



# The Right of Initiative

## The Montréal Experience



OFFICE  
DE CONSULTATION PUBLIQUE  
DE MONTRÉAL





## Montréal in brief

2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in Canada

Québec's metropolis

2 million residents (3.5 including the metropolitan area)

Great population diversity





# Public consultations in Montréal

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- ❑ Public consultations are an important part of the democratic process
- ❑ The objective of the consultations is to improve projects by taking into account public concerns and expertise
- ❑ May be held either by elected officials, private firms or the OCPM
- ❑ Since its creation, in 2002, the OCPM has held almost 200 consultations
- ❑ Since 2010, the OCPM has held five consultations at the citizens' initiative





# The role of the OCPM

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- ❑ The OCPM holds its consultations transparently, openly and independently
- ❑ Its members are neither elected officials nor municipal employees
- ❑ Its consultations deal with development projects and public policies at a borough or city level
- ❑ The OCPM may hold a public consultation only if mandated by the city council or executive committee (including for the Right of Initiative)



# The recommendations of the OCPM

- ❑ Distinguish among the desirable, the acceptable, and the unacceptable
- ❑ Aim to make objective and enlightening recommendations to decision-makers, away from external pressures
- ❑ Are based on all the opinions presented during the consultation
- ❑ Are made public and presented to elected officials by the president of the Office
- ❑ The OCPM plays no role in project follow-up



# Public consultations at the citizens' initiative

- ❑ Since 2010, the Right of Initiative has allowed Montrealers to obtain public consultations on anything that falls under Montréal or borough jurisdiction (except for the budget, fees and taxes)
- ❑ May be initiated by any resident or group of Montréal citizens ages 15 and +
- ❑ May deal with an ongoing project or a new issue
- ❑ Require the submission of a petition with 15,000 signatures for the city or with a number of signatures based on 5% (max 5,000) of the population for a borough
- ❑ A consultation that is deemed eligible may be entrusted to a municipal commission or the OCPM
- ❑ An initiative leads to a public consultation and recommendations (not to the cancellation or approval of a project)



# The Right of Initiative since 2010

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- ❑ Since its creation, a dozen petition campaigns have been initiated, eight of which resulted in a public consultation
- ❑ Some had to do with new issues, while others sought to contest a project already under way
- ❑ Most of those initiatives were at the city level, while two were at a borough level
- ❑ The others were abandoned

# Two issues, two initiatives

- ❑ Urban agriculture in Montréal: a new issue for Montréal
- ❑ Private-vehicle through-traffic in Mount Royal park: from dispute to compromise



# Example 1: Urban agriculture in Montréal

- ❑ In 2012, a group of citizens got together to maintain, increase and promote the place of urban agriculture in Montréal.
- ❑ A major mobilization enabled a coalition of organizations to collect 29,000 signatures within a few weeks
- ❑ The OCPM established an innovative process to allow experts and citizens to become familiar with and express themselves on the subject
- ❑ Recommendations were well received by petitioners and elected officials alike

# A few observations

- ❑ The consultation allowed the general public to become well versed on the subject through extensive news coverage on urban agriculture
- ❑ The consultation compelled the municipal administration to acquire expertise
- ❑ The OCPM adapted its consultation techniques for the uninitiated
- ❑ Record participation for a public consultation in Montréal
- ❑ Beginning of a new era in public participation



# Example 2: Automobile through-traffic on Mount Royal

- ❑ A deadly accident reignited the public debate on banning automobiles in Mount Royal park
- ❑ Following municipal elections, the new elected officials announced the closing of park access routes to automobiles
- ❑ Two parallel petition campaigns were initiated, one by opponents and another by proponents of the ban
- ❑ The City of Montréal went ahead with the decision, but gave the OCPM the mandate to evaluate “the pilot project” from the citizens’ point of view and to propose a vision for the future

# A few observations

- ❑ The consultation took place in a context of great dissatisfaction of part of the population strongly mobilized either in favour of or against the pilot project
- ❑ 15,000 people expressed their opinions
- ❑ Opponents and proponents of the project were forced to take into account the point of view of their adversaries
- ❑ Despite their differences, points of convergence evolved
- ❑ The OCPM recommended measures to reduce traffic by developing a “recreational road”
- ❑ The City of Montréal is implementing the recommendations of the OCPM



# In conclusion

- ❑ Public consultations contribute to citizens' appropriation of their city
- ❑ All public consultations require resources and time
- ❑ The independence and neutrality of the public consultation body raises the population's level of trust and lends credibility to the process
- ❑ The diversity of consultation activities allows broader participation and the expression of a greater variety of opinions



# Thank you!

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