

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Habitat Hippodrome** is an aspirational plan to develop the Hippodrome site proposed by McGill Master of Urban Planning students that envisions a model community for democratized, inclusive, economically accessible, and ecological development in Montreal. By seizing the opportunity to collaborate with the City of Montreal, other levels of government, the local community, and the social economy, the plan includes interventions and strategies that would deliver long-lasting housing that is affordable and decommodified. The plan, which was produced between January and April 2022 as part of a counter-planning exercise, serves as inspiration and demonstrates possibilities for citizens and other stakeholders involved in transforming the Hippodrome site to meet community needs.

## CONTEXT

In recent years, the housing crisis in Montreal has aggravated severely. Over a third of Montreal households, or over 180,000 households, are spending more than 30% of their income on housing. This is especially true in a neighborhood like Côte-des-Neiges, where there is a high proportion of low-income households. In addition to facing unaffordability, low-income households are also facing overcrowded and poorly maintained housing conditions. The Hippodrome is a well-located vacant 46 hectare site that represents an opportunity to partially fill these needs. Given Montreal's strength in the social economy realm, the presence of community groups and activists, the site and current context presents a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, especially for different levels of government to step in and contribute to decommodified and affordable housing.

## THE PLAN

### A DEMOCRATIZED SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE

We propose the establishment of a Community Land Trust where the land would be transferred from the City of Montreal to maintain the social purposes of the land. It would be characterized by the following key elements:

- A system of decision-making involving elected representatives from the Côte-des-Neiges community, from housing associations operating in the Hippodrome community, and from municipal government.
- A hired directorate including a Société de développement communautaire et commercial to program commercial and community spaces on the site with the objective of generating opportunities for building social cohesion and generating economic opportunity.
- A Community Backbone Committee that informs community development initiatives through ongoing public engagement.





## A HUMAN SCALE COMMUNITY

The site will feature a mix of unit sizes and tenures with high-rise towers, mid-rise apartment buildings with courtyards, and three-storey plexes, in three distinct density zones, laid out taking into account specific design, circulation, green space, and social infrastructure considerations. A total number of 6,721 units will be included, ranging in size from one to four bedrooms.

## A HOLISTIC MOBILITY PLAN

The plan provides a wide range of transport options for residents and visitors, addressing the site's current isolation. We aim to create a high-quality travel environment that favours a variety of transport options, ensures a more equitable access to mobility, and reduces car dependency, all the while acknowledging the important presence of the car in neighbouring areas. These imperatives structure the design of the proposed connections and internal street network. Key proposals include:

- Creating an active mobility corridor along rue des Jockeys to connect to Namur metro station.
- Redirecting traffic towards the northern border of the site, making the site a more car-free environment for all users.
- Creating an internal street layout that includes one complete street running through the site, serving as the main internal access point for car-related services, as well as a complementary network of many smaller streets acting as shared spaces for cyclists and pedestrians.



## VIBRANT PUBLIC SPACES AND PARKS

**Interior Spaces:** This plan includes major physical space interventions and a variety of programmatic elements which will evolve with community demand. These include a community centre, schools, and a large flex space. Commercial and social economy spaces will be located throughout the site, to be leased or programmed by the Community Land Trust according to community needs.

**Exterior Spaces:** In addition to interior spaces, the plan proposes several typologies of exterior public spaces to promote rich community programming and healthy, sustainable lifestyles, including a large park, a public plaza, smaller decentralized park spaces, a biodiversity belt, and four green corridors. These are designed to provide the site with both an abundance and variety of public and green spaces.

## **BUILDING HABITAT HIPPODROME**

We estimate that the development cost to build the proposed housing units on the site would be \$4.6 billion, not including the community and ecological amenities which are key to this plan. We also assume a donation of land from the City of Montreal and that the Community Land Trust would be exempt from property tax payments. Our strategy for financing includes generating equity from the sale of residential and commercial spaces on the site, revenue from affordable rents, and fundraising from community organizations and different levels of government.

To begin development, the Community Land Trust would be established in its initial phase, with a board of directors composed of city officials and community representatives from the Corporation de développement communautaire de Côte-des-Neiges. It would be tasked with assembling a development consortium composed of experts with credibility and experience in developing large sites.

In subsequent phases, as construction is underway and housing associations begin operating on the site, the Community Land Trust board would gradually include representation from residents of the Habitat Hippodrome community. The phasing plan that we propose would take 20 years from pre-construction to completion. Social amenities like parks or community spaces would be prioritized from the start of development.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Habitat Hippodrome is a vision for redeveloping the Hippodrome site from bottom-up. For it to become a reality, it would require leadership from the local community, which we hope will be inspired by this vision. A vision where permanent affordable housing is at the heart of a sustainable and adaptive community. In the next round of public consultations, we encourage citizens to push for innovative ideas that ensure the Hippodrome serves local needs such as those included in this plan. We also encourage civil servants and other stakeholders to empower citizens to do so. A project like this also requires significant commitments from the different levels of government, especially in the form of financing and modification of affordable housing programs.

