en valider les conclusions quant à un diagnostic commun
 - préciser les enjeux de mise en valeur du secteur
 - formuler et valider un énoncé de vision touchant l'ensemble du secteur
 - formuler des orientations préliminaires répondant aux enjeux retenus

¹ One exception is the Canada Post Triage facility megaproject constructed in 1978 and in operation for only 25 years. It is currently being replaced by another megaproject: les Bassins du Nouveau Havre.

Step 2: • tenue d'une consultation publique sur un plan de développement urbain intégré pour l'ensemble du secteur élaboré conjointement par la direction du développement économique et urbain et l'arrondissement, à partir des conclusions de l'étape précédente

This mandate is entirely appropriate for mid-20th century Griffintown. Had a comprehensive study and plan for the sector been undertaken at that time, including appropriate zoning adjustments, it is unlikely that a sector-wide redevelopment would find itself on the current agenda. Discussion of the failures in leadership and urban planning during that period are nonetheless outside of the scope of this brief.

While the OCPM did not exist half a century ago, it was indeed well established in 2008 during the major Griffintown PPU debates where, again, this mandate would have been entirely appropriate. The failure to accord this mandate to the OCPM at that time is the subject of the next section.

Griffintown is the birthplace of the industrial revolution in Canada. It is defined by one of the earliest planned street grids in North America. Its surviving treasures include the Lachine Canal, the New City Gas complex and the Griffintown Horse Palace, among others. It harbours centuries worth of hidden treasures waiting to be exploited and reanimated. Today, with the OCPM, we are discussing a vision for this fragile, historic neighbourhood only after more than 20 development projects are underway based on ad-hoc planning! How did this happen? Who is responsible?

Responsibility for Deferred Consultation and Planning

This section describes why the OCPM mandate and sector-wide planning were deferred by four years and identifies the parties responsible.

In 2007, the Executive Committee of the City of Montreal gave the green light to elaborate a PPU for the Peel-Wellington sector of Griffintown to accommodate the proposed Projet Griffintown megaproject, brainchild of the promoter Devimco. The proposal was highly polarising and the Committee for the Sustainable Redevelopment of Griffintown (CSRG) owes its very origins to this project, regrouping concerned residents, property owners and workers of the neighbourhood.

Mayor Gérald Tremblay accorded responsibility for the planning, coordination and consultation of the PPU to the Sud-Ouest borough, where fellow Union Montreal politicians including Mayor Jacqueline Montpetit held power. The choice of a PPU allowed for expropriations, and the responsibility shift to the Sud-Ouest borough avoided OCPM consultations, which activists and citizens groups such as the CSRG called for, and for which a mandate was entirely justifiable².

Public consultations were organised by the Sud-Ouest borough, allowing public interaction with the promoter, borough elected officials and urban planners of the DDÉU (Direction du développement économique et urbain). The consultations drew unprecedented public participation with 84 briefs submitted, including that of the CSRG³. Despite the highly pertinent concerns raised, few adjustments

2 OCPM consultations were held for the neighbouring Canada Post site of inferior surface area.

3 <http://griffintown.org/projects/projetgriffintown/docs/memoireCSRG.pdf>

were made to the adopted PPU⁴. However, adoption of the PPU coincided with an economic downturn, and the project was stalled for lack of investment.

In the 2010 municipal election, the Sud-Ouest borough voted out the Union Montréal party in favour of a Vision Montréal contingent led by Mayor Benoit Dorais. Dorais and the Vision Montréal party were opposed to the controversial Dalhousie Corridor, an equal threat to the neighbourhood and subject of yet another OCPM consultation. Nonetheless, despite Dorais' government's authority and precedent to revisit the unpopular PPU, when developers clambered to elaborate their projects after the expiration of the Projet Griffintown reserves, they complacently issued the necessary permits. Furthermore, densification outside the PPU zone was authorised, citing the increased densities of the PPU as just cause (see Case Study: Lowney Phases 8-11).

As a result, today there are over 20 projects underway, catalysed by a dubious PPU. While politicians are habitually adept at deflecting responsibility, the facts are indisputable:

Mayor Gérald Tremblay <i>(and his government)</i>	Inappropriately accorded responsibility for the Peel-Wellington PPU, a project with area-wide ramifications, to the Sud-Ouest borough
Mayor Jacqueline Montpetit <i>(and her government)</i>	Responsible for the adoption of a PPU hostile to Griffintown's historic character and its potential exploitation in deference to popular concerns
Mayor Benoit Dorais <i>(and his government)</i>	Responsible for status quo and for the prolific issuance of building permits in the absence of a sector-wide plan or public consensus

Moreover, the civil servants of the DDÉU which have been involved in the consultation and planning of the PPU, as well as other controversial Griffintown projects such as les Bassins du Nouveau Havre, Quartier Bonaventure and District Griffin share this responsibility given their division's mission:

[La DDÉU] pilote la planification, le développement et la réalisation des grands projets urbains qui lui sont confiés.

Dans la poursuite de cette mission, la DDÉU propose à l'administration municipale des orientations, des stratégies, des projets, des actions et des outils pour le développement de son territoire, notamment en matière d'économie, d'urbanisme, d'aménagement, de design et de réalisation des grands projets.

Source: Direction du développement économique, Document budgétaire 2011

The mechanism which encourages the current unconstrained development boom under the PPU and adjacent zoning is the subject of the following section.

⁴ <http://dungen.ca/jeff/griffintown/ppurevisions.htm>

The Triangle of Short-Term Gain

The current Griffintown development boom can be characterised by the following relationship:

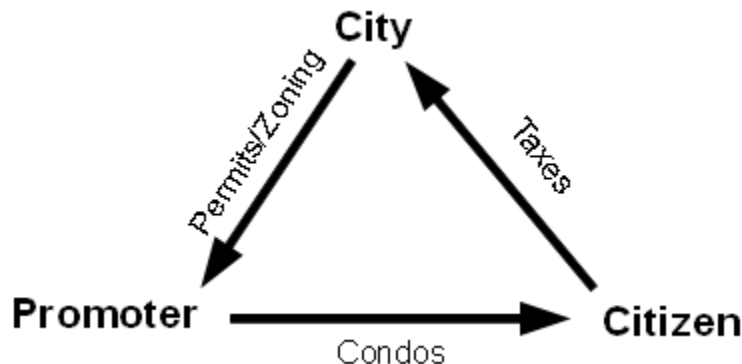


Figure 2. The triangle of short-term gain

In this triangle, each party is a winner:

- promoters build condominiums and earn profits from the sale of units
- citizens purchase units which gain in value
- the city increases its tax base

Since all participants gain in this scenario, there is no motivation for any one party to limit or restrain the cycle. In fact, there is motivation for the city and promoters to expedite projects during periods of optimal market conditions. In this brief we argue that this is indeed the case for present day Griffintown and provide recommendations to prevent this short-sighted approach.

An astute observer will question how it is possible for all parties to benefit economically from the above relationship. The answer is simple: Griffintown land values are undergoing an unprecedented upward correction after four decades of stagnation. The same astute observer will question where 2012 land values stand with respect to their fair-market value. While the answer to that question is outside the scope of this brief, *it is certainly no accident that the above triangle resembles a pyramid*. In the following section we examine a case study of an expedited project typical of this relationship.

Case Study: Lowney Phases 8-11

The Lowney Phase 8-11 condo project is the first contemporary residential construction within the Sud-Ouest sector of *historic* Griffintown. As it would (and has) set a precedent for the many subsequent projects it is discussed here to highlight the involvement of all concerned parties, namely the promoter (Prével), the city (Sud-Ouest borough) and the citizen. The following is the sequence of events leading to project construction. Figure 3 shows the project site and neighbouring historic buildings.



Figure 3. Site of the Lowney Phase 8-11 project including neighbouring historic buildings

In the Spring of 2010, Prével invited owners in phases 1-7 of their Lowney project to a preliminary unveiling and feedback session regarding their proposed phases 8-11 of said project. The proposed project would double the maximum height of the existing zoning from 12.5m to 25m and occupy the majority of a city block. During the feedback session, owners expressed concern over the proposed height and density of the project, heritage protection and cosmetic features. Committee spokesperson Jeffrey Dungen, an owner in phase 2 of the project, wrote his concerns and recommendations regarding heritage, integration, light and security in a letter to Prével (Annexe A).

Three weeks later, Prével invited the owners to an unveiling of their revised project. Alterations included a 6m recess from William Street of the top two floors, modifications to balconies and improved pedestrian space and visibility on William Street. Heritage concerns were ignored. Exploiting the heritage of the site, formerly Diamond Court, a progressive, philanthropic housing project dating to 1897⁵, could have been as simple as either respecting the orientation of the former buildings, placing the court in its historic location or recycling the many intact original bricks buried underground. Unfortunately, Prével's architects, Cardinal-Hardy, renowned for their work on historically-sensitive projects such as Place d'Youville and even the original Lowney lofts, did not include any of these elements into the design, perhaps at the request of the promoter. A second letter was sent to the developer (Annexe B, C) which, as in the case of the former, did not elicit a response.

One week later, the project was subject to a public consultation at the Sud-Ouest borough. Citizens raised the following concerns to the elected officials: excessive building heights, lack of green spaces, lack of respect for the history of the neighbourhood, impact on current residents and lack of family-oriented units, among others. Councillor Véronique Fournier concluded that there is still much work to be done with the promoter in order to arrive at a better project⁶. This conclusion was reiterated at the following borough council after citizens refined their concerns with the project.

Following the borough council meeting, residents of the sector collected and deposited a petition with the necessary signatures to force a referendum concerning the change in building heights. However,

⁵ <http://griffintown.org/sites/diamondcourt/>

⁶ Procès-verbal du consultation publique Lowney, 3 mai 2010

simultaneously, Prével collected 50% of the eligible signatures renouncing their right to said referendum, voiding the petition. Residents of the Lowney Phase 2 submitted two additional petitions directly to the Sud-Ouest borough along with a reminder of the elected officials' mandate to represent their constituents (Annexe D).



Figure 3. Final Version of Lowney Phase 8 with Phase 9 in Background

On June 19th, 2010, Prével held a pre-sale for Lowney Phase 8 more than two weeks before the zoning could even be adopted! Clearly they were confident that the borough would adopt the zoning unchanged. Buyers lined up, many spending the night outside in order to reserve the most valuable units. At the July 6th, 2010 borough council, the zoning change was indeed unanimously adopted despite the CSRG's request to defer, pending consensus with the citizens. The modifications imposed on the project by the Sud-Ouest borough as a result of the public consultation and council questions: increased vegetation for the pedestrian space on William Street and analysis of the problem of garbage collection for dense projects. In other words, all but the most cursory concerns were dismissed. The CSRG followed up with a final letter to the elected officials (Annexe E).

In early 2011, the CSRG was contacted by an architect chartered to create a plaque commemorating Diamond Court, requesting pictures of the historic buildings. Lowney Phase 8, which as of February 2012 is in the masonry-work stage, will, despite the efforts of so many citizen-activists, dominate the neighbouring historic buildings and commemorate the heritage of the site with no more than a simple plaque.

This case study highlights the triangle of short-term gain. *Clearly, the parameters of the project were agreed upon by the promoter and the borough before any public consultation.* Were the case otherwise,

certainly the borough would have exacted more changes to the project than the promoter themselves, and, critically, the promoter would never have held a pre-sale pending adoption of the required zoning! The threat of a delay caused by a referendum on the zoning pushed the developer to resort to extreme means as, according to the Quebec Municipal Affairs Department, renunciations are not intended for the benefit of private developers⁷. Nonetheless, the project's rapid, unchallenged approval results in expedited gains for the developer, its clients and the city.

In the following section we argue that a revised, improved project would equally satisfy all three parties with significant gains over the longer-term.

Collaboration for Long-Term Gain

Assume for the previous case study that, via some form of collaboration, the city, the promoter the architects and the citizens had achieved consensus. The resulting construction would benefit from the following:

Table 1: Benefits of Consensus-Based Sustainable Development

Heritage conservation:	Emphasis of the history of the site increases the land value of the construction and neighbouring sites. Contributes to a unique and prestigious offering.
Constrained density:	Heights limited to that of surrounding historic buildings improve integration, highlight the surroundings and contribute to better light penetration. Density consistent with the two-century-old street grid alleviates congestion problems.
Mixed offering:	Improves diversification of the sector to improve resilience against demographic shifts and turnover. Allows local couples to raise families locally and establish an enduring community.
Sustainable building practices:	Reduce energy and maintenance costs, contribute to affordable housing over the long term.
Public infrastructure and services:	Public green spaces and pedestrian-friendly construction improve health and alleviate congestion problems.

Clearly, reduced density equates fewer units which promoters and the city will argue translates into reduced profits and tax base. However, it can easily be argued that the increased *value* of the offer, both initially and over the long term, outweighs any reduction in short-term gains. The following section discusses the key points of Kenneth Greenberg's presentation which corroborate this reasoning.

⁷ *Developers exploiting legal loophole*, Linda Gyulai, The Gazette, August 4th, 2010

Quartiers authentiques, denses et agréables à vivre : des stratégies, des arbitrages

At the OCPM conference of January 20th, 2012, Kenneth Greenberg presented “Quartiers authentiques, denses et agréables à vivre : des stratégies, des arbitrages”. Consider the following key points of his presentation:

- the public sector is responsible for guiding development, not promoters
- it is imperative to build real neighbourhoods, not just condos
- redevelopment should not proceed as isolated projects, but rather as a music of their ensemble
- redevelopment requires flexibility to permit evolution and feedback

The previous sections highlight the failure on the first point, while the very fact that we are holding OCPM consultations on the high-level vision of redevelopment at such a late stage exemplifies the failure on the remaining points. Stated differently, the fact that there are over 20 projects in progress, representing over 7000 residential units almost exclusively of the single-bedroom type, in the absence of a coherent plan or vision for the sector, is completely at odds with Mr. Greenberg's recommendations!

Renowned architect Phyllis Lambert asked Mr. Greenberg if it was too late to change the fate of Griffintown to which he replied that it's never too late. Interestingly, in 2008 at a press conference organised by the CSRG concerning the Projet Griffintown PPU, Ms. Lambert was asked the very same question to which she also replied that it's never too late. While many of the uncoordinated projects across the sector are now too far along to change, it is the opinion of the CSRG that positive change is still possible, as treated in the recommendations section. First, we conclude on the current situation.

Conclusions

First and foremost, the present OCPM consultation should have taken place by 2008, before any PPU or zoning change was effected. Mayors Tremblay, Montpetit and Dorais, their governments and the DDÉU bear the responsibility for this failure. Under existing zoning, the current condo construction boom will continue to be fueled by the speculation of increasing value. The city and promoters achieve short-term gains by expediting projects under these conditions. Citizen-activists have proposed viable alternatives with long-term benefits that have been systematically ignored by the officials elected to represent them. Griffintown redevelopment fails on all of Kenneth Greenberg's recommendations due to the absence of a plan or vision for the sector and the exploitation of short-term gains. And, finally, the current situation is exacerbated by the continued issuance of construction permits despite these critical failures!

Recommendations

The Committee for the Sustainable Redevelopment of Griffintown urges an immediate moratorium on the issuance of construction permits and changes to zoning throughout the sector. As we have shown in this brief, the public sector has consistently demonstrated its inability to promote sustainable redevelopment, and maintaining status quo threatens to erode all the remaining potential of this historic neighbourhood.

The current mandate of the OCPM, despite being at least four years overdue, is especially pertinent and the process should be completed in its entirety under said moratorium.

Following the OCPM recommendations, the City of Montreal should prepare and present an urban plan for the sector, dignified of a UNESCO City of Design, employing the assistance of an international body of urban planners experienced in the redevelopment and conservation of world-class heritage neighbourhoods, with the collaboration of local groups⁸ and citizen-activists.

Based on this urban plan, construction permits would be limited only to the winning proposals of an annual contest (Figure 4). This contest would include a conservative, fixed limit on the surface area permitted to be developed annually and encourage promoters and their architects, by means of their proposals, to maximise the potential of their sites. Moreover, it would mitigate the current boom-bust cycle by encouraging long-term, steady, organic redevelopment of the neighbourhood. Note that this recommendation was previously made to Luc Gagnon, head of the DDÉU's urban planning division in 2010 by Jeffrey Dungen in a study by the firm Acertys. Mr. Gagnon's letter of acknowledgment is included as Annexe F. No follow-up was made.

Finally, the lessons learned from the redevelopment of Griffintown, both positive and negative, must be archived by the SMVTP (Service de mise en valeur du territoire et du patrimoine) and dutifully applied to the redevelopment of other sectors in the greater Montreal community.

⁸ The CSRG redevelopment proposal can be found at: <http://griffintown.org/redevelopment/csrg01.htm>

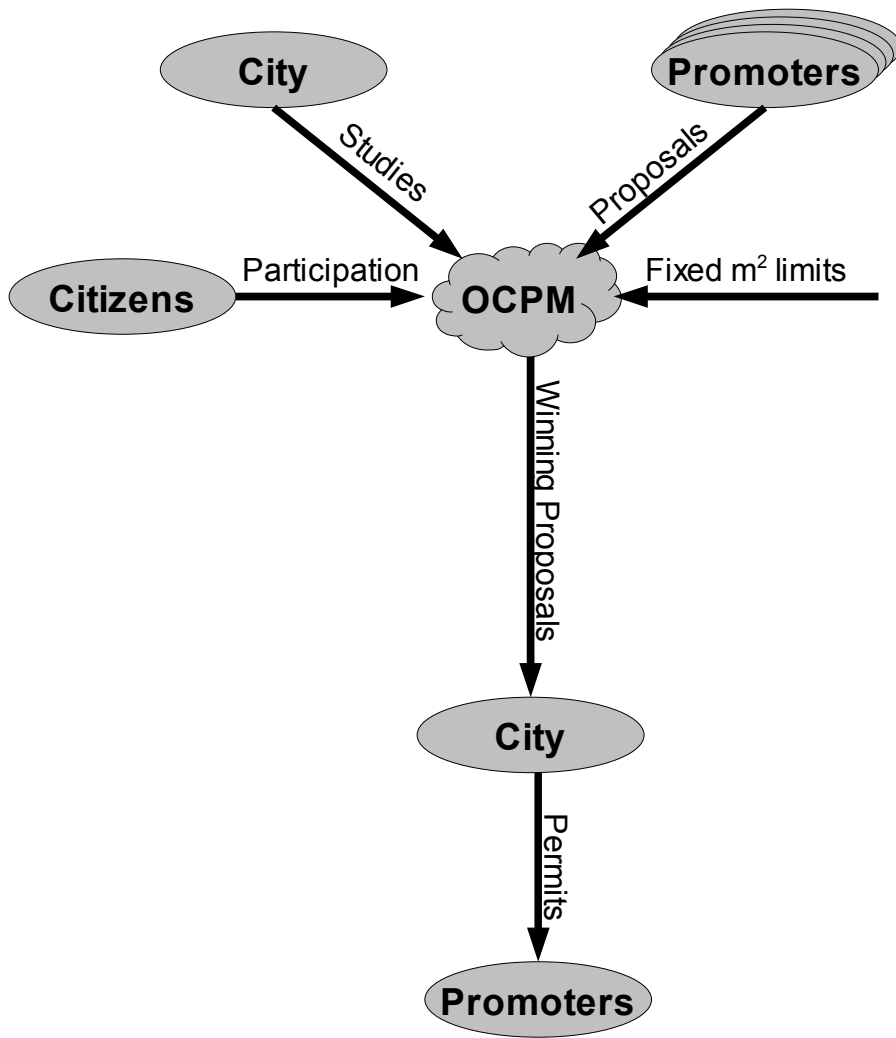


Figure 4. Annual Redevelopment Contest Flowchart