

BRIEF ON PIERREFONDS-WEST
Submitted by Sarah Amarica

I am writing to express my profound concern for the future of Pierrefonds-West.

In 2015, the Cap Nature development project for Pierrefonds West was made public, proposing the construction of 6,000 housing units, and ultimately the major urbanization of a valuable natural space. The area currently encompasses the l'Anse-à-l'Orme corridor, which, covering over 1500 hectares of land, comprises the largest contiguous natural area and the most biodiversity of any remaining unprotected space on the island. The impacts of residential development in this area would be nothing short of devastating, disrupting the unique ecological connectivity and decimating the vulnerable species inherent to L'Anse-à-l'Orme, as outlined by the recent ecological study conducted by the David Suzuki Foundation. The protection of L'Anse-à-l'Orme in its entirety is not only necessary but could create tremendous potential; economically, in terms of developing ecotourism and recreation industries, ecologically, in maintaining Montreal's most diverse wildlife corridor, among many other opportunities.

Aside from major environmental concerns, the development project itself contains many concerning issues. First, the cost of maintaining the infrastructure of this development, on wet meadow land, would far outweigh the profits generated. Next, without access to public transport, meaning the construction of a major boulevard, the area would spawn over 10,000 more vehicles on highways 20 and 40, which is nothing short of an unsustainable, poorly-planned chaos. Last, the hastened pace at which these plans for this development have flourished has meant proper steps not followed in terms of zoning and planning regulations, as outlined by the 2015 lawsuits filed against the project on behalf of community group Sauvons l'Anse-à-l'Orme. I am reminded of Montreal's ongoing and contested history of corruption via its construction industry, and am apprehensive to the underlying motives behind the rush to develop Pierrefonds-West. Development of this area simply does not make sense, and would serve much greater value elsewhere, especially in an area that would not require the inhalation of valuable ecoterritory. As a graduate researcher, I am taught to approach problems with a delicate balance of reason, fact, and empathy, a practice that I simply wish was better implemented in the early formations of this development project.

Above all, our local government's endorsement of this residential development over the conservation of a natural space boding the richest biodiversity in Montreal speaks to their priority to capitalize on profit rather than invest in sustainable futures. The plan to annihilate 185 hectares of wet meadows in favour of 6000-housing units not only poorly reflects the values of thousands of Montreal's citizens, but is an outdated model that ignorantly values urbanization and construction over sustainability and preservation.

My last point of concern, among many, is the City's failure to meet its conservation mandate, and the tendency to overlook our politicians' failed promises more broadly. In 2015, Montreal's Urban Agglomeration Council, which includes Mayor Dennis Coderre, pledged to conserve 10% of the island's territory to natural spaces, and since 2013, only 6% has been protected, with no plan or advancements of conserving the remaining amount. In very practical terms, I cannot fathom how the Coderre Administration plans to augment its conservation figures

by eliminating more green space, starting with Pierrefonds West. The only answer I can discern from these actions is that our local government has little or no intention to meet these conservations goals, speaking more seriously to the lack of accountability upheld by our politicians in maintaining the promises they make. Cap Nature Pierrefonds West's supposed sustainable focus, seen in its so-called "nature" title and the mayor's ongoing catch phrase of "harmonious development," is at best laughable and at worst a sly attempt to appeal to consumers under the pretend guise of environmental concern. I refuse to tolerate or vote for leaders who say one thing and do another, or, even worse, do nothing at all, especially when issues as serious as environmental conservation are at stake.