

THE CULT OF THE VIEW:

Comparing and Evaluating the Effectiveness of View Corridor Protection in Montréal and Vancouver

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This report compares and evaluates the effectiveness of view corridor protection in two Canadian cities. The view corridors in Montréal, Québec toward Mont-Royal and in Vancouver, British Columbia toward the North Shore Mountains were chosen for their Canadian context and because they are the only cities in Canada that protect views of mountains. This report examines the extent to which these significant landmarks have been protected and the effectiveness of the current policies and guidelines in implementing and maintaining view corridors. Specifically, it answers the following research question: Is view corridor protection more effective in Montréal or Vancouver, and why?

CONTEXT

Montréal is located in southeastern Québec and was named after Mont-Royal, one of the Monteregian Hills between the Laurentians and the Appalachians. Mont-Royal's summit overlooks Montréal at 232.5 metres above sea level, or 175.5 metres above the St. Lawrence River. The Mountain is important for its recreational component as the largest park in Montréal and for its significance to Montréal's image and identity.

Vancouver is situated on a peninsula in the southwest corner of British Columbia. Growth is constrained by surrounding water bodies including the Strait of Georgia, the Fraser River and the Burrard Inlet. The city is also bordered by the North Shore Mountains, which are part of the Coastal Mountain Range. The heights of the mountains vary from 1,015 metres to 1,788 metres above sea level and provide a unique backdrop to the downtown skyline and shoreline, which is considered Vancouver's signature view.

Montréal's view corridor protection policies were first adopted in the 1990 *Master Development Plan for the Ville-Marie District*, which included 12 views toward Mont-Royal from locations within the District. Today, there are 110 protected views: 23 from the Mountain to the St. Lawrence River and 87 from the city to the Mountain. The views were most recently amended in the 2004 *Montréal Master Plan*



Montréal and Mont-Royal from St. Helen's Island, 1831

and reaffirmed in the 2009 *Mount Royal Protection and Enhancement Plan*. Of the 87 protected views toward the mountain, 30 were examined for this report.

City Council adopted Vancouver's *View Protection Guidelines* in 1989 to preserve selected threatened views around the city. The Guidelines were most recently amended in 2011 and currently include 36 protected view cones and view cone sub-sections. Of these view cones, 24 fulfill the selection criteria and were observed for this report.



Vancouver's unique skyline as seen by Bartholomew in 1928

RESEARCH METHODS AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

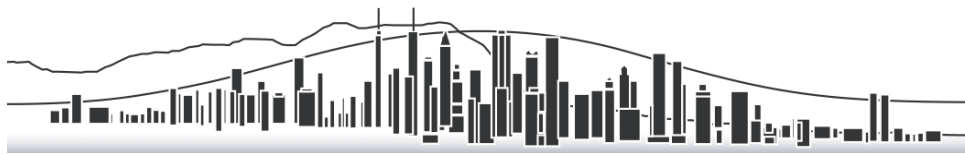
A comparative case study method was adopted for this report using Montréal and Vancouver as units of analysis. Data was collected using qualitative research methods including a preliminary literature review, a document review, direct observation, document photography, Google Street View where available and interviews with two industry professionals in each city. Direct observation was conducted for view corridors that transect the downtown core. The evaluation criteria for data analysis were determined from the initial literature review and were organized into four sections: policy and legislation, the shape of the skyline, the decision-making process and view protection.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Montréal

The analysis of policy and legislation demonstrates a strong commitment to view corridor protection in Montréal. Building heights are limited to the summit of Mont-Royal at 232.5 metres above sea level, not including building apparatuses. The increasing availability of technological tools to review and simulate building heights prior to their construction has helped ensure that buildings do not impede view corridors. The Comité d'architecture et d'urbanisme (Architectural and Planning Committee) functions as an urban design panel and assists to mitigate any attempts to build within a view corridor, as does the use of building setbacks which are implemented by each borough.

Clustering the tallest buildings within the Central Business District (CBD) creates a hill-and-bowl skyline shape. A "democratic" skyline is maintained by restricting the maximum height to the summit of Mont-Royal. This ensures that no individual building vies for attention on the skyline. The fractal dimensions (fd) of the buildings in Montréal do not match the shape of the Mountain. This creates an organic structure that is generally more liked by the public.



Montréal's preferred skyline

The decision-making process in Montréal follows the recommended process outlined by the National Capital Commission (NCC) and uses a mixture of experts and non-experts to determine which views to protect. However, information could not be found about how consensus was made among experts, or the extent to which non-expert opinions were considered in the final Plan.

Of the views examined, two were moderately well protected, with 28 assessed as well protected based on Montréal's view protection policies.

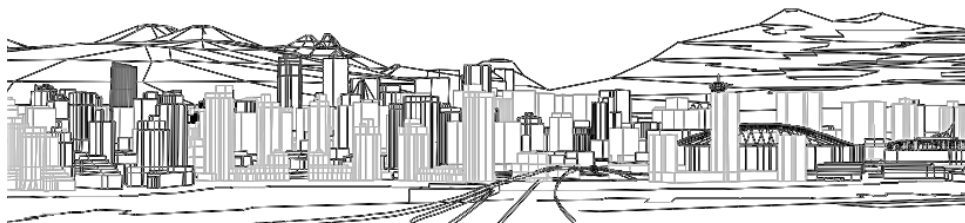
Recommendations for Montréal:

1. Implement the proposed amendments in the *Mount Royal Protection and Enhancement Plan* (2009)
2. Define all elements of each protected view
3. Ensure all views are publically accessible

Vancouver

Vancouver's *View Protection Guidelines* are comprehensive and easily understood. Angular control planes are used to limit building heights, however there are various instances of buildings that have entered a protected view cone or view cone sub-sections. Additionally, a policy allows buildings to surpass the permissible building height and enter a protected view if they are in the view shadow of a tall building. An urban design panel advises on building proposals and policies. However, the Panel has used their influence in some instances to allow buildings to exceed the prescribed height. Building setbacks also used, though not explicitly, to protect views of the North Shore Mountains.

A domed skyline approach has been adopted in Vancouver's CBD. A policy that allows taller buildings on predetermined sites makes the skyline "undemocratic", as some buildings will vie for individual attention. The fd of Vancouver's skyline does not match that of the North Shore Mountains, which is considered a good policy because it creates a more natural skyline.



Vancouver's preferred skyline

The process used to determine the protected view corridors in Vancouver used expert and non-expert opinions. The limited number of experts used, however, may not be a representative group. Similarly to Montréal, it is not clear how the information gathered from non-experts was used to inform the final decisions relating to the protection of view corridors.

Of the 24 view cones and view cone sub-sections examined in Vancouver, 11 were considered moderately well protected and 13 were considered well protected, as per the city's *View Protection Guidelines*.

Recommendations for Vancouver:

1. Amend the *View Protection Guidelines* to make them definite policies, eliminating the ability of other policies and advisory and decision-making bodies to reduce their effectiveness
2. Create long-term view protection policies
3. Protect views of Mount Baker from some prominent locations such as Queen Elizabeth Park

In addition to the recommendations for each city, two recommendations were made that apply to both Montréal and Vancouver.

Recommendations for Montréal and Vancouver:

1. Implement foreground control policies that maintain landscaping, preventing trees from blocking protected view corridors
2. Ascertain the public's input through community engagement to refine the cultural meaning and significance of view corridors, thereby educating the public about their presence and importance

The limitations associated with this report are largely due to a lack of resources, particularly associated with time and financial constraints. Future research should be more comprehensive in the number of view corridors examined and interviews conducted. It should also look internationally to other cities that protect views toward mountains.