



**PRESS RELEASE
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**The OMBUDSMAN DE MONTRÉAL FILES ITS 2015 ANNUAL REPORT
A Record Number of Files Processed – 1,802**

Montreal, June 21, 2016 – *A Beacon in the City* is the theme of the **OMBUDSMAN DE MONTRÉAL**'s 13th Annual Report, which once again demonstrates the importance of the Ombudsman's role as well as the added value that its interventions provide to citizens and the municipal administration.

In 2015, the **OMBUDSMAN DE MONTRÉAL**'s office processed a record number of files— with a total of **1,802**, including **1,731** new requests (**322** more than last year). It conducted **231** thorough investigations (**26** more than last year), **160** of which were opened in 2015 and **71** were carried over from the previous year. There were **70** investigations related to the *Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities* (**46** new files and **24** previously existing files). As of December 31, 2015, **89** investigations were still pending, of which **62** were opened in 2015 and **27** were from previous years.

The Ombudsman issued **NO FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS** in 2015. All issues were settled amicably with the relevant borough or department.

Appreciated by the public

"Numerous complainants have taken the time to express how important our services are to them. Through our processes, we are able to identify problems in the way files are handled, improve the quality of municipal services, have errors rectified and seek the implementation of viable and efficient solutions that take into account the legitimate expectations and the respective constraints of citizens and the City," said Johanne Savard.

Here are some of the testimonials sent to the **OMBUDSMAN DE MONTRÉAL** office in 2015:

- *"After a long and strenuous battle, we finally received our construction and demolition permit. [...] Your involvement in our file was significant and greatly appreciated. Without you, we would not have been able to get through this ordeal. We would like to express our sincerest thanks to you for your hard work and support. You spent countless hours on our file and the moral support you provided was invaluable to us. [...] As witnesses to our story, you supported, helped and advised us during the whole process. The Ombudsman service is indispensable to the protection of citizens' rights, and we are proof of that."* (translation) – Ms. N. and Mr. G.

- *“The attention paid to my file by your office and entire team [...] is worthy of mention [...] Thanks to your support, I was able to navigate an administrative labyrinth, avoiding what would have otherwise been an expensive and sterile experience for both myself and City of Montreal [...] With this letter, I wish to thank you. The professionalism of your staff makes it possible for the Ombudsman’s office to respond efficiently and with discernment to the mission entrusted to you.”* (translation) – Mr. G.
- *“Thank you for the help you provided to me. I could not have done it without your support.”* – Ms. M.
- *“Thank you kindly for your help with this unusual ordeal. Your office showed great professionalism, which justifies the administrative costs associated with your services.”* (translation) – Mr. A.

Primary areas of concern

The most common areas of concern remained substantially the same in 2015 as in the previous year. They included: the functioning of the Municipal Court (123); parking infractions (57); insalubrious dwellings (57); quality of service (56); trees (55); permits (55); behaviour of employees or elected officials (50); roads/public works (50).

Targeted Boroughs and Departments

“A high number of complaints do not necessarily mean that a Borough or Department is problematic. Due to their specific clientele or inherent characteristics, some entities are naturally more likely to be the subject of complaints. Nevertheless, this information remains relevant”, stated Ms. Savard.

In 2015, the most frequently challenged Boroughs were mainly the same as in past years: Le Plateau-Mont-Royal (104 new complaints with 9 new investigations); Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (71 new complaints with 13 new investigations); Ville-Marie (66 new complaints with 7 new investigations); Rosemont–La Petite-Patrie (65 new complaints with 11 new investigations); Ahuntsic-Cartierville (57 new complaints with 9 new investigations); Mercier–Hochelaga-Maisonneuve (55 new complaints with 5 new investigations).

As for Central Departments, the Montreal Municipal Court had 165 new complaints with 6 new investigations; the Direction des opérations policières had 107 complaints with 5 new investigations; the Direction des affaires civiles had 94 complaints with 6 new investigations.

Processing times

In 2015, the average processing time for new complaints closed in 2015 was of **4.03** business days: **93.3%** of these citizens received a final response within one (1) month or less. The new 2015 investigations closed in the same year lasted on average **44.34** business days. The average processing time for all investigations closed in 2015, including those from previous years, was of **111.52** business days.

Fair processes, fair results

The **OMBUDSMAN DE MONTRÉAL** handles complaints from citizens who believe they were adversely affected by a decision, action or omission of Ville de Montréal or its related entities. The Ombudsman conducts neutral and impartial investigations; if a problem or injustice is detected, the Ombudsman intervenes with municipal authorities and seeks viable solutions. Most problems are settled amicably with the department or borough concerned.

Some 2015 examples

The Ombudsman obtained a reimbursement of approximately \$27,000 for a residential owner who had mistakenly been billed an annual local improvement tax since 2,000. When the City discovered the error in 2014, it quickly informed the citizen but only refunded the previous 3 years, invoking the *time limit* provision of the Quebec *Civil Code*. After extensive legal analysis, the Ombudsman submitted substantiated arguments showing that, in this file, the prescription period only started counting when the citizen was made aware of the error (in 2014).

The Ombudsman's conclusions are always well documented, and as such, they are generally accepted by the City. This was the case for a businessman whose defective water meter had registered excessive consumption since 2012. After replacing the meter in June 2013, the City had adjusted his water bill for the first months of 2013, but not for 2012. After highlighting certain facts concerning the case and invoking a specific by-law provision, the Ombudsman managed to have the 2012 invoice reviewed as well. Ultimately, a \$8,300 refund was issued to the complainant.

A pro-active Ombudsman - Own-motion inquiries

The **OMBUDSMAN DE MONTRÉAL** often intervenes in situations that are not the subject of a formal complaint, but are nonetheless likely to have an important impact. In 2015, **16** such new investigations were initiated by the Ombudsman on various issues, including:

- Long delays for the transmission of Fire reports required by insurers to compensate victims (citizens): **settled**
- Lack of information on the mandatory procedures and timeframes that citizens must respect to protect their legal right to file a lawsuit against the City, if they believe it has caused them damages: **settled**
- Building safety – Structure and solidity concerns. Inquiry on adequacy of the monitoring carried out by a Borough: **settled**
- Potentially dangerous pedestrian crossing: **under investigation**
- Insalubriousness of a large residential complex – Adequacy of City interventions: **under investigation**
- Universal access – Montreal City Hall and surroundings: **ongoing investigation**

About the OMBUDSMAN DE MONTRÉAL

Created in 2003, the office of the **OMBUDSMAN DE MONTRÉAL** office operates with a team of 9 people, including the Ombudsman. It intervenes, as a last resort, to ensure that citizens' municipal rights are respected and their files are handled with respect, justice and fairness by all municipal stakeholders. This service, which is completely **free of charge and easily accessible**, contributes to better municipal services, more transparency, and fair and equitable decision-making processes within the City of Montreal.

The Ombudsman also offers the only available recourse to ensure that the *Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities* is complied with by municipal managers and employees as well as by elected officials.

The 2015 Annual Report and those of previous years can be found on the **OMBUDSMAN DE MONTRÉAL** website: <http://ombudsmandemontreal.com>.

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Information: Caroline Bergevin
514-849-4554
caroline.bergevin@cominfrarouge.com