6.0. Practice of Community Architecture - A Case Study

In this chapter is presented a study of the practice of Community Architecture, which forms the second part of my research report. The study of a 46-unit non-profit housing co-operative in the Benny Farm Redevelopment Project called the Zone of Opportunity Housing Cooperative (Cooperative d’habitation Zone d’Opportunité) or Z.O.O. Co-op has been used as an example to answer my first research question:

How was the theory of Community Architecture translated into practice in the case of Z.O.O. Co-op?

To answer the stated research question, the process through which the Z.O.O. Project was realized is retraced in this chapter along with an analysis of the roles of different actors and their inter-relationships during different stages of the chosen project.

6.1. Initiation

The story of Z.O.O. Co-op starts with a few young mothers meeting once or twice a week at the Head and Hands support group. Head and Hands (H & H) opened
its doors in October 1971 with a mission “to work with youth to promote their physical and mental well being . . . [to] facilitate social change and the empowerment of youth based on their current needs within . . . [the] community and society at large” (Head and Hands). Located in the Notre Dame de Grace (NDG) district of Montreal, Head and Hands provides supports and services to the youth in the following six areas: (a) Information and Referral, (b) Social Services, (c) Medical Services, (d) Legal Services, (e) Young Parents Program and (f) Jeunesse 2000 Youth Centre (Head and Hands).

The launching pad for Z.O.O. Co-op was the Young Parents Program (YPP), which provides a break to young or expecting parents (under 24 years of age) from their hectic parental duties. Childcare is provided to children aged from 6 months to 5 years, while their parents enjoy a few hours of relaxation either by socializing or participating in free activities and workshops offered by the YPP on Wednesdays and Fridays (Head and Hands). YPP acknowledges the psychological needs of young parents especially single mothers and not only provides a recreational break from their duties but also helps reduce isolation that parents might face in a childfree environment. It’s almost cathartic for these young mothers to meet other women in similar situations and to be able to relate and understand each other’s common problems. As Lina Gonthier, one of the founding members of Z.O.O. Co-op remembers YPP as, “the only place I could go to and like forget and just be with my friends and you know, get a break . . .” (Interview 4 Aug. 2005).
6.1.1. Problem Identification

It was here at the Young Parents Program during the meetings and activity sessions that the young mothers also started talking about their lives and the problems each faced on a regular basis. One thing that almost all found in common was the
inappropriate nature of their housing units, unfit for raising their children. Finding
decent housing is a real challenge as is, however, these young parents with limited
resources, have added difficulties due to their restricted finances. Gabriela Richman,
Co-ordinator of the YPP discusses that the major housing problem faced by young
parents is of discrimination on part of the landlords especially towards parents on
welfare or belonging to ethnic minority groups (Interview 4 July 2005). Similarly the
Vice President of Z.O.O. Co-op, Angela Campeau points out that the situation is
aggravated further for single mothers with more than one child. Even when they are
able to find an apartment, it is not the most suitable accommodation in terms of either
affordability or livability. According to Gabriela, “They spend sometimes 60-70% of
their income on rent just to live in a half decent place that’s not totally run down,
eglected, in a most terrible neighborhood . . .” (Interview 4 July 2005). Lahreal
Everett, President Z.O.O. Co-op adds, “They [families] have to weigh, ‘Do I pay
hydro or buy food this month’” (Segal). Founding member Lina Gonthier also
remembers her apartment prior to moving into Project Z.O.O.,

I was living in a three and a half with my two kids . . . It’s pretty small,
it was carpeted, had neighbors who didn’t like me very much because
my kids made were making too much noise . . . I was the only person
with kids in my building . . . my oldest was sleeping with me in my
bed and my other one in the crib in the same room. All their toys in the
same room, all our, everything was in that room. So it was pretty
tough, money wise too I mean, $500 for a three and a half. (Interview
4 Aug. 2005)
Lina’s comments highlight another serious issue of isolation felt by families with young children in a childfree environment. Noises made by children are often unwelcome in the quietness of such places, which can be the cause of stress in neighborly relations. All these issues add up to a situation, which is physically and mentally unhealthy for the young parents and their children. Gabriela sums up the adverse affects of inappropriate housing conditions on family life,

if you live in an apartment that’s too small, where your kids can’t run, where they can’t make noise, where you’re cramped, you know, an apt that takes all of your income, you are stressed and it affects your kids. It has one of the biggest impacts, you know, if you live in a lousy accommodation, it totally . . . affects all other aspects, you know, your relationship with your spouse, it just is much more stressful. (Interview 4 July 2005)

Angela Campeau also faced several livability issues in the apartments that she lived in before Z.O.O. Co-op. Some had mould problems while in others she would be forced to move out again because according to her, “I couldn’t deal with living with cockroaches and mushrooms growing in my bathroom . . . ” (Interview 12 July 2005).

Finding decent accommodation has always been a real challenge for families with limited resources and consequently a genuine concern in the healthy upbringing of their children. The major federal government cuts to social housing programs that Canada saw in the early 1990s, followed by the complete government withdrawal
from these programs in 1994, seriously affected low-income households in accessing affordable housing. Prior to these cutbacks, an average of 18,750 units (low-cost, co-ops and non-profits) were created annually from 1986 to 1989 by the federal government (FRAPRU, “For a Major”). However, since 1994 there has been a drastic drop in the annual average to 1300 units, after the federal withdrawal from new social housing programs. Because of these cutbacks, social housing units have dropped in number at an annual average of 17,450 units and according to an estimate, by the year 2000 a total of 104,700 housing units were denied to low-income and homeless people, 30,000 of which were in Quebec (FRAPRU, “For a Major”).

According to the 1996 census results, the number of tenant households spending more than 50% of their income increased by 42.8% in Canada and by 41% in Quebec from 1990 to 1995 (FRAPRU, “For a Major”). Within these tenant households, women tenants face aggravated problems as compared to their male counterparts. On an average, women generally earn less than men, as the median income in the year 2000 of household tenants with female providing the primary financial support was 21,785$, as compared to 30,864$ in the case of male tenants. Hence single women living independently or as single parents supporting dependents are at a greater disadvantage as shown in a study by Front d'Action Populaire en Réaménagement Urbain (FRAPRU)\(^\text{11}\) published in 2000 on the situation of women tenants in Quebec entitled Logement au Québec : femme et pauvreté (Housing in

\(^{11}\) Founded in 1978, FRAPRU is an umbrella organization under which 110 community organizations (FRAPRU) from most parts of Quebec operate to “[defend] the right to housing and, more specifically, . . . [to lobby] for social housing (low-cost, coop and not-for-profit)” (FRAPRU, “For a Major”).
Quebec: woman and poverty). This study showed that in the year 1996, 49% of the tenant households with women as their principal providers spent more than 30% of their income on house rents as compared to the much lower 36.1% tenant households with men providing the primary financial support. Similarly 25.3% women led households spent more than 50% of their income on house rents as compared to 19.6% men in the same situation. Another alarming figure is that 54% of families with women as single parents spend more than 30% of their income on rent while 29% spend more than half of their income (FRAPRU, Logement). These census figures and results point to the obvious housing crisis faced by the low-income households in general and low-income women headed families in particular. The housing problems faced by the young mothers at the YPP were rooted in reality, corresponding to the prevalent housing crisis in the province and the country.

Apart from the significant housing shortage, the young parents also face serious social problems. As mentioned above, Head and Hands’ Young Parents Program provides support to young families, mostly women who had children at an early age. In addition to this, most face financial difficulties or are on social welfare programs. Having to deal with childcare responsibilities at a young age can be a daunting task especially in the case of single parent families. In the absence of economical and accessible childcare facilities, most people with young children have limited job opportunities. The situation becomes grave in the case of young women as the childcare responsibilities mostly rest upon the mother. In the absence of affordable childcare system, young parents especially single mothers are at risk of losing out on better employment opportunities, working in poorly paid jobs or
becoming dependant on social welfare programs (CRRU). Amidst these troubling financial and housing situations, the psychological support is also lacking in the case of young parents, leading to a feeling of isolation and rejection by the society at large. The attendance and involvement of young parents at the YPP is also an evidence of the missing social support from their everyday lives. A place where the young parents could live together with other young families in similar situations was an attractive idea that motivated the founding members to carry on the Z.O.O. housing co-op project.

6.1.1.1. The Role of Young Parents Program in Problem Identification

The first step in solving or even addressing a problem is its ‘identification’. People could be facing the same problem individually with the feeling that they are alone in their misery. But how does this happen in today’s world where people lead isolated lives, to know that there are others in similar situations, facing similar problems. Changes happen when people come together and start a dialogue concerning their problems. This coming together is extremely important in the process of problem identification, which can happen as soon as two people start talking. In the case of this project, it was the coming together of young parents, mostly women, at the Head and Hands’ Young Parents Program, which provided a platform for women to voice their concerns about their obvious housing problems. H & H’s role in the entire project was that of a launching pad, without which the project would possibly not have taken off.
A problem when raised individually does not have an impact, however, it gets recognition when a group of people sharing the problem come together as one to remedy their situation. The problem becomes that of the entire group, which is more powerful than its members standing alone. The success rate of groups working for a common cause is higher than an individual because of the simple logistic factor of delegating various tasks among members of the group. The basic prerequisites for the group to exist are for everyone to share the problem and stay motivated without losing hope. The members stay motivated and dedicated for a longer time when together than if they were to work alone. Moreover, the desire to reap individual benefits at the end of the struggle is the source of motivation for most people with limited time and resources.

6.1.2. The Concept

Arriving at a ‘concept’ is the second step in the Initiation phase of any project. The first question concerning this project is probably, how did the idea of forming a housing co-operative first emerge? Gabriela Richman remembers the idea emerged from a ‘dream’ of Lahreal Everett (President Z.O.O. Co-op), which was to “live in a building with other parents like herself with young children . . . ” because of the problems commonly faced by the young parents (Interview 4 July 2005). Gabriela, however, could not take on the responsibility of developing a housing project, as envisioned by Lahreal in the fall of 2000, due to her extremely demanding position of running the Head and Hands Young Parents Program. Hence the ‘dream’ remained
just that for a while until a young graduate student from the Concordia University got involved with the Head and Hands’ Young Parents Program in January 2001. Marcie Gibson was studying Community Economic Development at the School of Community and Public Affairs at the time. One of the mandatory program requirements was for her to either initiate a project or to work with an ongoing project in the area of community development for a period of 6 months. Marcie got in touch with Gabriela for the possible integration of her project with the YPP and after receiving permission she started working formally with the parents’ group from January till July 2001. During these 6 months, Marcie was able to assist the YPP members translate their ‘dream’ into a real project.

It is important to mention here that because of all the regular meetings and activity sessions at the Young Parents Program, the young mothers already had an established bond and a sense of community when Marcie joined in. Stefanie Dunn, a graduate of the School of Urban Planning at the McGill University, had also previously developed a collective garden with this group while she was working with an organization called the Eco-Initiative (now Action Communiterre). Action Communiterre is a grassroots organization working in NDG since 1997, which works with “residents, community groups, and local institutions to build neighborhood solidarity and community food security” (Action Communiterre). It helps people establish productive garden projects around the world and is operating several gardens in Montreal. One of their collective gardens\(^\text{12}\) here in Montreal, called the

\(^{12}\) In a collective garden, participants work with a group leader and share their labor and harvest amongst themselves (Action Communiterre). The collective gardens
Friendship Garden\textsuperscript{13}, was created from scratch by the mothers from the YPP in the backyard of the Wesley United Church in NDG. Stefanie worked with the young mothers as the project animator by giving information sessions on growing techniques and cooking the harvested vegetables during the YPP weekly meetings.

Angela talks about this garden,

\begin{quote}
We had a community garden in at the Western United Church, we called it the Friendship Garden. It was sort of like a thing we developed from an idea. [The site was] was a compost [heap], a big pile of garbage, not even compost, it was just garbage and we dug, took out all of the garbage, threw everything out and did everything to make it into a beautiful garden. (Interview 12 July 2005)
\end{quote}

Stefanie Dunn feels that the friendship and sense of togetherness that these women developed while working at the collective garden is a big contributor to the group’s decision to form and follow through the idea of a housing co-op (Interview 11 May 2005). The Friendship Garden was a small project in scale that the young mothers tended to and cared for all by themselves and saw it through but big enough to inculcate a sense of achievement amongst these women.

differ from the community gardens where each participant is allotted a lot to grow on individually.

\textsuperscript{13} The Friendship Garden project was initiated in 1998 with the participation of members of the Young Parents Program, however, in 2002 after Head and Hands changed its location to Saint-Raymond Parish, the young mothers could not continue the upkeep of the garden due to the traveling distance. The site for the Friendship Garden is still being used for collective gardening and the YPP has a new garden of their own in the Saint-Raymond Parish where they are currently located (Eco-Initiatives).
When Marcie Gibson started her internship with the Young Parents Program in January 2001, her goal was to help identify any project that the young mothers wanted to pursue with her acting as their resource person and co-ordinator. Marcie conducted the first few meetings with the young mothers to introduce her project and the scope of Community Economic Development. By the end of January 2001 after the first two workshops, Marcie was able to identify housing as the area that all members had major concerns about. The group also showed interest in wanting to do a housing co-operative project. A housing co-operative (see box 8) is one of the most popular housing types amongst single women or women led households as according to a FRAPRU study entitled, Logement au Québec : femme et pauvreté (Housing in Quebec: Woman and Poverty), majority of the tenants living in housing co-operatives are women (FRAPRU, Logement). According to the 2001 Canadian

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**Box 8. Housing Co-operative**

Housing co-operative constitute a dwelling system which is unique in its operation as compared to a traditional housing scheme in the sense that the residents collectively own and govern their housing co-operatives (co-ops). Each member has one vote in the decision-making process and is required to perform his or her assigned duty within the co-operative while an elected Board of Directors represents the co-op as a whole. The biggest benefit of living in a co-op is in terms of its affordability and rental security as it eliminates the role of the landlord and the monthly rent is fixed according to the individual income (usually set at 30% of monthly income and the difference in rent is borne by the government in most cases). Similarly owning a unit in a housing co-op is not an investment and hence cannot be sold for profit either (Co-operative).

Introduced for the first time in 1820s in Scotland, the first housing co-operative formed in Canada was a student-housing co-op in Toronto in 1936. In 1968, Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, CHFC (then the Co-operative Housing Foundation of Canada) was formed to promote the development of housing co-ops. Canada saw a period of co-operative development from 1969 through mid-1990s when the federal cuts started to happen in funding new housing co-operative developments. However, a quarter of a million people in Canada are benefiting from this type of housing in about 2,100 non-profit housing co-operatives. Quebec is a forerunner in co-op housing amongst other provinces housing with more than half (1,093) of the total co-operatives in Canada (Co-operative).
Census, women provide primary financial support to 55.4% of the households living as tenants in housing co-operatives as compared to the 33.8% men in the same situation (FRAPRU, “Encore”). The women find in these co-operatives, a satisfying solution to affordable and decent housing and become fully engaged in the management of their co-operatives as another study\textsuperscript{14} conducted in 1999 by the Confédération québécoise des coopératives d'habitation (CQCH)\textsuperscript{15}, found women to be on the Board of the Directors of most housing co-operatives.

On a separate note, it was around this time in early 2001 that Jason Prince, representing Fonds Foncier Communautaire Benny Farm (FFCFB), also did an information session about the Benny Farm Redevelopment Project for the members of the YPP, hence the young mothers were formally introduced to the situation in Benny Farm.

Soon after it was determined that the group was interested in doing a housing project, Marcie Gibson began researching for the necessary information required to set up a housing co-operative. She prepared a list of organizations and housing co-operatives for the YPP members to visit in order to educate themselves with the issues related to housing co-operative organization. Marcie got the members involved in the process of making necessary appointments and visiting these organizations. The purpose of these visits was to get a sense of the working of


\textsuperscript{15} CQCH is a Confederation of Housing Co-operatives, which was created in 1987 to protect and promote the housing co-operative movement in Quebec. It also provides services to other regional housing co-operative federations, co-ops and their members and acts as a spokesperson to defend their interests and to develop new housing co-op projects (“La Confédération”).
existing housing co-operatives and to find how they had initiated their respective projects as well as to learn about the programs and services offered by various community based organizations that could be helpful to the YPP members. Marcie organized a workshop on how to conduct interviews and the participating members were asked to fill in a reflection questionnaire after conducting these interviews for the benefit of others (Interview 17 Aug. 2005). All the interviews were conducted by the end of February and by March 2001 they had already contacted a local technical resource group or Groupe de Ressources Techniques (GRT) called Groupe Conseil en Développement de l'Habitation or Groupe CDH (see box 9).

Angela Campeau remembers inviting Catherine O’ Neil from Groupe CDH to come speak with the Y.P.P group

### Box 9. GRT Groupe CDH

A GRT provides technical assistance to communities in developing projects, mostly associated with housing co-operatives and non-profit organizations. There are about 4 GRTs in Montreal, each working within a certain neighborhood in the city based on a mutual understanding amongst them. Groupe CDH is one of the two GRTs with a working history in the NDG area but it is Group CDH, which has been worked closely with the Benny Farm Project for about 10 to 15 years now. Groupe CDH resulted due to the 1990 merger of two older GRTs created in 1976, namely the Conseil du Developpement du Logement Communautaire (CDLC) and Groupe de Ressources Techniques en Habitation de Montreal Inc. (GRTHM). Groupe CDH is responsible for close to 4679 housing units in about 188 co-operatives and non-profit organizations in Montreal since 1976. It is committed to providing access to housing to communities with modest incomes including senior citizens, physically handicapped, immigrants and families. The GRT is run by the income generated in fees by its clients, which covers about 96% of their expenses. Groupe CDH offers services in the areas of development of project proposal and research, incorporation, identification of sites and sources of funding and providing education to the community that is required for living in a housing co-operative. It also offers all architectural services including planning and estimate, tender invitation and supervision during construction, in short, covering all vital areas of assistance that may be required in the realization of any community-based project (Groupe CDH).
about forming a housing co-operative and to answer their questions concerning the role of a GRT, funding possibilities and the Benny Farm Project.

6.2. Planning

6.2.1. Site Selection

Several aspects had to be addressed simultaneously during the initial phase by the YPP members to launch the project. While the Y.P.P group along with Marcie Gibson were still trying to get familiarized with the concept of a housing co-op, the search for a suitable site to realize their project had already started. As mentioned before, the YPP group was aware of the Benny Farm Project and its community group Fonds Foncier Communautaire Benny Farm (FFCBF) had links with the Head and Hands program. This is about the same time when the struggle of FFCBF for saving the Benny Farm was at its peak, which resulted in the hand-over of the site to the FFCBF for 6 months starting from April 2001 as mentioned in the previous chapter. The search of the YPP members and the struggle of the FFCBF crossed paths and each group became aware of the activities of the other.
Architect Mark Poddubiuk from architectural consultants L’OEUF had been involved with the FFCBF for a long time and he remembers the time when they were preparing a redevelopment plan for the Benny Farm Project, they “also started soliciting different groups in the community to see if they were interested in participating in the project” (Interview 14 Sept. 2005). It was at this time that the YPP through Head and Hands approached FFCBF with their project details. Both Gabriela and Marcie got in touch with people from the FFCBF and one of the things that architect Mark Poddubiuk suggested to Marcie was to get the group to discuss and prepare a list that would best describe their dreams and visions about the new housing project. Marcie conducted two sessions in March and April 2001 where the YPP members discussed issues related to the spaces that they lived in and what they liked or disliked about them, followed by their ideas of how they visualized ideal indoor, outdoor and communal living spaces. Several of these ideas, as given in Appendix 1, were later incorporated by the architect in the design of the project and Gabriela thinks that this was very encouraging for the women whose ideas were so well received by the architect (Interview 4 July 2005).

During early May 2001, Lucia Kowaluk\textsuperscript{16} representing the FFCBF also went to meet the young mothers in order to encourage them to support their struggle to save the Benny Farm buildings. Lucia remembers the women talking about their

\textsuperscript{16} Lucia Kowaluk currently holds the position of the co-ordinator for a community organization called the Société de Développement Communautaire de Montréal (SODECM), which works towards improving the ecologic and sustainable development of Montreal neighborhoods (SODECM). She was one of the key players responsible for saving the Milton Park neighborhood from destruction (Helman) (discussed in detail in the previous chapter) and has since then been involved as a prominent community activist in several projects around Montreal, including the Benny Farm Redevelopment Project.
housing needs and their search for a suitable site for the co-op. Lucia talks about the YPP members,

They were a handful of women who were clear leaders and of course, Lahreal stood out right from the beginning as a leader and as a person who had some conviction. But there were also some very good followers there and people who . . . spoke up and who spoke about needing housing . . . I remember leaving the meeting feeling interested, I thought, you know, that’s . . . a good group of women, they need housing. . . . (Interview 18 Aug. 2005)

Architect Mark Poddubiuk also made a presentation to the YPP group about the Benny Farm Project and the buildings in it and the young mothers also accompanied him to the site to visit some of the buildings at the Benny Farm that he had arranged with another local community organization called the Elizabeth House. This was a *deciding moment* in the project’s development when the young mothers actually saw the buildings that they could live in. Gabriela Richman talks about the visit,

I remember, you know, the day when [for] the first time we visited the Benny Farm site because before that, you know, . . . when Marcie was coming and trying to sort of, you know, get them involved in the whole housing co-op thing, they . . . only half believed, you know, and were half . . . enthusiastic . . . they kept finding hair in the soup, you know, because nobody had ever seen it and then we went together and
we visited [it], it was like a total turn around . . . That’s when they started to fight for it . . . (Interview 4 July 2005)

Gabriela explains that the YPP group was under the impression prior to the site visit that the apartments at the Benny Farm Project were completely run down but their perspective changed completely when they saw them first hand. The open space surrounding the buildings also caught their attention, as they visualized their children playing in a safe open space and gardens for themselves to enjoy as well, something their existing accommodations lacked seriously. Once the young mothers saw in the Benny Farm Project, a promising housing possibility, the struggle for saving the existing buildings became their struggle to save their future houses. From this point onwards, the YPP members became active participants of lobbying, demonstrations and protests along with the FFCBF and its supporters, as also explained later in the text.

According to Marcie Gibson the Benny Farm Project helped overcome the major obstacle of identifying an actual site for the YPP group to realize their housing co-op dreams. Marcie believes that it also provided the young mothers with access to the resource people working on the Benny Farm project after she discontinued her work with the program and this collaboration in part resulted in the actualization of the housing co-op. By the time Marcie completed her 6-month internship period with the YPP at the end of June 2001, she was able to help develop for the group a unified housing aim and its interim Board of Directors. When it came to naming the co-op, Marcie conducted a workshop with the young mothers on how things get named and what name would best describe the intention of their co-op. The group decided upon
Zone of Opportunity or Z.O.O. for naming their housing co-op, based on its mandate to provide an opportunity for young parents to raise their children in a safe and healthy environment and Lahreal Everett was named the President and Angela Campeau the Vice President of the co-op.

This ended the formal involvement of Marcie Gibson in the development of Z.O.O. Co-op. However her contribution to the project lasted till September 2001 when she returned to the Head and Hands for two last workshops, one on group decision-making and the other one on functioning of the Board of Directors. When Marcie left, Z.O.O. Co-op members took on the project from that point onwards as a “self-sufficient running group” and she is amazed by the progress that they made in such a short period (Gibson, Interview 17 Aug. 2005). This was one of the initial intentions of the project undertaken by Marcie to help the group develop itself into an organized entity so that the project would keep on going even after when she wasn’t able to continue.

6.2.1.1. The Role of Head and Hands, Gabriela Richman and Marcie Gibson in the Planning Phase

Lahreal Everett, Z.O.O. Co-op president, came up with an idea of living together with other young parents as a solution to their poor housing conditions and the isolation that they felt in the places where they lived. This was a great idea but would certainly have had great difficulty in progressing to the planning stage if it
hadn’t been for the contribution of three important actors: Head and Hands, Gabriela Richman and Marcie Gibson.

Head and Hands provided the institutional and administrative support to the project. It was based on Head and Hands’ reputation that Marcie Gibson had approached the Young Parents program for the possible integration of her project. She became a useful resource for the young mothers in acquiring all the necessary information and providing them with training sessions about the concepts and issues pertinent to the development of their project. She worked as a project facilitator by getting in touch with various sources and contacts that would benefit the project. Marcie provided the initial support to help translate the idea into a real-life project. Another significant contribution that Marcie made to the project was in terms of the development of the young mothers’ group into a self-sustaining entity that took on the project after she discontinued working with them. That was one of Marcie’s project aims, which became a valuable asset to the Z.O.O. project in the long run. Even though Marcie was acting as the project facilitator, she made sure that the young mothers were involved every step of the way, from calling various organizations for interview appointments to

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**Box 10. Gabriela Richman**

Co-ordinator, YPP

A mother herself, Gabriela Richman went back to school after her children were a bit older to receive a Master of Social Work degree from the McGill University in 1993. She has always been interested in the problems of young families, especially their children and started working with the YPP to develop a drug prevention program with and for young parents for two years. She later became an integral part of the program and has been coordinating the YPP for 12 years now (Richman, Interview 4 July 2005).

Photo from personal images.
Marcie Gibson received a degree in Bachelor of Social Work from the McGill University in 2000 and pursued her education in Community Economic Development at the Graduate Diploma level at Concordia University, which she completed in 2001. It was during this time that she started working with the YPP members as part of her program requirements, acting as a coordinator for the Z.O.O. members during the early stages of the project. In 2002, she worked as the coordinator for QPIRG, which is a non-profit environmental and social justice organization at Concordia University. Marcie refers to herself as a “community organizer” and has worked on many projects as a facilitator and organizer in women, sexual assault, queer and environmental issues (E-mail, 30 Nov. 2005).

As discussed previously, people have different sources of motivation that keep them working together within a group. When it comes to identifying Marcie Gibson’s motivation towards this project, it was probably the fulfillment of her masters’ program requirement. Z.O.O. Project acted as a means of satisfying her academic pursuits and enriching her professional experience, and its success during the six-month period that Marcie was engaged in it meant success to her as an effective facilitator. The young women in return saw in Marcie someone who could act as a good resource for getting them started. It was a sort of an understanding where each was benefiting in one-way or the other.

However, there are always people who find great interest in helping others on a day-to-day basis. They can be called community activists or social workers but their motivation is

Box 11. Marcie Gibson, ex-coordinator Z.O.O. Co-op

Marcie Gibson received a degree in Bachelor of Social Work from the McGill University in 2000 and pursued her education in Community Economic Development at the Graduate Diploma level at Concordia University, which she completed in 2001. It was during this time that she started working with the YPP members as part of her program requirements, acting as a coordinator for the Z.O.O. members during the early stages of the project. In 2002, she worked as the coordinator for QPIRG, which is a non-profit environmental and social justice organization at Concordia University. Marcie refers to herself as a “community organizer” and has worked on many projects as a facilitator and organizer in women, sexual assault, queer and environmental issues (E-mail, 30 Nov. 2005).

Photo from personal images.
the desire to change the flaws in society that exists around them, which becomes their lifelong commitment. Community-based projects benefit greatly from such individuals and there are many in the case of Z.O.O. Project as well: Gabriela Richman, Coordinator Young Parents Program, is one such individual who acted as a patron to the entire project. Her contacts with the Fonds Foncier Communautaire Benny Farm helped Z.O.O. Project in identifying a site and also benefit from its team and resources. Gabriela’s decision to allow Marcie’s internship to be linked with the program and to dedicate time and resources to the development of the project cannot be overlooked. She would invite guest speakers and arrange for regular updates to keep the project alive and moving. She provided all her support and patronage to the project without being controlling and always consciously maintained her distance from the project so as to let the young mothers handle the project themselves (Richman, Interview 4 July 2005).

In addition to providing a platform to initiate and develop Z.O.O. Project, another contribution that the Head and Hands made to the project was the development of the members of the Young Parents Program into an established community. Through the informal meetings and activity sessions, the young parents had already established a strong bond of friendship and sense of community that is a primary pre-requisite in developing community-based projects. In the case of Z.O.O. Project, the bond had already existed because of the members’ association with the YPP and its many activities, such as developing the Friendship Garden as mentioned above.
Once Project got Z.O.O. off the ground, Head & Hand’s role evolved from that of a launching pad as discussed earlier into a permanent base for Z.O.O. Project from where the young mothers operated. H & H’s contribution to the project extended to providing information over the phone to interested individuals, accepting paper applications from new member candidates, making free copies, providing space and childcare facilities to the Board members for and during their meetings. Hence, there was the Young Parents Program support of different kinds that Z.O.O. Project enjoyed at various stages of the project (Richman, Interview 4 July 2005).

6.2.1.2. The Role of Fonds Foncier Communautaire

Benny Farm in the Planning Phase

The awareness of activities of Z.O.O. Project on the part of the Fonds Foncier Communautaire Benny Farm and vice versa, was an important event in the progress of both the project and the struggle of FFCBF. This is a good example of how two different groups with varied aims joined forces to achieve mutual success. The FFCBF had been working for years to save the buildings from demolition in the Benny Farm Project. One of their arguments was that the existing housing crisis in Montreal for affordable housing did not permit the careless destruction of perfectly standing empty housing units. They needed to put a face on this housing deficiency encountered by the people in their proposal and this is where the members of Z.O.O. Project fit the picture. They presented an ideal case in point of young mothers with small children, living in deplorable and expensive housing and in desperate need of

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appropriate housing, which was sitting empty at the Benny Farm ready to be demolished.

Z.O.O. Project similarly benefited from its collaboration with the FFCBF on many fronts. Benny Farm Project provided Z.O.O. Project with an attractive site and once the young mothers saw the buildings that they could potentially inhabit, they became more convinced in their aim to form a housing cooperative. In addition to a site, Z.O.O. Project also received the technical support of FFCBF as both the technical resource group (Groupe C.D.H.) and architects (L’ŒUF) associated with the Benny Farm project became involved with Z.O.O. Project. In this way FFCBF and its supporters were able to guide the young mothers’ group in their fight for housing rights.

6.2.2. The Technical Support

In July 2001, Z.O.O. Co-op signed a contract with L’ŒUF as its representative architectural firm. The services offered by L’ŒUF included all preliminary studies and drafts comprising documentation of the existing building conditions, identification of the scale of work, preparation of proposal drafts, cost and time estimates, coordination of engineering services and attending meetings with the clients and its representatives (Poddubiyuk, Interview 14 Sept. 2005). The architects were also responsible for preparing all the preliminary working drawings with cost estimates for the approval by the City of Montreal. After approval, L’ŒUF was also in charge of preparing final drawings and construction estimates and assisting the
clients in preparing necessary documents for tender invitation from contractors. The architects were also responsible for recommending a contractor based on the analysis of the tenders received and establishing a schedule for the realization of the project. Lastly L’OEUF was accountable for the administration of the contract and monitoring of the construction work.

The official GRT of the Z.O.O. Project is Groupe Conseil en Développement de l'Habitation or Groupe CDH, which has provided close assistance throughout the development of the project. Catherine O’ Neill from Groupe CDH in particular, has been an important benefactor of the project and a close friend to the members ever since she got involved. Z.O.O. members signed a formal contract with Groupe CDH on 15th July 2001, however, it is important to mention that the GRT had started working on a preliminary project proposal from before this signing of the contract (Neill, E-mail 29 Nov. 2005).

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**Box 12. Catherine O’ Neill**

*Project Coordinator, Groupe CDH*

Catherine has a vast experience in community organization and has been associated with the NDG community for many years now. She has worked with the NDG Community Council as a community organizer where she was in charge of the housing section. She graduated in Urban Studies from the Concordia University and attended courses in Environmental Studies at the York University. She was also involved in research studies on the economic impact of various interventions in housing and is currently working with Groupe CDH as a project coordinator (Groupe CDH).

Photo from Groupe CDH.
6.2.2.1. The Role of Groupe CDH

While talking about the role of the GRT-Groupe CDH, Catherine describes that the community groups need technical support to follow their projects through but at the end of the day it is the community which signs contracts and makes all the decisions. The role of the GRT is limited to providing support and advice wherever needed and in the case of Z.O.O. Co-op Catherine humorously refers to her role in the project as “an annoying fly”. She asks questions wherever she deems necessary for the benefit of the community interests during meetings with other actors. She finds this very important especially in order to help overcome the feeling of intimidation on part of the community members initially unfamiliar with all the legalities and technicalities. She also makes sure that the community members are aware of all the things that need their immediate and careful attention. According to Catherine this is
one of the most significant support provided by the GRT in advising the community members, with limited resources and time constraints due to family obligations, to direct their energies in a most productive fashion (Neill, Interview 19 Aug. 2005).

Catherine points out another benefit of working with a GRT is that it provides continuity to the project especially useful in projects extended over a long period of time where there can be a change in the committee representation over time. Since Catherine has been there from nearly the beginning of the project, she can guide and update new members taking the vacant positions in committees of the past progress. The GRT is also responsible for the training and education of future residents unfamiliar with the concept of living in a co-operative. Groupe CDH in short has been involved in representing Z.O.O. Co-op at various levels, dealing with the funding and paperwork and providing advice and training to the members on matters regarding the management and operation of a housing co-operative.

6.2.3. The Benny Farm Factor

The dynamics of community-based projects are rarely consistent; there are times when things move quickly and then the next moment, everything instantly halts to a standstill. Marcie Gibson remembers that most members had limited time and resources, which created additional hindrance in the project’s development. Many of them were either working part-time or were jobless but still had serious childcare responsibilities, which prevented them from dedicating time and energy towards the project. One of the biggest challenges according to Marcie was to keep the people
motivated and interested in the project, which became harder with all the delays that Z.O.O. Co-op had to encounter. Initially things were moving at a reasonable pace and it had seemed that there was going to be housing within 9 months. However, with all the delays that the Benny Farm Redevelopment Project met with during the latter part of 2001, the development of Z.O.O. Project slowed down considerably as well.

Marcie believes that one of the biggest challenges at that time was to keep the people engaged in the project despite all the apparent hindrances,

Because for most of the people in the group who were looking at this, they were in housing crisis right now . . . and so they were looking for somewhere to move into. And so that was difficult, being able to be realistic about . . . how long this was actually . . . [going to] take but at the same time . . . motivating [them] . . . that it was a worthwhile project. (Interview 17 Aug. 2005)

Z.O.O. Project was well on its way during the summer of 2001 when it started working with the architectural consultants L’ŒUF, which was at the time also involved in preparing a redevelopment master plan for the Benny Farm project incorporating Z.O.O. Co-op in its proposal. L’ŒUF also prepared a proposal on behalf of Z.O.O. Co-op to the City of Montreal for possible subsidies and funding for the project. As discussed in the previous chapter as well, Benny Farm landowners Canada Lands Company had granted the site to the FFCBF for a 6-month period starting in April 2001 to develop an alternate proposal for redevelopment. At the end of this time period in October 2001, CLC decided to take back the Benny Farm site
from FFCBF and prepare its own redevelopment plan for it. This turn of events obviously became a major reason for the project to stall yet once again. However, CLC made it known this time that it wanted to develop a proposal, which was more sensitive to the community needs based on participation and consultation.

Both Angela Campeau and Lina Gonthier talk about this period of uncertainty and doubt about Z.O.O. Project because of all these delays. According to Lina that was probably the most difficult phase of the project, not knowing whether anything was going to happen. Angela remembers the doubts that crept in their minds about the Benny Farm site and many including her, thought that probably it would be better if they were to develop their project on another site. This situation was made much worse, as Angela points out, by the resistance on part of many Benny Farm Veterans who were opposed to the idea of young families on welfare moving into their neighborhood for the fear that it would turn into a ghetto. Angela argues that it was the exact opposite of what the Z.O.O. Co-op members had in mind, as they were already living in ghettos and were seeking to live and raise their children in a safe neighborhood.

It is ironic in some ways when this situation is compared to the mid-1940s when the local NDG residents showed similar opposition to the idea of constructing low-income apartments for the returning War Veterans in their neighborhood. They had similar fears for their neighborhood as well that the low-income housing would decrease their land values, eventually turning Benny Farm into a slum after years of neglect and poverty (Fish 70). However, these fears turned out to be baseless with the passage of time and the War Veterans with their families flourished together into a
vibrant community in the Benny Farm Project (Fish 71). Unfortunately, this fear of poverty as an illness capable of plaguing all the good that is around is common within our society and it also recurred in the minds of the Benny Farm Veterans, despite the fact that they themselves had faced similar opposition when they were accommodated on the same site.

6.2.4. The Big Event

It was in late 2001 when Canada Lands Company was developing its new proposal for the Benny Farm project that Z.O.O. Co-op members geared up their efforts for decent housing. Since the site of Z.O.O. Co-op was the Benny Farm Project, the cause of saving the existing buildings from destruction became as much that of the young mothers’ as it was of the Fonds Foncier Communautaire Benny Farm (FFCFB) and other support groups. They actively participated in protests and demonstrations and were engaged in lobbying against the government authorities, all in an effort to ensure that their voices were heard and their housing needs catered for in the new redevelopment plan. The Fonds Foncier Communautaire Benny Farm employed the needs of these young families to support their cause of saving the existing Benny Farm buildings, arguing the lack of decent affordable housing in the city.

One major event that is remembered as a turning point in bringing a lot of attention to the demands of Z.O.O. Co-op members and other community groups was a demonstration held during the Montreal Summit (Sommet de Montreal) organized
in the summer of 2002 by Mayor Gerald Tremblay (Kowaluk, Interview 18 Aug. 2005). The Mayor of Montreal invited the public municipal authorities and the citizens to jointly propose a vision and prepare a future plan of action to enrich the quality of the City life (“Sommet”). Prior to the Montreal Summit, held from 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> June 2002, there were a series of sub-summits held for its preparation, called the 2<sup>nd</sup> Citizens Summit on the Future of Montreal (22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2002). These sub-summits attended by “community organizations, citizen groups, experts, and specialists from the universities and research institutes, as well as political actors” focused on Citizen Participation in decision-making concerning issues of Sustainable Development of the City (“2nd Citizens”). These sub-summits were held in various geographical boroughs and under various themes dealing with a sustainability of city life such as Water and Waste Management, Sustainable Development, Transportation, Housing and Urban Agriculture, amongst others. One of the main focuses of the housing sub-summit was to get the City to build or renovate dwelling units that had been promised from before. The community groups took this opportunity to bring the attention of the public and the City once again to the empty units of the Benny Farm project and to exert pressure to resolve the issue once and for all (“2nd Citizens”).

Groupe C.D.H., L’OEUF and the Urban Ecology Centre 17 were involved in coordinating one of these sub-summits on housing. Lucia Kowaluk from the Urban Ecology Centre remembers the participation of Z.O.O. Project’s young mothers in a

17 Urban Ecology Centre operates under the non-profit community organization SODECM (explained in footnote 16) with an aim to “build and share expertise concerning the most viable approaches to sustainable development . . .” and to promote public awareness towards incorporating these approaches in their neighborhoods (SODECM).
demonstration event held in front of a sub-summit meeting in the borough of Cote Des Neiges-NDG,

. . . they had a bus that came from Head and Hands and they came there . . . around noon time for lunch break . . . it was really hot. And they were there with their strollers and their kids . . . and of course the media ate it up. And there were probably 10 women with their kids from the ZOO project and Lahreal was pregnant at the time, and so . . . that was a big media event and it really struck home to the city . . . it also galvanized them . . . they got so much media attention and everybody wanted to interview them with their kids and everything and these women, nothing had ever happened like this to them before. (Interview 18 Aug. 2005)

Angela also remembers the time when the Z.O.O. Co-op members went to the public consultations and demonstrations with their children carrying handmade signs made by their children of houses, shouting slogans like “Save Benny Farm” as shown in figs. 6.4 and 6.5 (Interview 12 July 2005).
Fig. 6.4. Children of founding members of Z.O.O. Project participating in demonstrations, photo from Angela Campeau.

Fig. 6.5. Posters made by the children of Z.O.O. Co-op’s founding members for demonstrations, photo from Angela Campeau.

Interestingly enough non-residents of Benny Farm such as Z.O.O. Co-op members and other community groups played a significant role in the effort to save
its existing buildings. Once FFCBF was disintegrated in 2003, these future resident community groups took on the responsibility of the preservation of Benny Farm’s heritage. However, association with the Benny Farm project for these community-based projects, Z.O.O. Co-op in our case, has been both a good and a bad thing. Benny Farm offers a pleasant and attractive neighborhood for housing with its openness and rich heritage. However, at the same time due to the highly political nature of the Benny Farm Redevelopment Project, it proved to be quite complicated and time consuming for the Z.O.O. Co-op members to realize it. The delays that the Benny Farm project incurred over the years had a direct affect on the progress of Z.O.O. Project and it probably took Z.O.O. Co-op longer than it should have, adding additional strain on the limited resources of its members. According to Catherine O’Neill’s personal experience of working with Groupe CDH, it normally takes people about 2 years from the start till the end in a similar community-based project (Interview 19 Aug. 2005). However, in the case of Z.O.O. Project it took the founding members more than double that time, about 5 years to realize their project.

The event discussed above was a key move made by the supporters of the Benny Farm Project including Z.O.O. Co-op members, hoping to save the existing buildings. Young or expecting mothers picketing in the summer heat with their children in strollers during the demonstration was given immediate media attention. This also helped in creating empathy among the onlookers and gave coverage to their housing needs. According to Lucia Kowaluk’s vast experience in community activism, there is nothing like a good demonstration in the organization process, which brings people with similar goals together and instills in them a sense of unity.
and solidarity (Interview 18 Aug. 2005). It was also good for getting attention and kept things going for Z.O.O. Project that had almost come to a standstill due to all the changes in decisions concerning the future of the Benny Farm project.

6.3. Z.O.O. Co-Operative – Structure, Design and Funding

6.3.1. Structure

In technical terms, Z.O.O. Project is a non-profit housing co-operative\(^{18}\) and together with the other non-profits of the Benny Farm project constitutes a part of the horizontal condominium. Catherine O’Neill defines the horizontal condominium as “an agreement between all property owners on Benny Farm for the management essentially of common . . . [assets] and the exterior spaces” (Interview 19 Aug. 2005). The housing co-operative model exists on the very fact that the residents are completely involved in and responsible for the development and management of the project (see box 7). Each resident or resident household is a member of the co-op and has one vote to participate in making various decisions about the co-op. The structure of a Non-Profit co-operative is such that there is a Board of Directors consisting of both founding and new members, which represents rest of the members. The co-op

\(^{18}\) In purely technical terms, Non-profit and Co-operative are somewhat different from each other, even though a Co-op is kind of a Non-Profit. In a Non-profit, the Board of Directors is the intermediary between the members and other support groups like the G.R.T., architects, etc, which makes it logistically more feasible than a Co-operative (Catherine O’Neill). Also as a non-profit organization, Z.O.O. can get additional benefits like raising funds for various activities, which also contributed towards the group’s decision to form a non-profit.
members elect the Board of Directors and make other important decisions concerning the co-op during the Annual General Assembly meetings, however, other meetings can be called during the year in the case of decisions required for urgent matters. There are also different committees performing various functions of the co-op, which are run by the members and headed by one Board member.

The Z.O.O. Co-op members have organized themselves in about eight committees to perform different functions as the co-op goes through various developmental stages. For the selection of new members of Z.O.O. Co-op, there is a ‘Selection Committee’. To supervise all the ongoing construction, there’s a ‘Sites Committee’ while the ‘Maintenance Committee’ deals with repairs and cleaning of the buildings and garbage collection. The ‘Finance Committee’ is responsible for rent collection and budget allocation to various committees and functions. There are also some committees formed to improve the communal life within the co-operative. The ‘Good Neighbor Committee’ deals with resolving the inter-members conflicts and differences while the ‘Activities Committee’ deals with organizing entertainment activities for the families, like a base ball game for the children or a picnic and so on. There is a ‘Fund Raising Committee’, which collects funds for any upcoming community activity or event. There is also a “Communications Committee” which deals with the press and answering external queries about the co-operative. The ‘Secretary’ of the Co-op deals with all the documents and minutes taking during all the meetings. Some committees are more active than the others depending upon the stage that the project is going through. For example, the ‘Selection Committee’ is not functioning fully at this moment as most of the community members have already
been chosen while the ‘Sites Committee’ was working at full force due to the ongoing construction of the units until very recently.

All the Committee Heads present the progress of their group to the rest of the Board members at the weekly or biweekly Board meetings. Every member has to contribute in the overall functioning of a co-operative and the duties are assigned according to individual preferences. At the time of the interview and selection stage, the members were asked to choose from the available committees based on their personal interests. The members are also given necessary training from the GRT for carrying out various specialized tasks of their committees.

6.3.2. Design

Z.O.O. Co-op is a 46-unit hybrid housing project comprising both the renovation of existing (30) and the construction of new (16) apartments. On an average the apartments range in size from 2 to 4 bedrooms per unit in the following proportion: 25% apartments have 2 bedrooms, 50% have 3 bedrooms and 25 % have 4 bedrooms. The design process, design details and the role of the architects are discussed in detail in the Chapter 7.

The architectural consultants for Z.O.O. Co-op as mentioned earlier is a Montreal firm founded in 1992 called L'Office de l'Eclectisme Urbain et Fonctionnel or L’OEUF. The partnership of architects Mark Poddubiuk and Daniel Pearl at L’OEUF specializes not only in architectural practice in the field of sustainable design and affordable housing but is also engaged in the areas of teaching, research
and experimental design (L’OEUF). This creative duo is best known for its innovative and sensitive design approaches towards the buildings. In the context of this research project, L’OEUF has had a long history with the Benny Farm Project as mentioned before. Mark Poddubiuk had been working with the Fonds Foncier Communautaire Benny Farm and L’OEUF was one of the four architectural firms to have been invited to develop a proposal for the Benny Farm Redevelopment Project in October 2002 (“Archives”). Their design was considered the most sensitive alternative to the existing Benny Farm buildings and proposed renovation of old buildings and addition of new ones without disturbing the original scheme.

6.3.3. Funding

Catherine O’Neill explains that the hybrid nature of this project consisting of both renovated and new construction units makes the funding all the more complicated (Interview 19 Aug. 2005). Different types of projects can only get Government subsidies and funding under different programs and hence, Z.O.O. Project has more than one source of funding. Primarily the project is funded by Government’s S.H.Q. (Société d'Habitation du Québec) program called the Logement Abordable Quebec or L.A.Q. (Accessible Housing Quebec). L.A.Q. is a program that provides funding to the low-income households for the realization of affordable housing (Logement).

Other subsidies and funding for the project have been provided to cover its energy efficiency aspect, discussed in detail in Chapter 7. Z.O.O. Project is benefiting
from programs like Fonds en efficacité énergétique, Gaz Métro, Commercial Building Incentive Program (CBIP) and the more recent Green Municipal Fund (GMF). Fonds en efficacité énergétique or the Energy Efficiency Fund was created in October 2000 by the Régie de l'énergie, to provide funding to the users of natural gas situated in the regions covered by Gaz Métro. This fund covers residential, institutional, commercial and small industry buildings and it has a special program for co-operatives and non-profit organizations, providing subsidies for both the renovation and new construction of social housing (Energy). Office of Energy Efficiency at Natural Resources Canada offers a program called the Commercial Building Incentive Program (CBIP) that “encourages the design and construction of new, energy-efficient commercial, institutional and multi-unit residential buildings and facilities”. CBIP provides support in the form of assistance in design or actual funding up to $60,000 to projects that meet their energy efficiency standards (Commercial).

Z.O.O. Project is also benefiting from the Green Municipal Fund (GMF), which is financing the “Greening of the Infrastructure Project at Benny Farm” or “Green Energy Benny Farm (GEBF)” of which Z.O.O. Project forms a part. Founded in the year 2000, the GMF worth $125-million, was created by the Government of Canada to encourage and invest in “innovative municipal infrastructure projects” in an effort to improve the overall environment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (FCM). In 2001, the fund was doubled to $250-million by the Canadian government.

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19 Gaz Métro is the primary distributor of natural gas in Quebec and one of the five largest natural gas distribution companies in Canada. It also provides energy efficient goods and services and offers special financial programs as incentives for residential and commercial users to make their buildings energy efficient (Gaz).
while another $300-million has been recently granted to the fund in the 2005 budget (FCM).

The funding programs including Fonds en efficacité énergétique, Gaz Metropolitan, Commercial Building Incentive Program and Green Municipal Fund, have in a way guided the project to incorporate energy efficiency principles in its program. The funding and subsidies provided by these programs have acted as incentives for the community to undertake their projects along the lines of sustainability and energy conservation. It is a good means used by these funding organizations to encourage and stimulate the projects towards a more environmentally sensitive approach.

### 6.4. Construction

On November 17th 2003, Z.O.O. Project received its “Engagement Conditionnel,” which is a conditional approval from the City in which all the preliminary work like, project proposal, clients, budget and costs are defined with the help of the GRT. After the conditional approval for the project, the search began for a contractor with the help of the architects and the GRT. The Government gave the project a certain budget that determined the Co-op’s selection of the contractor, which
was willing to do this project within the allocated budget. Edilbec Construction Inc. responded as the lowest bidder to the construction tender and after negotiations was selected as the official contractor in charge of all the renovation and construction involved in Z.O.O. Project. The project received the final approval from the City, called “Engagement Définitif” on May 3rd 2004, also prepared by the GRT, after which the next step was to start the construction as soon as possible to avoid financial loss. The building was purchased soon after the final approval of the project and the construction finally began end of May 2004 after such a long struggle; however, the worries of the Z.O.O. Co-op members were far from being over (Neill, Interview 19 Aug. 2005). It was anticipated at the beginning of construction that the first phase of occupancy would be as early as the fall of 2004, however, the contractor poorly failed in meeting this deadline. From there on, the relationship of the community, the architects and the GRT with the contractor became quite stressful due to the slow work progress and unsatisfactory quality of construction at times.

These delays have heavily affected the project in many ways, including the increase in construction and material costs over time, with a serious impact on the project’s limited budget. Another set of problems was created when the future Co-op residents, after canceling their previous apartment leases had no place to stay! The displaced families either found alternate accommodation or stayed with friends, which was all quite inconvenient. For some of the families, the co-op had to pay for storage for the duration of the waiting period. Even after the final move-in, there are still some discrepancies in terms of construction details, for example in the case of apartments for families having people with physical disabilities, the bedroom doors
weren’t made the right size for wheelchair accessibility, thus causing unwanted delays in the move-in of the concerned families (Campeau, Interview 7 Nov. 2005).

### 6.5. Move-In/Management

As a result of the failure of the contractor to follow the construction schedule, Z.O.O. members had to be moved-in in phases as the apartments became available: the first set of apartments were completed in December 2004, then later on in March 2005 and the third time in April 2005, followed by the final move-in recently in October 2005. Catherine O’Neill points out that the possession of 6 units at a time in phases is administratively quite difficult and adds to the legal complexity of the project,

people needed housing so we had to accept delivery in phases. Its … certainly not my favorite thing, it makes things much more complicated and it means that people have been living on a construction site since December which is unpleasant when you have . . . lots of kids in the co-op. (Interview 19 Aug. 2005)
The long construction process has not been easy on the members, at least not Angela Campeau who was the Head of the Sites Committee, and had to meet every week with the contractors, architects, engineers and City representatives for over 55 weeks.

6.6. Community Profile

The community at the Z.O.O. Housing Co-operative consists of both the founding members and the new selected members. The founding members involved throughout the development of Z.O.O. Co-op comprise 5 young mothers. When Z.O.O. Project was finally launched with a total of 46 dwelling units, the founding members had to embark upon the difficult task of choosing new members to be a part of their co-operative. It was a difficult task in the sense that the final community consisting of both the founding and new members has to work in unison in decision-making and management of their co-op over the future years to come.

At the time of selecting new members for Z.O.O. Co-op, the founding members had to devise selection criteria and an interview process consisting of a point system, all from scratch. Lina Gonthier was made the

Box 13. Lahreal Everett
President, Z.O.O. Co-op

A young businesswoman, Lahreal Everett was the creative mind behind the idea of Z.O.O., a housing co-op for young families. At age 27, Lahreal is a mother of three children and has taken courses in business and accounting and currently works as an accountant (Angela, Interview 7 Nov. 2005).

Photo from Angela Campeau.
Head of Selection Committee, however, the final decision was made with the consent of all the Board members. Angela Campeau remembers that they did not have to advertise their co-operative for the purpose of getting new members. Z.O.O. had been able to receive a lot of media attention due to its unique nature of being the only co-op for families in Montreal. Many families showed interest in being a part of Z.O.O. Co-op and were asked to fill in an application form along with a letter of intent describing why they wanted to live in this co-operative. According to Lina, there were basically two main criteria that guided the choice of new members. Previous community and volunteering experience was given value to suit the very nature of co-operative living. Since Z.O.O. Co-op is for families only, having kids was also a major requirement. Initially the founding members were looking for young parents with children but soon after they lifted the age limit because they were rejecting many older families with good background and experience (Interview 4 Aug. 2005).

Lina Gonthier being in charge of the selection process received all the application forms with the letters of intent. Those applications without the letters of intent were immediately disqualified on

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**Box 14. Angela Campeau**
Vice President, Z.O.O. Co-op

Angela Campeau, aged 27, is a mother of two boys, 8 and 5 years old respectively. An active member and the driving force behind Z.O.O. Project, she went back to school in Sept. 2004 to study Human Relations at Concordia University. She did an internship with McGill’s radio station CKUT, developing a 4-hour documentary series on youth protection systems called Voice, with the support of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. Angela describes this as a “life altering experience,” which motivated her to continue her education and she plans on working with similar programs dealing with youth problems in the future (Interview 12 July 2005).

Photo from Angela Campeau.
the basis that it showed an overall lack of interest. According to Angela, it was not the quality of paper that the applicants used for the letter or whether it had taken 5 minutes or it was handwritten that was considered but what was in the content that was taken into account. Parents, who were interested in raising their children in a safe and healthy environment and who were community oriented, motivated, responsible and hard working were the obvious choices (Interview 12 July 2005). Once Lina reviewed the application and the letters of intent, she then contacted the short listed members for a preliminary interview. She remembers doing over 150 interviews after which the best candidates were brought in front of the rest of the Board members for a final review. Being the Head of Selection wasn’t an easy job either, as Lina mentions,

I had a phone line on my personal home, where people could call me about Z.O.O. stuff, so it rang all day long, all night even and I had to answer questions, I had to show, probably bring people to see the apartments that they wanted to sign leases. . . . (Interview 4 Aug. 2005)

The final community of Z.O.O. Housing Co-op is home to about 150-200 people (Z.O.O.) and consists of a mix of families with both the parents (partners) and single mothers. About 35% of the families are lead by single mothers. The community is quite diverse with members belonging to various ethnic groups and most of them either going back to school or employed with a very small number on
social welfare. There are also some professionals such as doctor, chiropractor, lawyer, nurse e.t.c., living within the co-operative (Campeau, Interview 7 Nov. 2005).

6.7. Apartment Allocation

The size of the apartments in both the renovated and new construction buildings varies from 2 to 4 bedrooms, which have been allocated to the families based on their size. Hence a small 4½ apartment is given to a single mother with one child while a larger 5½ or 6½ apartment is allotted to a bigger family with 2-3 or 3-4 children respectively. Lina Gonthier explains that there is a formula for the allocation of units by law that also requires children of the same sex within less age difference to share a single room. In the case of Z.O.O. Co-op, they have tried their best to stretch the law because the children will be growing up in these houses and it's important to make the families as much comfortable as possible in their new homes.

6.8. Current Challenge

According to the mandate of Z.O.O. Housing Co-operative, its main goals are to “provide affordable housing for families with children in a safe and stable
environment. By building a community that is open, accepting and full of support, Z.O.O. will help to break the isolation that many families feel” (Z.O.O.). It is obvious from the above statement that Z.O.O. Co-op aims not only to provide decent housing but also to create strong communal ties among its residents. Realizing the physical part of the project, as much difficult as it was, is only a part of the entire mandate. The members now have clean, safe and affordable housing in the form of a co-operative but managing it efficiently from this point on is a demanding task in itself. Also breaking the isolation of young parents by creating a supportive community still remains a challenge. With the move-in of the families in the final phase in October 2005, Z.O.O. Project has fully entered its management phase. As most members have not lived in a housing co-op ever before, the functioning of a co-operative is still an alien concept to them. Social science tells us that only ‘physical proximity’ is insignificant to “eliminate inter-group conflict” (Brewer 109). The conflict among the members in the case of Z.O.O. Co-op is due to the tenant role that new members having taken as a result of their unfamiliarity with co-op living and in turn by treating the Board members as landlords towards whom all their problems and concerns are directed. This is the major challenge that the Z.O.O. community faces now with the end of the move-in phase, according to Angela Campeau,

Biggest challenge that we face now I would say . . . [is] getting everybody into the committees they need to be in and trying to explain to everybody who’s here . . . to realize that, you know, the Board is not responsible for everything. We’re their voice, you know, we sort of make the big decisions but we do it for their benefit . . .
there has been a little bit of difficulty at times with different members and . . . we’ve had info sessions to explain to these members exactly what this co-op entails, what our co-op is, why we’re different from other ones and what we what we hope to achieve in the end. (Interview 12 July 2005)

Lina Gonthier, another founding member in the Z.O.O. Co-op explains this situation,

its pretty difficult sometimes living there because its like a 24 hour job . . . people don’t realize that either, you know, we don’t get paid for this, you know and . . . we are stuck dealing with a lot of the issues so its pretty tough. (Interview 4 Aug. 2005)

As explained earlier, each member of the co-op has an equal standing and status in decision-making and the Board of Directors are mere representatives of the group as a whole. However, since the new members joined in the project at an advanced stage with most things already worked out, their involvement has been limited. The inter-group dynamics at it stands at the moment in the case of Z.O.O. Co-op needs major work due to the segregation within the community, which is not uncommon in similar situations “with pre-existing status differences based on group membership” (Brewer 117). In the case of Z.O.O. Co-op the involvement of the founding members and the new members has been unequal so far. The founding members have been there since the inception of the idea to making the idea into a
reality. They already share a bond amongst them based on their previous experiences as a group. Within the Board of Directors the new members and the founding members again share a bond of mutual co-operation and responsibility. This bond is missing in case of the remaining members merely because of the position that they have within the community.

This conflict and inequality in status is not intentional, however, it exists naturally due to the course that Project Z.O.O. has taken. The new members have taken a back seat while the Board of Directors may have take a position, which is higher than the rest of the members, all at a subconscious level. The Board feels that the balance and harmony within the community will be created with time once the residents settle in their new homes. Angela feels that there is a lack of communication among the members and the problems will be solved through delegating responsibilities and communicating. They have recently started publishing a newsletter for the Z.O.O. community to keep everyone informed about the latest developments and changes in the Board or Committees (Angela, Interview 7 Nov. 2005). Also as part of their mandate, Groupe C.D.H. is also responsible for providing training to the members for the operation and management of their co-op.

The move-in stage for all the members has been completed very recently and Catherine O’ Neill feels that it will take another 3-4 months before the co-op starts functioning normally as a whole entity (Interview 19 Aug. 2005). Z.O.O. Project is nearing the end of its contract with Groupe CDH and will be operating without all the external support for the first time. Like every stage during the process, this autonomy is a big challenge for the community but Angela feels confident that they will be able
to operate well on their own and develop into a vibrant community that they had initially aimed for (Angela, Interview 7 Nov. 2005).

The step-by-step development of the Z.O.O. Project has been presented in this chapter along with an analysis of the roles of different actors in the overall process. In the next chapter is discussed the architecture of the Z.O.O. Co-op focusing on the design process and the role of the architects in this project, followed by an overall analysis of the case-study project in the final Chapter 8 of this report.