

**A Day of Consultation and Reflexion With the Members**  
(CMP) Communauté Milton-Parc  
May 9, 2009

On May 9, 2009 the members of the co-ops and OSBLs which are the co-owners of the Milton-Parc project met for a large community discussion. The purpose of the day was to give to all the members the opportunity to share with the board of directors of the CMP their ideas regarding future activities. The results of this discussion would be presented to a decision-making general assembly in June.

The day took place at St John's Lutheran Church, 3594 Jeanne Mance from 9 am to 2 pm. The participants met around tables combining as much as possible a variety of coops and OSBLs. About seven or eight participants gathered at seven tables. In the course of the day as some participants came and went, about 70 were in attendance.

The president of the CMP board, Alanna Dow, opened the day with a word of welcome. The participants at each table introduced themselves. One person at each table, who had previously been asked to do so, gave a brief history of the Milton-Parc project, describing at the same time which aspect of the process made the person most proud of his or her involvement.

**First Part**

The participants were invited to respond to two questions. They should first identify the values most important to them – the values that they considered important enough to defend publicly. Then, arising from these values, they should propose a vision, or more precisely, what would be the “signature” of Milton-Parc in five or ten years from now.

Forty minutes were allotted for this exercise. The answers were written on a large sheet of paper which would then be used by the animators. Here, in summary, are the answers.

**The “Signature”: the environment, access to housing, and involvement.**

The signatures tended to converge. Three ideas were prominent:

- the role of the community in making available good housing;
- its mission in preserving a healthy environment
- the importance of the involvement of members to the benefit of the whole community

In general it was also clear that the participants considered the good will of the community to be of service to the city as a whole. Here are the five most prominent signatures: there are two additional ones that were less prominent – we will look at them later.

1. To preserve CMP and reconfirm its social values as a space protected from property speculation;
2. A community model assuring access in a democratic fashion to good housing for those most in need;

3. A philosophy based on the environment, community involvement, and the cooperative movement;
4. A healthy and harmonious environment; a community of involved and committed residents; creative and innovative results;
5. The participation of all the residents in their co-ops and in the community.

In addition to the above points, several others were made by only one group:

1. The Milton-Parc project and its mission has to become better known
2. The social values of the project have to be made more visible along with the development of a sense of pride within the community.
3. Milton-Parc demonstrates that housing cooperatives are an excellent model of social integration within a socially diverse group; this model should become widely known.
4. Another idea will be discussed below within the category of the specific issues involved.

### **The Values: mobilization and quality of life**

The list of values prepared at each table confirm the importance of the three main ideas in the signatures: the environment, access to decent housing, and involvement of the members in the functioning of the project. However several nuances deserve mention.

- Within the category of the involvement of members, democratic functioning is key along with the concepts of sharing, representivity and transparency.
- The idea of belonging had strong support in the list of values.
- Several groups mentioned specifically the importance of not allowing the rooming houses to be rented to students.
- Several groups mentioned the importance of quiet and cleanliness.

Along with recognizing the importance of involving the members in the functioning of the Milton-Parc community, we noticed another perspective which emphasized the quality of life and the functioning of various organizations in the neighborhood. One participant noted that we don't have to go out onto the streets, we only need to talk to each other.

Throughout the discussion we also noted the expressed need to take care of our property as well as our collective identity.

### **Second Part**

Once the groups had finished their work on the values and the signatures, the participants changed tables in order to form new groups. One person was asked to stay at each table in order to give a report to the new participants. The new groups now had a new task which was to list the challenges facing CMP. A strict definition of "enjeux" was not imposed: ("Enjeux" can be translated as challenges, issues, implications, or stakes). The participants were free to put on the table the ideas they felt were most important. At the end of the exercise they would have to chose only ONE challenge.

Ideally, it should be related to the signature identified earlier, but this was not obligatory. The participants had fifty minutes to respond to this question.

## The Challenges

The following were chosen by the groups as being the most important. They are listed in the order that corresponds to the list of signatures.

1. Ensure lines of communication with elected political representatives, the police and the McGill administration.
2. Strengthen CMP so that it is able to represent the community in dealing with issues facing the neighborhood.
3. Create a zone of sustainable quality of life at a time when the area is threatened by several projects.
4. Encourage exchange of information among the coops dealing with common concerns such as maintenance of the buildings, good administrative management, and a spirit of collaboration.
5. Since the Declaration of Co-ownership is the document which governs the whole Milton-Parc project, it must be made available in a way that is clearly understandable; its principles and requirements must be followed in practice.
6. Emphasize a spirit of community and solidarity and assure that clearly written information is widely circulated.
7. Identify new sources of financing in order to keep rents low and to have sufficient funding to properly renovate and maintain the buildings.

The responses to questionnaires listed in detail the concerns of the groups, which match essentially the items listed above. However, several nuances merit mention.

- The theme of transparency and circulation of information appeared over and over as something very important. Several groups specifically mentioned the need for new members to be well informed regarding the history of the project, its founding values, the role of CMP and the obligations of the coops and OSBLs. Several responses called for better exchange of information among co-ops on questions such as security. One group suggested that CMP offer advice on conflict resolution.
- The theme of good maintenance of the buildings was a theme that appeared in nearly all the groups. Renting out certain buildings to students was mentioned in a negative tone several times. Several themes mentioned at the beginning of the session appeared again: the inclusion of the elderly, the inclusion of families and individuals of low income, noise, and cleanliness.
- Several groups urged the residents of CMP to also be concerned with issues touching the city as a whole. One group expressed the desire to give back to the Montreal population considering the privileged position we are in with our cooperative housing. One person asked us not to forget other residents in the neighborhood living on "the other side of the street" and be concerned especially with their economic situations.

- Several groups mentioned the problem of the impending construction of a condo within the project.

This part concluded with a presentation in the plenary session of the results from each group. Following that the board of directors and the members publicly thanked Cecile Grenier for her 18 years of work as manager of CMP.

### **Third Part**

During the lunch break several members of the board along with the animators briefly met to reformulate the challenges. Following that, the participants were asked to regroup and chose the group with the challenge that interested them; the group was then to develop the appropriate response to that challenge.

Here is a list proposed to the groups:

1. That CMP work with the coops to find new sources of funding
2. That a simplified summary of Declaration of Co-ownership be written which would help the members to understand it.
3. That a method of sharing information and expertise regarding maintenance and selection be organized among the coops and OSBLS.
4. That a method be developed within CMP to deal with neighborhood problems in a sustainable way (noise, cleanliness, security, land speculation, relations with the students).
5. That lines of communication be established with institutions such as the borough, the police, McGill.
6. That CMP help the coops and OSBLs with their internal democratic functioning and, in general, distribute information.

The participants should therefore, starting with one of the challenges, propose a project. The definition of this project could include the participants, the social impact, the economic impact, the physical impact, the people affected, the conditions of success, and the steps needed to attain that success. The participants were grouped in five tables, the items 2 + 3 having been grouped together. They had nearly an hour to prepare their proposition. Here are the projects elaborated by the groups.

That CMP make efforts to find new sources of financing

Make CMP the negotiator with CMHC in discussions regarding financing. Currently CMHC negotiates directly with each coop. The group proposed that CMP develop an overall financial plan and pressure CMHC to contribute to it. Within that process CMP could designate one particular co-op member with expertise in financial matters to work with the finance committee of each coop. FECHIMM could become a partner in this process furnishing information on financing. The group also reminded us that the government funds designated for energy efficient renovations could be used.

That the Declaration of Co-ownership should be better understood and its requirements consistently observed.

Establish a committee to publish a popular and bilingual version of the Declaration. The older members who worked on the writing of the Declaration would be called upon to help. All members of the co-ops and OSBLs have to have a good understanding of it.

That there be an exchange of expertise and information regarding selection and maintenance among all the co-ops.

This project was divided in two. First the group proposed to create a framework for selection and a list of requirements of prospective candidates, which would serve as a tool for the ad hoc selection committees. This effort would create more harmonious relations among co-op members, better participation of members, and fewer complaints at the Rental Board. Then the group proposed to hold information workshops on questions such as windows and doors and to teach members how to write requests for bids from companies. The most knowledgeable members of coops would be partners in this process which would create a more dynamic community, would reduce renovation costs, and improve the maintenance of the buildings. The group also suggested that the website be used to post information on best material to use, as well as best businesses to use. The group proposed that the coordinators of the coops meet in order to identify their needs.

That CMP be concerned with neighborhood problems (noise, cleanliness, security, speculation, relations with the students) within the perspective of sustainable development.

The group was aware that there is already an organization that is concerned with these neighborhood problems: the CCMP (Milton-Parc Citizens Committee). On the other hand the group was also aware that when the lanes are cared for by the residents (whether the lane belongs to CMP or not), vandalism and unwelcome "visits" in houses or yards are discouraged. The group suggested that CMP organizes semi-annual lane cooperative clean-ups. Such initiatives tend to improve neighbor relations, and increase security.

That CMP establish communications with local institutions (elected officials, police, McGill)

The creation of a Milton-Parc neighborhood Forum. To do this the group suggested developing relations with local recreation associations, the CCMP, businesses, the Yellow Door, the police, McGill, elected officials (both provincial and city). The establishment of a forum would be needed to carry out this work, establish relations, and find space to meet twice a year. Such an activity would encourage communication among neighborhood groups, and would give some stability to the local businesses which in turn might encourage them to give discounts to coop members. This forum would involve 1400 residents. It would need the active participation of the coops and its members in order to succeed.

That CMP help the coops and OSBLs in their functioning as democratic structures; this would include a better transmission of important information.

A representative of CMP could be made available for this purpose, particularly to give information on the Declaration of Co-ownership and on the structure of CMP. The purpose of this approach is to encourage as much autonomy as possible to each co-op. Information overcomes apathy, generates participation, improves the relationship between the board and its members, and discourages the kind of relation that sometimes exists when members treat the co-op as they would a landlord.

### **Other Suggestions**

Several participants, acting as individuals, made suggestions by writing a note to the animators, or expressing themselves after the proceedings had finished.

- One person wanted to call the attention of the CMP board to a conflict in his/her coop with a member who refuses to fulfill his/her membership responsibility.
- Another proposed a poetry contest with the theme "The Paradise of Milton-P arc".
- Another submitted two written suggestions. One suggestion was that CMP keep one list of applications for membership rather than each co-op keeping its own, thus simplifying the selection process. She also suggested that the selection committees meet about six times a year to discuss principles, orientations and procedures. A CMP board member could begin this process.

Report submitted to the CMP board  
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