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Blue Bonnets: Advocates push for affordable housing community

Citizens join city officials to discuss what to do with site of former Montreal racetrack

CBC News Posted: Sep 21, 2014 12:43 PM ET | Last Updated: Sep 21, 2014 5:24 PM ET



What to do with Blue Bonnets? 2:09

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Social housing proponents are advocating for the conversion of the old Blue Bonnets race track into a new, affordable neighbourhood.

The 43-acre race track near the Décarie Expressway has been sitting vacant since 2009 and control of the property has since been transferred from the province to the City of Montreal.

On Saturday, social housing advocates took part in talks on what to do with the property.

They say developers are focusing more on condos at the expense of rental properties and the need for government-funded affordable housing is growing.

"That's the only way we're going to get it, unfortunately, because the private market just isn't that interested in building rental housing anymore," said Susan Fitch, a volunteer with the Project Genesis housing rights advocacy organization.

Affordable housing advocates say around 10,000 Côte-des-Neiges — Notre-Dame-de-Grâce households spend more than half their income on rent.

Jennifer Auchinleck of the Côte-des-Neiges Community Development Corporation told CBC News that Saturday's discussion provided ample food for thought.

"How can we create a neighbourhood that's really good for families? What do we need for senior citizens? How can we organize the neighbourhood so youth feel really included and really involved? Really interesting discussions," she said.

Borough Mayor Russell Copeman said there's a long way to go before anything can be done with the Blue Bonnets land once the City of Montreal takes possession.

"Buildings have to be demolished. There are no sewers. There are no

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water mains, there are no streets. So we're looking at a horizon of maybe five, ten years down the road," he said.

In the meantime, advocates like Fitch and others will continue their campaign to see the City of Montreal put its money on affordable housing down at the old racetrack.

"I have a lot of memories of seeing the horse racing on television when I was a kid. People used to place their bets there, their dreams, you know, for a better life. Now we're doing that same thing again," Fitch told CBC News.



Jennifer Auchinleck of the Côte-des-Neiges Community Development Corporation said Saturday's discussions produced a wealth of ideas for what a housing development at Blue Bonnets should look like. (CBC)

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name646

Not just affordable housing but use it as an opportunity to build "micro-housing" and "green housing" Imagine what that would do for this city!

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Rob Roy

Build a few dozen 50 story high rise low income apts. Ppl that depend on transit instead of cars so less traffic at Decarie and you should be able to solve the need for low income housing in Mtl.

No problem getting a hundred thousand ppl into this space.

A win win for everyone.

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Uncommon senses

@Rob Roy

Urban planners learned that concentrating low incomes dwellings in one area was a very bad idea. (Examples London's council flats and New York's housing Projects.)

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A mix of different income levels in proximity builds a more harmonious neighborhood.

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Uncommon senses

It's a bid piece of land.

To add some perspective, it the same size as a rectangle formed by Rene Levesque, University, Bishop, and Sherbrooke street

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Uncommon senses

There should be a social housing component to the development.

There should be some higher end homes as well.

Mostly it should be condos of 2-4 bedrooms priced on the lower end of the scale.

If there are too many higher end condos, there will be a lot more cars and the road access, primarily Jean Talon at Decarie cannot handle the extra traffic.

There are no parks in the area so there is an opportunity for a large park among the condos.

The project should also bring up the languishing plan to... » more

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haligonex

Build a huge Mosque and put up several apartments as the majority of immigrants to this side of Montreal are from the Islamic nations torn by war.

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