



February 7, 2018

Ms. Valérie Plante  
Mayor of Montreal  
275 Notre-Dame St East  
Montreal, Québec  
H2Y 1C6

Dear Madam Mayor:

We are writing to you in response to the consultation process for the *Plan d'action municipale pour les personnes âgées 2018-2020*. While we are pleased to see the city developing an action plan for bettering the lives of Montreal seniors, we want to share concerns we have about the public consultation process, and are calling on the city of Montreal and its new administration to substantially improve the process in order to make a genuine effort to engage older adults in Montreal's *Municipalités amies des aînés (MADA)* strategy.

We are writing on behalf of our respective research organizations: engAGE, the Centre for Research on Aging, and the international project Ageing, Communication, Technologies (ACT), both of which are based at Concordia University. In our work, we examine questions related to later life and we do collaborative research with seniors in the Montreal community.

We strongly believe that genuine public engagement needs to be a precursor to public policy, and we are following the city's recently-announced public consultation process with great interest. We understand from the action plan's webpage (<https://www.realisonsmtl.ca/aines>) that the consultation process entails an online survey, four public consultations sessions slated for February, and a guide to organize community conversations. Upon reading details of the MADA consultation process, we believe it will exclude the voices of seniors, especially those of seniors who are already most marginalized.

First, the public discussions are slated to occur in February, one of the coldest and snowiest months of the year. This is a time when we know seniors are wary of venturing out of their homes, and seniors with mobility issues will not likely attend. The seniors with whom we work have already expressed concerns that the weather and road conditions would prevent them from participating. Likewise, the locations that have been chosen for the consultations are not easily accessible for seniors who rely on public transit. Three out of four locations are next to metro stations that do not have elevators. The one location that is near an accessible metro requires an 11-minute walk to reach it. Aren't the seniors with reduced mobility among those who are most acutely in need of an age friendly city?

Second, we are struck by the fact that the process seems to eliminate the opportunity for Montreal's significant population of English-speaking seniors to participate. A 2006 report by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages explains that English-speaking seniors in Montreal are at a higher

risk of isolation than those who are French-speaking. As you surely know, most immigrant seniors in Montreal have English, not French, as their first official language. Why are older anglophones and immigrants being systematically disregarded in this consultation process?

From what we found, the website outlining the consultation process is only in French, as are the survey and the guide for organizing community discussions. We must also call attention to the unfortunate fact that no consultations are happening in the west of the city, in heavily English-speaking boroughs, including in Montreal's most populous and diverse borough CDN-NDG. We hope that English-speaking Montrealers will be included in the four consultation sessions themselves, and that translation services will be provided.

Third, the survey designed to collect the opinions of Montrealers is only available online, and we haven't seen non-digital alternatives for filling out the survey. We know from our research that seniors are less connected to the internet than younger individuals. We also know that seniors who are already otherwise marginalized are even less digitally connected. In fact, low digital literacy correlates with low general literacy, low education levels and poverty. The city's *online poll* will reach the youngest, wealthiest and most educated seniors living in Montreal, and ignore the opinions and lived experiences of the oldest citizens as well as those who are already excluded or isolated in the city. For this consultation process to be inclusive and age friendly, steps need to be taken to include the opinions of seniors who are not online.

Fourth, and finally, the city encourages Montrealers to host their own community conversations, and provides a guide to facilitate these sessions. Small-scale community conversations are a nice idea, but how can they have an impact when the city is not listening? Nowhere does the city invite or provide a way for citizens to submit the ideas, reports or recommendations that will emerge from these conversations.

If Montreal wants to call itself an age friendly city, it should begin by adopting consultation processes that are attuned to the realities of the older adults who live here. We call for the city to extend its consultation period into the spring, and to take concrete, remedial steps to address the issues we have raised above. It is time for the new Mayor and administration to show Montrealers their commitment to a brand of public consultation that is thoughtful, genuine and inclusive.

Our research groups would be pleased to meet with Montreal's MADA team to further discuss these issues, and to work together towards building a better and inclusive process.



Dr. Kim Sawchuk  
Director, Ageing, Communication, Technologies (ACT)  
[www.actproject.ca](http://www.actproject.ca)  
Concordia University



Dr. Shannon Hebblethwaite  
Director, engAGE: Centre for Research on Aging  
[www.concordia.ca/engage](http://www.concordia.ca/engage)  
Concordia University