

BACKGROUNDER

Model City of Mount Royal National Historic Site of Canada

Located in the heart of Montréal Island, the Model City of Mount Royal is a suburb bordered by a railway, northwest of Mount Royal, and represents nearly the entire Town of Mount Royal. From a design perspective, its remarkable synthesis of urban renewal movements of the early 20th century, reflecting the influence of the City Beautiful, Garden City and Garden Suburb movements, the quality of its construction, and its high level of integrity, make it an outstanding example of a planned community in Canada. The breadth of its realization illustrates the role of the speculative and real estate activities of the railway companies. Its organization and construction over decades reflect changes occurring in urban planning in the early 20th century, as well as the impact of landscape architects on urban planning with their insistence on a long-term perspective.

It was in the 19th century that various reform movements, such as the city park movement, were established in response to industrialization. In Canada, these ideas were introduced by town planners or landscape architects from the United States. Frederick Gage Todd, a follower of American Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., designed the entire plan for the Model City of Mount Royal. Its logical organization, use of curved routes and straight lines, and the large boulevards lined with institutions and apartment buildings converging into a central public place reflect the principles of the City Beautiful movement. The influence of the Garden City movement is evident in the integration of the railway, in the separation of the city's functional areas and in the distinction between residential streets and main thoroughfares. At the same time, the Town of Mount Royal was created with a view to making it a competitive suburb on the outskirts of Montréal, hence the connection with garden suburb.

The creation of the Model City of Mount Royal in the early 20th century is associated with the construction of a railway. It was initiated by the Land Company, launched by Mackenzie and Mann of the Canadian Northern Railway, and was to link the railway to downtown Montréal through a tunnel built under the mountain. The promoters expected that transporting inhabitants to work in less than ten minutes on a daily basis would help sell this major project.

A large town between 1914 and the end of the 1930s, the Model City of Mount Royal swelled between the beginning of the Second World War and the end of the 1950s. Its network was completed in the mid-1970s as originally planned. Even though, throughout these years, completion and supervision of the project were left to the client, in other words the city, the design and long-term plan drafted by landscape architect Todd were followed closely. For him, the value of projects such as the Model City of Mount Royal would unfold with the passing years.