Inner-City Perspectives: Montreal and its draft regional plan

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Abstract
The region of Montreal is adopting its first regional development plan, or Plan Métropolitain d’Aménagement et de Développement (PMAD), that will directly affect the orientations of City and borough plans for the next 20 years, and drive land-use and development in inner city neighbourhoods, including those surrounding the Glen Campus of the MUHC and the Turcot Interchange. Existing Montreal policy documents that are not sufficiently integrated into the PMAD or other regional planning initiatives could supply specific language that may be lacking from the objectives and orientations of the PMAD. The consultations around the PMAD provide a platform for community groups to both express their concerns and show support for the plan’s objectives and goals, thus helping to guide policy and the development of the CMM over the next 20 years.

Cite as

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The PMAD and the community

The community partners of the CURA are involved in work on a variety of issues, many of which are addressed both directly and indirectly in the Plan Métropolitain d’Aménagement et de Développement (PMAD). As a planning tool, the PMAD will have an impact on policies enacted by the Municipalités régionale de comté (MRC) and the municipalities part of the CMM. This report aims to provide a clearer understanding of the repercussions of the objectives and orientations of the PMAD on the issues of interest to the community sector.

Background

The PMAD is a regional plan composed of objectives and orientations to structure planning processes throughout Montreal’s Metropolitan area. This plan was created as a result of Law 58, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l’aménagement et l’urbanisme et d’autres dispositions concernant les communautés métropolitaines, which was passed in June 2010 giving the CMM the responsibility to create a regional plan that addressed eight planning themes identified in the law. In addition to the public consultations to be held between September 28 and October 20 throughout the Metropolitan region (September 28 and 29 in Montreal), the MRC and the agglomerations, as well as the Ministre des Affaires municipales, des Régions et de l’Occupation du territoire (MAMROT) will give their feedback on the plan. If the PMAD is accepted, the orientations, objectives and criteria that are laid out in the plan must be integrated to the urban development plans of the MRCs and agglomerations situated in part or completely in the territory of the CMM. Thus, the MRCs and municipalities would have to conform to the PMAD in the elaboration of their plans and planning tools.

The regional plan seeks to harmonize planning practice and, using the principles of sustainable development, create a common vision for the growth of the Greater Montreal area over the next 20 years. There are 82 municipalities that belong to the Communauté Métropolitaine de Montréal (CMM) and together they are home to almost half of the population (3.7 million) and jobs of the province and contribute almost half of the Québec GNP (PIB). In addition to guiding the sustainable development of the CMM, another goal of the plan is to assure the attractiveness and competitiveness of the Montreal’s Metropolitan area.
The PMAD

The PMAD consists of three main orientations, fourteen specific objectives and thirty planning criteria to accomplish the plan’s goals. The first objective calls for a Greater Montreal with sustainable living environments, and contains diverse objectives on a variety of topics aimed at promoting a sustainable region. The second objective focuses on transportation as a means of guiding development in the CMM, with the goal of increasing public transportation use and improving accessibility. The third orientation addresses protecting and promoting both the natural and built environments.

This document specifically addresses objectives or planning criteria directly related to the missions of the community partners of the CURA Making Megaprojects Work for Communities.

Orientation 1: Planning and development

Housing and transit-oriented development

Increasing the residential density of the Greater Montreal area in line with the principles of sustainable development is a major focus of the first orientation of the PMAD. The PMAD uses the concept of transit-oriented development (TOD) as a way to structure future residential development in Greater Montreal, given the projection of 530 000 new residents (320 000 new households) in the next 20 years. More specifically, the PMAD calls for channeling at least 40% of all future households in areas near key transportation axes and public transit access points as a measure to promote the sustainability of the region.

Thus, communities in proximity to major transportation structures would be affected by the PMAD’s policy on increased housing development within TOD areas, defined as areas near access points to the current public transport network.

While the plan cites research on the close relationship between TOD and gentrification, there are no policy measures cited that would be directly aimed at protecting the existing housing stock and ensuring that it remains affordable for current residents. Instead, the PMAD recommends mitigating gentrification by aiming for creating a social mix (‘‘miser sur la mixité sociale’’) (p.47), where mixité sociale (social mix) is defined as the coexistence of diverse social groups in the same space,
represented by a diversity of housing types both in typology and cost. This approach is further elaborated in Criteria 1.1.3 which presents two recommendations for mitigating gentrification in TOD areas: favoring the construction of a mix of housing types to better respond to the different types of households and including different socioeconomic groups in neighbourhood life (p.53). Despite the acknowledgement of the link between gentrification and TOD, it is unclear whether the plan’s recommendations for achieving mixité sociale are sufficiently detailed or concrete.

These criteria are accompanied by an incentive program for TOD development which the municipalities could use to develop TOD neighbourhoods. The PMAD recommends that such an incentive program be closely linked to government programs on the fight against climate change. This incentive program would thus define measures:

- for supporting residential demand for a denser typology and a diversified housing prices near public transportation access points, such as financial aid for housing, as well as

- “mesures de soutien à la planification détaillée des secteurs situés aux abords de points d’accès au réseau de transport en commun, à la maîtrise du foncier et à l’aménagement et au réaménagement du domaine public dans une perspective TOD” (p.53).

This objective also lists a number of means by which the minimum density can be achieved, including PPUs, PAEs, zoning, etc. (p.58).

The strong association between gentrification and TOD development as well as the speculation that would likely accompany a policy promoting incentives for TOD areas could have important repercussions on existing communities, such as the displacement of vulnerable populations. To ensure that the mitigation of gentrification is taken into account in the PMAD, more precise language could be included, for example provisions regarding percentages of affordable and social housing in TOD developments. Specific percentages of affordable and social housing for large TOD developments could be suggested as requirements to obtain the incentives allotted to TOD developments. Detailed language from the existing Plan d’action métropolitain pour le logement social et abordable 2009-2013 could be integrated into the content of the PMAD to ensure its integration into municipal planning documents.
While the principles of “mixité sociale” and a diversity of housing types mentioned in the PMAD demonstrates an awareness of the need to protect vulnerable populations, the current language may not be sufficient to lead to policy that will protect vulnerable populations from gentrification pressures associated with TOD.

**Economic Development**

The PMAD acknowledges the polycentric nature of the regional economy, and identifies 9 major economic poles which will receive many of the projected 150 000 new jobs over the next 20 years. However, local economic development is not a major objective of the PMAD, whose primary reference to economic development concerns the consolidation of economic poles and major infrastructure (related to health, education, sports, culture and tourism) around public transportation nodes (p. 64-67, 70). This absence of local economic development proposals in the plan is to be expected given the regional focus of the PMAD. The regional economic development goals are contained in a regional economic development plan passed in 2005 and updated in 2010.5

**Health : air quality**

Objective 1.5.4 addresses the impact of air quality on health (p.76). The PMAD cites a study showing that older people who live along highways are more likely to develop serious health problems. However, as this preoccupation is under consideration by other regional partners, the objective calls for completing the regulatory framework regarding emissions by identifying areas near existing and projected highway axes to ensure public health and safety (p.76).

This language may be too vague to ensure policies are enacted leading to concrete action in the neighbourhoods heavily affected by traffic congestion and poor air quality, and although other regional partners are involved in the issue of air quality, the PMAD could provide a platform to further the discussion on zoning regulations around major traffic axes and other air quality mitigation measures.

**Aging population**

Addressing specific needs related to the elderly is largely missing from the PMAD’s objectives. The
PMAD does mention the need to “respond to the mobility needs [of the population] in the context of growth and aging of the population”, specifically in regards to accessibility and new patterns of movement. However, no specific objective identifies the elderly as a vulnerable population. To ensure that the needs of the elderly are taken into account, specific language prioritizing accessibility measures for the elderly could be added to plan objectives which address infrastructure improvements and other interventions such as TOD and housing (p.53, Criteria 1.1.3).

Orientation 2: Transportation

The PMAD clearly states that transportation improvements are joint ventures with many stakeholders and decision makers, such as the AMT, STM and MTQ. While the PMAD suggests a priority list of transportation infrastructure and improvement projects, it is acknowledged that the CMM does not have much weight in determining the timing of these multi-agency construction projects.

Regarding the reconstruction of the Turcot interchange, the PMAD supports the “train de l’ouest” as a traffic mitigation measure during construction on the Turcot interchange. The PMAD further calls for a reinforcement of the public transportation network during and after the construction of the Turcot interchange as well as mitigation measures for the transportation of merchandise. Though regional in scope, the PMAD could provide an opportunity to reiterate requests regarding local transportation initiatives such as improving intermodal public transport stations.

Orientation 3: Environment

Objective 3.3 calls for the identification and protection of “landscapes of metropolitan interest”, and is accompanied by a map identifying landscape types to be conserved. Objective 3.5 calls for developing the diverse landscapes, built environment and natural areas of the CMM in light of creating an integrated recreational tourism area. Both of these objectives could have important ramifications for the Falaise St Jacques, an important area for the surrounding neighbourhoods. The expansion of recreational tourism in this area, similar to the development of the Lachine Canal recreational area, could be a positive influence on the economic development and character of the surrounding neighbourhoods. However, it could also add to the gentrification pressures already felt in these neighbourhoods.
In Criteria 3.4.2 regarding the protection of the metropolitan built environment, several areas of Notre-Game-de-Grace and Westmount are identified as areas with built heritage to be protected. As the PMAD calls for the protection of significant architectural and built environment heritage but does not provide for specific measures, it is unclear the effects that this policy will have on property values, especially given that many areas are already classified as heritage sites and protected as such by municipal plans.

Conclusion

The enactment of the PMAD will directly affect the orientations of City and borough plans which will drive land-use and development throughout the neighbourhoods which are a part of the CMM. Existing Montreal policy documents that are not sufficiently integrated into the PMAD or other regional planning initiatives could serve as examples of specific language that may be lacking from the objectives and orientations of the PMAD. The consultations around the PMAD provide a platform for community groups to both express their concerns and show support for the plan's objectives and goals, thus helping to guide policy and the development of the CMM over the next 20 years.
Notes

1. The plan can be consulted on the website of the PMAD, currently only available in French: http://pmad.ca/. For information on the location and date of public consultations this fall: http://cmm.qc.ca/fileadmin/user_upload/communique/com20110616_02.pdf.


