

# The Changing Face of Milton-Park



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**L**ike other Montreal neighborhoods, the area between Pine Avenue and University, Saint-Denis and Sherbrooke Streets, traditionally known as Saint-Louis sud, has seen many different economic and cultural changes during its history.

By the late 1800s, much of this area had been developed into a residential suburb. While McGill University and Square Saint-Louis were magnets for middle-class families, modest housing also existed along the immigrant corridor of Saint-Laurent Boulevard.

After World War II, Montreal spread far beyond the mountain. In the 1950s, the population in the central neighborhoods decreased and many single family homes were converted into rooming houses or separate flats. The streets to the east of McGill University became known as the student ghetto because of the many residents attending the university.

During this time, the municipal administration also encouraged the construction of high-rise apartments in the Milton Park district. As a result, at least one high-rise now stands on almost every block. The La Cité complex is the best known of these intrusions, an example of urban renewal at its worst. Originally, a dozen high-rise towers were to be built and thousands of dwellings — important elements of Montreal's architectural heritage — were to be eliminated. In the 1970s, area residents began to fight against the construction. While they could not stop the building of the La Cité, their efforts eventually helped preserve much of the Milton Park neighborhood.

By the late 1970s, the city recognized the attractiveness of Milton Park's 19<sup>th</sup> century and turn-of-the-century buildings. In 1976, the city passed new zoning by-laws, reducing maximum building heights to four stories.

At that time, several neighborhood groups formed to fight certain development projects. These groups not only fought the city and the developers but also helped create the largest non-profit housing co-operative project in North America, acted as

urban "watchdogs" and developed many new community facilities.

In the early 1980s, the most noticeable project in the Milton Park district was the co-operatives. Residents helped renovate over 500 units — ranging from two-storey houses to single rooms — without displacing anyone.

The Milton Park co-operatives had as a goal to remove the properties from the speculative real estate market, meaning rents would remain affordable. Unfortunately, after the renovations were finished, the city increased the co-operatives' property taxes claiming they were no different from the for-profit condominiums of nearby streets. Again, residents rallied together to convince authorities to maintain affordable housing. Their work was successful.

The history of Milton Park shows that when residents get together they can influence the development of their neighborhood. The work of neighborhood groups has made Milton Park a fine place to live. However, the fight is not finished for problems like the lack of recreational facilities and the increase in traffic remain. Work by citizens must continue in order to maintain the quality of life in this unique area.