

NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION COMMISSION DE LA CAPITALE NATIONALE

# Exploring new uses for the monastery lands at 210 Laurier

PUBLIC CONSULTATION REPORT OCTOBER 11 TO 24, 2018

Canada

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# I. Project description

# A. Background

As part of its commitment to enhance public access to the Ottawa River shoreline, and in keeping with the <u>Ottawa River North Shore Parklands Plan</u>, the National Capital Commission (NCC) recently acquired a riverfront property located at 210 Laurier Street in Gatineau, Quebec: the monastery of the Congrégation des Servantes de Jésus-Marie.

The site has been home to the Congrégation des Servantes de Jésus-Marie, a contemplative and cloistered community of nuns, since 1902. Originally established in Masson in 1894, the congregation was relocated to Aylmer in 1898, and finally to Hull in 1902 as its size—and therefore its needs—grew. Over the past century, the Servantes de Jésus-Marie and the monastery itself have come to occupy a special place in the local community and in the history of the Outaouais region. It is the only congregation actually founded in the Outaouais. The monastery's chapel has welcomed the public since its construction in 1926, and Pope John Paul II gave mass there in 1984.

Today, the 82-room monastery has become too large for the congregation's 42 sisters, and they have decided to move to a new location that better suits their current needs.

# B. Objective

By spring 2019, the NCC will identify and rank a series of desired uses for the monastery at 210 Laurier Street.

# C. Plans for the property

The main building and the surrounding land will be repurposed and integrated into Jacques-Cartier Park, in keeping with the NCC's <u>Ottawa River North Shore Parklands Plan</u>, after March 2020, when the current lease ends.

Planned initiatives for the lands in proximity to the monastery include the following:

- Maintain extensive forest cover on the steep banks and along the top of the escarpment to contribute to the river's scenic landscape and prevent erosion.
- Expand the aquatic grass bed under the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge by linking the two existing aquatic grass beds in front of the monastery and in Jacques-Cartier Park North.
- Showcase the monastery's history, and preserve elements of the building and surrounding lands that contribute to its heritage value.
- Once the monastery's current activities conclude, use the building in a way that will enhance the recreational public space that is Jacques-Cartier Park.
- Redevelop the areas behind the building to integrate them into Jacques-Cartier Park, and allow the public to move freely around the monastery.
- Convert the back of the parking lot located south of the monastery into a park, integrate it with Jacques-Cartier Park South, and provide a riverfront link between Jacques-Cartier Park South and Sacré-Cœur Boulevard.

- On the land to the north of the monastery, allow for either fully or partially underground parking facilities to support the building's new functions.
- Consider using the street-front portion of the land north of the monastery to enlarge the building and thus provide additional space to accommodate the new use.

# II. Public consultation process

# A. Overview

Public consultations for this project included the following engagements:

- A meeting with the Congrégation des Servantes de Jésus-Marie during which the NCC consulted members of the congregation regarding their preferred future uses of the monastery.
- A meeting with friends of the monastery during which the NCC consulted monastery staff, volunteers, visitors and former staff members regarding their preferred future uses of the monastery.
- An online consultation that solicited input from members of the public on potential future uses for the monastery and a number of related matters, including protection of the building's heritage, temporary use as office space and the potential construction of an addition.

### a. Consultation objective

The objective of the consultations for this project was to ascertain the preferences of stakeholders and members of the public regarding potential future uses of the monastery.

# b. Date and time

Online consultation:

• Thursday, October 11 to Wednesday, October 24, 2018

Meeting with the Congrégation des Servantes de Jésus-Marie:

• Wednesday, November 14, 2018, 10 am to noon

Meeting with the friends of the monastery:

• Monday, November 19, 2018, 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

# B. Consultation procedure and tools

#### a. Online consultation

The online consultation for this project was conducted in two parts. Participants were first directed to a <u>web page</u> on the NCC's website that contextualized the project by providing information on the following:

- the rationale behind the NCC's acquisition of the property
- the purpose of the consultation

- the future plans for the property
- the history of the monastery

The website also featured a video guided tour of the interior of the monastery, drone footage of the building's exterior and immediate surroundings, and a 3-D model that outlined the proposals of the NCC's long-range plan for the property and its integration into Jacques-Cartier Park.

Participants were then redirected to an online survey. The survey was divided into two parts. In the first, respondents were given 10 votes to allot to a set of eight proposed uses (cultural centre, exhibition centre, artistic education centre, museum, hotel, tourism business, restaurant and office space). On subsequent pages, respondents were asked to provide feedback on a number of related matters. These included other uses not considered among the eight proposed on the previous page, the protection of the building's heritage, the temporary use of the building as office space, the building's potential enlargement and uses for the ground floor.

### b. Meeting with the congregation

NCC staff met with members of the Congrégation des Servantes de Jésus-Marie at the monastery on the morning of Wednesday, November 14. NCC staff outlined the project's business requirements and discussed how the monastery and surrounding lands fit within the Ottawa River North Shore Parklands Plan. Following these presentations, the NCC's public consultations team engaged members of the congregation in a round table discussion during which all were invited to share their ideas and aspirations for the monastery's future. One NCC staff member served as a moderator, and ensured that each member of the congregation was given an opportunity to speak. Two other NCC staff members served as note takers.

#### c. Meeting with the friends of the monastery

In addition to the consultation with the congregation itself—and upon the recommendation of its members—the NCC organized a separate consultation with monastery staff, volunteers, visitors and former staff members. Over 50 members of these groups attended the consultation, and contributed to the lively discussion about potential future uses. In keeping with the format of the previous consultation with members of the congregation, the workshop began with two presentations by NCC staff on the monastery's place in the Ottawa River North Shore Parklands Plan and on the project's business requirements. This was followed by a question-and-answer session and a group-based brainstorming activity. Participants were divided into groups of 10, and invited to share their ideas and preferences regarding potential future uses for the building. All tables were supplied with Post-it Notes on which participants could write their suggestions directly and place them onto a bird's-eye view of the building and surrounding grounds. At the end of the activity, each table nominated a spokesperson whose role was to share the group's three best ideas with the other participants. At the end of the evening, NCC staff collected the Post-it Notes for later analysis.

# C. Invitation and promotion

An email invitation for the online consultation was sent using Public Affairs distribution lists, which include the following stakeholders:

- interest groups, user groups and heritage groups
- residents' associations
- members of the general public registered to receive public engagement messages

Messages were also posted on the NCC's social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter), soliciting the participation of all interested members of the public. A paid digital advertising campaign was also launched on these same platforms throughout the duration of the survey.

For the meeting with the friends of the monastery, the sisters communicated directly with their list of stakeholders to share the invitation.

# D. Participants

#### a. Online consultation

- A total of 949 respondents
- b. Meeting with the congregation
  - A total of 15 participants
- c. Meeting with the friends of the monastery
  - Approximately 50 participants

# III. Public consultation highlights

A thorough analysis of the responses to the online consultation and the feedback provided by members of the congregation, as well as by the friends of the monastery, revealed the following trends:

- The ideas put forward by participants were both creative and diverse, yet they were nearly all informed by a shared set of values that prioritized public access, community, respect for the building's heritage, and social good.
- A large share of the participants were either open to, or active proponents of, having multiple uses for the building. Many viewed this as an opportunity to foster synergy between multiple complementary uses and thus enhance the utility and appeal of the facility as a whole.
- Protection and commemoration of the building's heritage was a major concern for many participants. This concern extended not merely to the monastery's built heritage (e.g. the chapel, front facade, architecture and so on), but also to intangibles such as its spirit and history.
- The building's potential enlargement and its potential temporary use as office space were greeted with skepticism and opposition by a number of participants. For many, the

acceptability of these options hinges on the details of how such plans would be executed.

- IV. Analysis of results
- A. Online consultation
- a. Future uses

#### Voting exercise

The results of the voting exercise revealed a clear preference for cultural, artistic and educational uses, which collectively attracted 65 percent of all available votes. Hospitality-oriented options, such as a restaurant, hotel or tourism business, attracted a further 20 percent of available votes, while office space garnered only 3 percent of all votes (*see Figure 1*).





Distribution of votes for proposed uses

*Note:* Each respondent was given 10 votes to allot to one or several of eight proposed uses. A total of 930 respondents participated in this exercise, for a total of 9,300 votes—1,094 of which remained unused.

#### Alternative uses

The alternative uses put forward by respondents followed a similar trend, with museums and various uses within the arts and culture industry among the most commonly suggested options. The most popular suggestions among the latter included art studios, various kinds of art classes, performance space, a cultural centre and art galleries.

Among those who were keen to see the monastery become a museum, there was significant interest in programming that would focus on the Outaouais region—for example, its history, culture or natural environment. A large subset specified that they would like to see such a museum emphasize the monastery's heritage and the history of its congregation.

Housing and hospitality were also among the top 10 most commonly proposed alternatives. While suggestions included for-profit enterprises such as hotels and condos, the largest share emphasized affordability and social welfare. Suggestions in this vein included mixedgenerational and low-income housing, hostels, retirement homes, and shelters for homeless persons and for victims of domestic abuse.

Community-oriented uses were also of frequent interest. Ideas of this kind included community centres, libraries, youth centres and seniors' centres, as well as recreational centres featuring various athletic facilities. Some suggested that the building should house an educational institution (public school, university or specialized education), while others envisioned it as a resource centre that would champion a variety of causes, including social justice, sustainability and the provision of aid to vulnerable groups in the community.

Of all of the proposals, those that were oriented toward wellness and health most often mentioned a desire to see direct continuity between the spirit of the existing monastery and that of the repurposed building. Many of these suggestions referenced the Monastère des Augustines in Québec City, a monastery that has been turned into a holistic wellness centre complete with hotel, heritage museum, restaurant, boutique and an array of programs geared toward personal wellness and health. These respondents expressed a desire to see the building become a peaceful retreat where guests could enjoy a spiritual and/or meditative experience. In a similar spirit, some expressed a desire to see the building become a health care centre, with particular interest for palliative and long-term care facilities, as well as for a hospital.

Tourism and retail options were mentioned by some, including an information centre and various types of stores. There was also some interest in having the building and the surrounding lands become the site of a botanical garden or a private event space.

Many of the suggestions above included mentions of food and drink vendors as desirable secondary or complementary uses, but some viewed this as the possible centrepiece of the repurposed building. Among these respondents, there was particular interest in a grocery store or a public market.

Finally, several respondents took this opportunity to stress the following:

- The overriding importance, in their view, of preserving the monastery's heritage, no matter what the outcome would be.
- The importance of enhancing public access to the building.

• Their desire to see the property maintain a religious orientation.

# b. Heritage

It is clear from the feedback in all parts of the survey that respondents value the intangible character of the monastery's heritage as much as its physical attributes. When asked which features of the building's heritage should be preserved, respondents were as likely to point to its history and spirit as they were to its architecture, rooms and general appearance.

Among many of the respondents who commented on this matter, there was a strong desire to see the monastery's story—and that of its congregation—shared with future visitors in a meaningful way. Suggestions in this vein ranged from turning the building as a whole into a heritage museum to reserving a room or space in the building for a small museum or exhibit on the monastery's history.

For others, protecting the monastery's heritage meant ensuring that its existing spirit and vocation would imbue whatever new use is devised for the building. In keeping with this objective, some of these respondents emphasized uses that would be geared toward community service, wellness and accessibility.

Respondents also expressed a desire to preserve several of the building's physical and aesthetic attributes. A number of these respondents would like to see the monastery as a whole spared from change, while others singled out its architecture, chapel, exterior, interior, front facade and general appearance for preservation. A smaller number of respondents also recommended that special attention be given to the building's surrounding green spaces, cultural artifacts, materials, bedrooms and kitchen.

#### Figure 2



Figure 2: Bilingual word cloud of responses to the question "What does the monastery mean to you?"

#### c. Temporary use as office space

Among those who commented on the possible temporary use of the monastery as office space, 61 (11 percent) indicated that they had no problem with this, 138 (24 percent) indicated that they were against it, 194 (34 percent) found this option to be acceptable with caveats and 175 (31 percent) commented without taking a clear stance.



# Sentiment toward potential temporary use as office space

The primary concern of those who commented was for the integrity of the building's heritage. Many worried that the type of renovations required to convert part of the building into office space would deface, damage or otherwise harm both the historical tenor of the building and its internal architecture.

There was a shared fear that conversion to office space would render it impossible, or at the very least extremely challenging, to restore the building to its original state or adapt it to longerterm and more desirable uses. Some viewed the proposal of office space as being outright disrespectful toward the monastery and its history as a place of worship and service to the community. For those who were not completely opposed to the proposal, the acceptability of converting part of the building into office space was contingent on the protection of both its built and its cultural heritage.

A similarly large share of those who provided comments were skeptical that the use of part of the building as office space would remain temporary. These respondents felt that, given the investment required to convert the building to office space, the reliability of cash flow from rent and the influence of tenants, there was a significant risk that future plans for the building would be postponed indefinitely. For those who were not categorically opposed to the proposal, any use of the building as office space would need to be short-lived, and should not slow down or create obstacles for the transition to more suitable, long-term uses.

A number of those providing comments considered the use of the monastery as office space to be incompatible with their aspirations for the building. Others noted that if the building was to be used as office space, preference should be given to non-profit organizations and, in general terms, to tenants who would work to further the public good. Respondents also worried that the use of the building as office space would restrict public access to it, which many opposed on principle.

# d. Possible enlargement

Among those who commented on the possible enlargement of the building, 38 (7 percent) indicated that they had no problem with this, 106 (18 percent) indicated that they were against it, 267 (46 percent) found this option to be acceptable with caveats, and 167 (29 percent) commented without taking a clear stance.



Sentiment toward a potential enlargement

The respondents who commented on this proposal were overwhelmingly concerned with the effect an addition might have on the building's external appearance. Many stressed the importance of keeping the original building intact, including its external architecture, front facade and overall historical character.

Others worried primarily about the design of the addition, in particular that the architectural styles of the addition and original building would clash and detract from each other. Among those who were not outright opposed to the proposal, a majority believed that any addition should adopt the same architectural style as the original building, while a minority maintained that it would be either acceptable or desirable for the two to have distinct visual identities. In nearly all cases, however, commenters deemed the proposal to be acceptable only insofar as the existing structure would not be overshadowed, but rather enhanced or complemented by an addition.

A number of others were primarily concerned with the effect that enlargement would have on the surrounding green space. Many of these respondents oppose any outcome that would reduce or otherwise detract from the natural areas and picturesque views around the monastery. Others emphasized the importance of utilizing sustainable practices in any work involved in enlarging the building.

Some respondents were opposed to enlargement on the grounds that the building is already sufficiently large to accommodate their preferred use of its space, while others gave their support to enlargement on the condition that the additional space was used to fulfill their aspirations for the building. Certain respondents stressed the importance of maintaining public access to the building both during and after construction work.

### e. Uses for the ground floor

The use most frequently suggested by respondents for the ground floor was as a space for learning and discovery—whether a small museum, cultural centre, exhibition, art gallery or information centre. Many of these proposals emphasized programming that would expose visitors to local and regional history (in particular that of the monastery itself), culture and art. Others saw an opportunity to include an event and performance space, or one in which to offer a variety of classes and workshops.

These suggestions and others were often paired with more functional proposals, including food and drink vendors, public washrooms, water fountains, a rest area, and a tourism information desk.

Some saw the ground floor as an opportunity to create a community space or library, while others suggested that it be used for commercial purposes—primarily boutiques or a public market. A small number of respondents also proposed that it be used to offer wellness services such as yoga and guided meditation.

consultation.	
Торіс	Sample comment
Future uses	A space that recognizes the history of the building and its location along the river. Make it a place that has multiple purposes so that people have a variety of reasons to visit. To eat, to socialize, to learn, to experience, to reflect, to relax.
	I would recommend it be an artist centre with studios for artists, artist in residence programs, lecture rooms, school of arts, pottery studios, etc.
	I would sincerely like to see the maintenance of a spiritual mission and that it become a personal resource centre with a section where people can gather. This building has a soul that needs to be preserved.
	A hotel is good, but a youth hostel would be even better. Clients are

The following table provides a few examples of the comments received as part of the online consultation.

A hotel is good, but a youth hostel would be even better. Clients are seeking experiences... a silent retreat in part of the monastery? Keep it as intact as possible. It's our history, our heritage.

I think this place is an ideal site to promote social cohesion among different

	groups in society: youth and seniors, Indigenous peoples and those from other nations, immigrants, etc. It should offer cultural activities, free language classes, community evenings, etc.
Heritage	The history of the Order in the region and the congregation's contribution to regional development. The architectural, historical and religious value of the building.
	Accurate historical preservation of the building architecture, and the buildings, in general — not "modernizing" it.
	Keep its history alive so that it can be passed on to our children and grandchildren.
	Preserve the look and architecture, and include a small area near the entrance that is a museum about the history of the building, so that it can be easily seen by all.
	It deserves to be kept intact. The nuns in this convent are part of the heritage and storyline of this region.
	Preserve the history, tradition and building used by the cloistered nuns. Share this history with our future generations.
Temporary use as office space	Offices need things like ceiling drop cables for electrical outlets and network connectivity. Just don't wreck the place in the short term.
	Renting means deterioration of the premises or renovations to accommodate tenants — which is not a desirable course of action.
	Major concerns that, once it is rented, it will no longer be possible or will be difficult to renovate the building for public use. Concerned about renovations that would be done to the space to accommodate offices, which may then not be suited to the next use of the building. Concerned that the NCC might cancel its plans to revitalize the space if faced with opposition from commercial tenants and regular revenues gained from renting the space.
	I would be concerned with spatial/structural modifications that would be permitted and could damage the building's architectural integrity.
Potential enlargement	Enlargements must respect the existing heritage architecture. The walk that leads to the river is a hidden treasure on a par with the Promenade des gouverneurs in Québec City.
	As long as the architectural design is respected, I am not concerned. If new sections were added, I would hope they would be complementary to the style of the building.
	My main concern would be a gutting of the building and thereby losing the historical significance and architectural integrity of the building. It is

	interesting to see how the nuns lived and to tear down walls to accommodate a few businesses is not a far-sighted action.
	I don't think this is desirable, because an enlargement always diminishes the architectural value of a heritage building. It would be better to choose a use that would involve the least intervention.
Uses for the ground floor	Exhibition space, some food and beverage options, and opportunity to learn about the building's past / the former occupants' role in the community.
	Public washrooms! A heritage/museum component. Public gallery? Space for quiet contemplation.
	Bistro or coffee shop to hang out with friends [and] take a break after a walk. Also a place with exhibitions and a section explaining the building. Maybe a room for the community.
	A family café where children can take over the space — a travelling library with art exhibit on the walls — a local business and not a large franchise — a user-run co-op — a gallery with access to a view of the river.
	It could be used as a market space for buying and selling local products and crafts (indoors in the winter and outdoors in the summer), a reception room for events, as the Canadian Museum of History does
	Performance venue, museum on the history of the monastery and the role of religious communities in our history, exhibition space, restaurant.

# B. Meeting with members of the congregation

The ideas put forward by the members of the congregation were diverse in scope, but kindred in spirit. Many, if not most, were informed by a desire to see some kind of continuity between the existing vocation and atmosphere of the monastery and its future uses. For the sisters who participated in the consultation, it is important that the monastery remain a peaceful, welcoming and compassionate space for all to enjoy.

The sisters were unanimous in their support of multi-use/multi-tenant options, pointing out that the building was so large it seemed unlikely that it could be feasibly occupied by a single tenant. The chapel in particular was mentioned several times as a place that would lend itself to a variety of uses, including a concert hall for classical and folk music, a youth meeting space, and a multi-purpose room. The north section of the building was similarly identified as having potential as a community space, a school of music or fine arts, or simply a space in which artists could meet and collaborate.

Some thought that the rear lookout and courtyard would be a great place for a restaurant and patio where patrons could enjoy the picturesque view of the river and surrounding parkland.

One member of the congregation suggested that there was also room for an outdoor pool in this area.

A number of the sisters were keen on uses that would cater to children and teens, including a daycare, youth hostel, youth-oriented activity space, and a school or camp at which youths could discover and learn about ancient forms of music. Others emphasized the importance of creating a peaceful and quiet atmosphere in which people could find shelter, pray or engage in quiet contemplation. There was also shared interest in having part of the building become a public library.

Other proposed uses included a knitting store, a museum, a café, a recreational or cultural centre, and a centre for urban agriculture.

# C. Meeting with the friends of the monastery

The proposed uses put forward by former and current monastery staff members, visitors and volunteers echoed several of the trends observable in the online survey results. The most frequently mentioned uses included a hostel, a museum, and a place of wellness and quiet contemplation. A number of participants also hoped that the repurposed monastery could host a variety of events, exhibits and activities related to the arts and culture, including a performance space, an art gallery and painting workshops.

Other suggestions included the following:

- A care facility
- A library
- A conference centre
- A daycare
- Private event space
- A resource centre
- A restaurant
- A retirement home
- A boutique for religious items

Many of the participants expressed a strong desire to see the chapel preserved and for it to remain a centrepiece of the repurposed building. Some emphasized the importance of paying homage to the monastery's history and ensuring that its spirit is passed on. Others expressed their opposition to the potential use of the building as office space or a fast-food restaurant, as well as to the construction of above ground parking.

Торіс	Sample comment
Future uses	Museum about the religious history of the region.
	An inn or hostel for youth and low-income families.
	Use the chapel as an exhibition space.
	Ose the chapel as an exhibition space.

	Restaurant with an outdoor patio.
	A library space for resources and quiet contemplation.
	Music concerts and other exhibition events.
General suggestions	The chapel should remain a place where people can gather, and should be left intact.
	Protect the spirit of the space, and ensure its profitability.
	No to an office space.
	Keep it accessible to the public.
	Highlight the history of the congregation and the nuns in the Outaouais region.
	A social and cultural vocation. Something the nuns would appreciate.

# V. Integration of results

The consultation results and insight gained throughout the process will assist the NCC through a tenant solicitation and selection process.

# VI. Next steps

Upon completion of the options analysis based on the outcome of the various consultations and studies, the NCC will proceed to its design of the marketing package to seek tenancies. We expect the solicitation packages to be launched in spring 2019.

# VII. Appendix 1: Online survey



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