

Activity Report

Information sessions

November 4, 5 and 6, 2025

Hydro-Québec

PROJECT TEAM:

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Background

As part of the project to build a transformer substation in downtown Montréal, Hydro-Québec committed to meeting with the community as early as the draft design stage and to conduct consultations. Hydro-Québec subsequently held three information meetings—on November 4, 5 and 6, 2025—with residents living close to the site of the Institut des Sœurs de Miséricorde, i.e., the location chosen for the new substation, which aims to support development in downtown Montréal.

The meeting objectives were as follows:

- Initiate a dialogue with people living near the site of the future substation.
- Provide an overview of the project and answer questions.
- Collect the initial comments and suggestions.
- Establish a preferred method of communication.

Steps

The 90-minute meetings began with a presentation by Pascal Monette, Manager – Projects, on the new substation in downtown Montréal. The objectives of the presentation were as follows:

1. Explain the energy context in the downtown area, including the growing demand for electricity, the need to upgrade the power transmission infrastructure as well as the current limits of Berri substation, which will reach full capacity in 2030 and has several components nearing the end of their service life.
2. Present the Institut des Sœurs de Miséricorde site, which was selected as the location of the future substation to replace the initially considered BAnQ site, as well as the new “pivot substation” approach adopted by Hydro-Québec.
3. Provide information regarding Hydro-Québec’s commitments: i) Ensure a safe, harmonious coexistence of the substation with the residents’ living environment and for neighbouring infrastructure. ii) Promote the integration of quality urban, architectural and heritage landscapes; and iii) Mitigate the temporary impacts associated with the construction period.
4. Provide information on the environmental studies to be carried out, the preliminary project delivery schedule, including the public consultation activities planned for fall 2025 and winter 2026.

Following the presentation, the participants were invited to ask their questions and share their concerns. Several members of the Hydro-Québec project team were present to answer questions directly and collect comments.

Participation

Although open to the general public, the information sessions were intended primarily for people living near the Institut des Sœurs de Miséricorde site. In total, 700 homes located in the area of the chosen site received an invitation to participate in one of the information sessions about the project to build a substation in downtown Montréal.

Approximately 80 people participated in the meetings and some even attended more than one meeting. In addition to the people living near the site, several people representing various groups and organizations also took part in the discussions, including:

- The Comité logement Ville-Marie
- The Coopérative Testan
- The Table de concertation Faubourg Saint-Laurent
- The Ville-Marie citizen association and the Village de Montréal citizen association
- The Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste
- Action Centre-Ville
- La Fabrique de la paroisse Notre-Dame de Montréal
- The Société de transport de Montréal (STM)
- Leonardo Munoz, Political Attaché for MNA Manon Massé

Session	Participants
Tuesday, November 4, from 6:30 to 8 p.m.	38
Wednesday, November 5, from 1:30 to 3 p.m.	22
Thursday, November 6, from 5 to 6:30 p.m.	22

Attendance at information sessions

Summary of discussions

This section presents a summary of the topics addressed in the discussion periods during the three information sessions. The topics are separated into themes to facilitate understanding.

- Issues regarding the substation project:
 - Site heritage and history
 - Urban integration of the substation
 - The master plan for the site and the connection between the two projects (the substation project and the heritage renovation project)
 - Impacts of the substation project on health and quality of life
 - Impacts of the work
- Issues regarding the public consultation process:
 - The nature and scope of the process
 - Communication methods

Issues regarding the substation project

Site heritage and history

Several participants welcomed Hydro-Québec’s commitment to renovating and enhancing part of the heritage buildings on the site. However, the renovation must not be limited to a superficial process involving the preservation of only the exterior, historic façade of the building, referred to as façadism, which would result in the loss of the main portion of the buildings. For several people, the ideal scenario would be to ultimately allow the public to once again access these spaces, given the importance of the site in the history of women in Québec.

In this regard, participants emphasized the importance of promoting the site’s history beyond the heritage dimension of the built environment, i.e., the site’s role over time. For instance, the participants underscored the importance of recognizing and promoting the social and institutional history associated with the site. In this regard, it was recommended that Hydro-Québec expand the list of experts consulted to include historians in addition to heritage specialists. While it is necessary to determine which old buildings can be conserved and renovated, it is crucial that we collectively consider how to go about ensuring that the site’s history is preserved and enhanced.

For certain people, the project presented by Hydro-Québec is an opportunity to restore a long-forgotten site, while also respecting its historic and heritage value.

“If the land could talk, it would describe both the wonderful things and the great suffering that occurred here.”

Urban integration of the substation

The integration of the future transformer substation in its urban environment constitutes a major concern for participants living near the chosen site. Several participants shared their fears regarding

the substation volume and how it might impact the urban landscape and the amount of sunlight. In this regard, requests were made to Hydro-Québec to consider the different realities of the various streets in the area in question when choosing locations for the buildings, allowing adequate clearances and adjusting the height of the buildings. Finally, a few residents of Rue de la Gauchetière expressed their concerns regarding the project's possible repercussions on property values.

Hydro-Québec indicated that the precise volume of the substation (footprint and height) had not yet been determined. Hydro-Québec nevertheless committed to ensuring that the new constructions will harmonize with the existing built environment, in particular by making sure they do not exceed the height of neighbouring buildings. The project team also stated that it was aware of each street's specific realities and confirmed that those features would be taken into account at the planning stage.

The commitment to hold an architecture competition was welcomed by the participants. Some people suggested that the competition include not only the substation building but also the entire area of the site, as part of the master plan. Other people said they thought the public should be involved in the process, either to help define the rules of the competition or to help select the winning team. Hydro-Québec took note of the comments while also reminding participants that it was too early to commit to the specific terms of the competition.

“The substation is being added to an exceptional site in a built environment. It will require skill on your part along with a touch of magic!”

The master plan for the site and the connection between the two projects (the substation project and the heritage renovation project)

Several of the participants' questions were about the master plan for the site and the connection between the substation project and the heritage renovation project. In particular, people wanted more details regarding the schedule of the heritage renovation project, its potential integration with the architecture competition, and the role Hydro-Québec intends to play in bringing it to fruition.

With regard to the first two points, Hydro-Québec specified that although both projects are included in the master plan, they are nevertheless separate. The heritage renovation project is yet to be defined based on the results of ongoing studies and the partners who will be involved. It is therefore too early to establish a schedule. Similarly, the details of the architecture competition have not yet been determined, even if it has been established that the design needs to take the overall context of the area into account.

Regarding the last point, people representing different groups and organizations reminded Hydro-Québec of the existence of projects in the area in question. They said they were worried about being excluded from the project and that they would like to obtain commitments from Hydro-Québec with regard to the residential component. Hydro-Québec said they understood the concerns while also stating that, at the draft design phase, it was too early to make commitments about usages other than the substation's intended use. Hydro-Québec stated that several studies are underway in order to gather data that will be used to provide a better overview of the situation and to have a clearer

view of the possibilities. To date, Hydro-Québec does not intend to act as the principal contractor of the heritage renovation project and plans instead to rely on partners to carry out the project.

Impacts on health and quality of life

Several participants raised questions and concerns regarding the potential impacts of the transformer substation on their health and quality of life, in particular with regard to electromagnetic fields, noise, vibrations and traffic related to operating activities.

Regarding the first point, Hydro-Québec reassured participants that electric and magnetic field (EMF) exposure levels near substations are very low compared with those produced by common electrical appliances found in our homes. Hydro-Québec reminded those present that no harmful health effects have been shown at those levels and that the company complies with the most stringent international regulations.

As for the vibrations emitted by the substation, they should be very weak, given that all of the substation's equipment is located inside the building. The noise emitted will come solely from the ventilation systems designed to cool the transformers. Given that Hydro-Québec is aware of the different realities regarding implementing this project, it will strive to position the fans in areas where there is already more ambient noise, in particular near Boulevard René-Lévesque. In any case, Hydro-Québec specified that it must comply with noise standards that require emissions to remain within ambient noise thresholds.

Some local residents also fear that Hydro-Québec employees and trucks will create traffic that will negatively affect their quality of life. Hydro-Québec explained that transformer substations are automated. Consequently, any on-site work will be limited to servicing and maintenance operations.

Impacts of work

Finally, participants expressed their concern regarding the duration of the work and its impact on their daily lives. Some fear being "trapped" in their neighbourhood due to the many road closures and parking issues.

To limit impacts and delays, some participants underscored the need to coordinate the work with other planned jobsites in the area. They also requested that efficient communication mechanisms be put in place to inform them of the situation in real time. Hydro-Québec recognized the legitimacy of these concerns and reminded participants that coordination already exists with the Ville de Montréal. Discussions are also ongoing with the STM to ensure an optimal alignment between the various jobsites. Hydro-Québec confirmed its intention of using tailored communication tools, while specifying that local residents will be invited, in a timely manner, to comment on the most appropriate methods for contacting them.

On another note, some local residents are worried that the atmosphere in the neighbourhood will be affected by the prolonged presence of the jobsite and that there will also be visual impacts. Hydro-Québec expressed its interest in improving the visual aspect of the temporary installations. The company plans to install a historical banner on a portion of the jobsite perimeter that showcases the historical highlights of the site in order to mitigate the visual impact on local residents and passersby.

Issues regarding the public consultation process

Nature and scope of the public consultation process

The participants also commented on the consultation process itself. Several participants said they appreciated being informed of Hydro-Québec's plans early in the draft design phase. They expressed their wish to be involved on a regular and ongoing basis, including during the construction phase.

Several participants said they would like to be involved at various levels rather than simply being kept informed. Other participants underscored the importance of developing an inclusive approach that allows everyone to attend meetings—not just local residents—so that all interested parties can express their aspirations and concerns.

As for the public consultation process, Hydro-Québec will implement a process involving a variety of activities, at different times, aimed at informing and consulting the public. The process will begin with information sessions and meetings with community organizations and other industry stakeholders, such as local elected officials. Hydro-Québec reminded those present that the substation is still at the draft design stage and that initiating public consultation activities at this point is already quite out of the ordinary.

Communication methods

At the end of the meeting, Hydro-Québec questioned local residents about the best ways of keeping them informed of the progress made on the project. The participants expressed a strong preference for regular in-person meetings rather than online initiatives such as webinars.

The participants also highlighted the importance of collecting all the information and putting it on a project website. A newsletter could be used to inform people who sign up for it when new content is available online.

Finally, several participants recommended that the website include an FAQ section containing answers to the most frequently asked questions. They added that this would help to improve the clarity and accessibility of the information for the entire community.