

Brief

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CAP NATURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
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To Honour the Principles of
Sustainable Development

THE 185 HECTARES OF THE ECOLOGICALLY RICH “KESTREL FIELDS” MUST BE SAVED

FROM THE CAP NATURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

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The consequences of this collective failure [to stop biodiversity loss], if it is not quickly corrected, will be severe for us all. Biodiversity underpins the functioning of the ecosystems on which we depend for food and fresh water, health and recreation, and protection from natural disasters. Its loss also affects us culturally and spiritually. This may be more difficult to quantify, but is nonetheless integral to our well-being.

*Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General
United Nations
Global Biodiversity Outlook 3, May 2010*

“The arrogance of humanity is that somehow we imagine we can get by without biodiversity or that it is somehow peripheral: the truth is we need it more than ever on a planet of six billion heading to over nine billion people by 2050.”

*Achim Steiner
United Nations Under-Secretary General
and Executive Director,
United Nations Environment Programme
Global Biodiversity Outlook 3, May 2010*

THIS BRIEF WILL MAKE THE CASE FOR CONSERVATION OF 185 HECTARES OF FALLOW FIELD/WET MEADOW HABITAT IN PIERREFONDS WEST UNDER 5 BROAD HEADINGS:

I VALUE OF FIELDS IN PIERREFONDS WEST FOR BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION

Since at least the adoption by the newly merged Montreal of the *Politique de protection et de mise en valeur des milieux naturels* in 2004, much has been done by city officials and developers to devalue the outright protection of the land in Pierrefonds West now at risk. The line designating the boundaries of the Rivière à l’Orme Ecoforest Corridor, one of the policy’s 10 designated ecoterritories, deliberately left out a major part of land that could — and should — have been included for potential conservation. Biologists with the city have characterized the site as relatively low in biodiversity and hence not worthy of consideration for inclusion as conserved natural parkland.

LOSS OF CONNECTIVITY AND SPECIES DIVERSITY

However, other respected authorities on biodiversity, with impeccable academic credentials, disagree with the city’s assessment. On the issue of habitat connectivity, a

study entitled “**The impacts of the Cap Nature real estate project (Pierrefonds West) on ecological connectivity**” concluded that “*Development in Pierrefonds West will impact terrestrial biodiversity through a loss of habitat, an increase in landscape fragmentation, and a decrease in functional habitat connectivity,*” and “*that development will have a detrimental impact on the terrestrial biodiversity at multiple scales (page 3).*” The analysis authored by academics and researchers at the Université du Québec en Outaouais, McGill University and Concordia University, has been supported by the *Working Group on Green Infrastructures* of the *Quebec Center for Biodiversity Science and the Institut des sciences de la forêt tempérée*. Conducted independently from any political or development interests, this report should be viewed as objective and valid. Not only will diversity be impacted where the infrastructure is emplaced but in the broader surrounding context as well. (The report is deposited online).

DIVERSITY OF BIRD SPECIES INCLUDING THOSE AT RISK

Biologist, Dr. Richard Gregson (PhD, MPhil, CBiol, FSRB), Past President and current member of the board of directors of Bird Protection Québec authored a report on the diversity of bird species in the fields that for his purpose he has dubbed the Kestrel Fields. The report compiled in July 2015 is entitled *Avian Species reported in the “Kestrel Fields”* is included among documents deposited online. Dr. Gregson records 158 species in the fields which encompass the entire area within which the 185 ha development is planned to proceed. Eleven species in his listing, indicated in **bold red**, “are . . . species that are listed in the Environment Canada Public Registry of Species at Risk as being designated by COSEWIC as vulnerable or threatened.” Species in **bold green** are species of local rarity or concern.

In the spirit of the study on connectivity, Dr Gregson offers two listings for his sighting data. The first column indicates species seen within boundaries of the projected site, the “Kestrel Fields,” while the second lists those sited in immediately adjacent lands. His species inventory, overall, offers a reasonable estimate as to the numbers of species deterred or displaced from the Cap Nature site for feeding, mating and nesting.

Included among documents deposited online is *Where the Bobolinks Roam: The Plight of North America’s Grassland Birds*, published in the “TROPICAL CONSERVATION— BIODIVERSITY 6 (3) 2005.” Ecologist Jon D. McCracken of Bird Studies Canada, Canada’s leading science-based bird conservation organization, is the article’s author. In it he points out the decline, in most cases, of Canada’s grassland birds. Numbered among birds in serious difficulty is the Bobolink, having suffered a yearly decline of 1.7% per year in the period from 1966 to 2004. The bird, according to more recent estimates at Bird Studies Canada, has to date lost 80% of its original estimated population. The article’s even worse figures show the eastern meadowlark’s decline at 2.9% per annum, while those for the grasshopper sparrow show an annual drop of

3.8%. Among ground nesting raptors in decline is the northern harrier with a decline of 1.3% per year. All four groundnesting birds have been sighted in the fields in question, only the bobolink being a predictable occurrence. This writer has often seen bobolinks and occasionally northern harriers, as well as the field's namesake kestrels, the last most recently spotted on April 21. Dr. Gregson reports kestrels as in local decline.

Compared with the *Rapport d'inventaire — Audit écologique (inventaire) de l'avifaune Projet d'aménagement des marais Lauzon et 90* authored by city biologist, François Morneau, Dr. Gregson's listing is much more comprehensive and wasn't restricted to the two marsh areas, the Marais Lauzon and the Marais 90, as was Morneau's. Had the city extended the study area and its time frame, it might have found itself with data more in line with the more credible Gregson evaluation.

Since the city favours the Cap Nature development, it appears to have little interest in ecological assessments by its personnel unfavourable to that purpose. Assessments by independent third parties, being free of direct interest, weigh more convincingly, under scrutiny, for conservation. These last are the sources that should guide the final outcome for the site.

MAMMALS LARGE AND SMALL FREQUENT THE FIELDS

At the information and question session held at Pierrefonds Comprehensive High School on April 4, we were told by city biologist, Claude Thiffault, that the deer herds in the area do not regularly frequent the fields in question, but rather concentrate further west, particularly in the area close to the Rivière à l'Orme. This must be, quite simply, a misrepresentation based on a single aerial count conducted by a navigator and two observers from the Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs from a Bell 206 LR helicopter on a single winter day, February 20, 2017, at 11:15 am. A map, accompanying an answer to a question by Mme Chantal Jacques, shows that on that day only 3 out of a total deer count of 61 deer were located in the 185 hectare field site. We are expected to assume that this will be the deers' distribution through all seasons.

Through years past, winter and summer, this observer has been witness on the ground to deer activity in the heart of these fields. From deer tracks, to fecal droppings, to browsing, particularly on red-osier dogwood and staghorn sumac during winter, to sites where the deer bed down in tall grass in summer, it is abundantly evident that the deer regularly habituate these fields in all seasons. In summer 2015, during a field crossing by this observer near the Lauzon Marsh in a torrential downpour, a four point buck rose from the place where he had bedded down among tall grass very close by. Coyote scat containing deer fur have been found by me as far east as the 440 servitude, and remains of deer carcasses, as well, in the same general area; the same indications

have been found throughout the 185 hectare site. Photographic evidence is presented at the end of this document.

FOOD WEB: VOLES AND THEIR PREDATORS

The fields, best characterized as wet meadow, present an intact and functioning food web, an important criterion for a well functioning ecosystem subtended by insects and, particularly, voles. Everywhere in the wet meadows one can see tunnels created by ubiquitous meadow voles under the grass, flattened by the winter snow. These provide an important food source for raptorial birds, including the harrier and the 10 species of owl that frequent the immediate area. Voles are fed upon by crows, jays, shrikes, gulls and even herons (voles are competent swimmers). They are prey to garter and milk snakes, and a host of smaller predators, including shrews, weasels, mink and skunks. As well, they provide an abundant food source for foxes, whose scat often includes the voles fine, soft, grey fur speckled with the black elytra of ground beetles. Coyotes also feed on voles, but their scat regularly includes the coarser fur of deer whose numbers they are contributing to controlling. All the predatory species mentioned occur in these fields and the surrounding areas. Wet meadows are the meadow voles most favoured habitat and these prolific animals serve to secure the fortunes of the vast array of those other creatures. (Reference: The Mammals of Canada - relevant pages deposited)

A WILDLIFE PROBLEM IN THE MAKING

If the land is developed, deer, coyotes, foxes and indeed other animals stand to be a management problem by increasingly entering into residential neighbourhoods and habituating themselves to people.

The development will certainly have a disruptive impact on the ecological quality of the adjacent protected lands. (This contention is amply supported on page 11 of a document on the constraints, costs and impacts of the Cap Nature project (q.v.), authored by Juste Rajaonson, and cited later in this brief under the heading THE GROWTH PONZI.)

II MONTREAL'S SHORTFALL OF NATURAL SPACE PROTECTION OVER 30 YEARS

In 1987, the same year as the publication of OUR COMMON FUTURE, Green Environment West Island, began to bring citizens together in the pursuit of natural space conservation. The founder and guiding spirit of the organization, Sylvia Oljemark, had actually begun her quest in 1977 with successful efforts to get the Saraguay Forest protected from development. However, there was much more at stake, since natural space was likewise at risk across the island. By 1988, the organization had morphed into the

Green Coalition (GC), soon to become an alliance of over 50 member groups. Collectively, we were able to persuade the Montreal Urban Community (MUC) to devote \$200 million dollars to conservation by the end of 1989. In 1990, some of this money went to save the southern half of the Bois Franc sector in the already partially protected Parc nature de Bois de Liesse, a major part of Woods #3 in the l'Anse-à-l'Orme corridor, the new Parc Agricole de Bois de la Roche, several pieces elsewhere in the East End including the Bois d'Anjou and the Parc Nature de Ruisseau de Montigny among others.

In 1992, progress came to an abrupt end when the economy tanked, the Federal and Provincial governments downloaded expenses to the cities nationwide and MUC President Vera Danyluk imposed what amounted to a permanent moratorium on further natural space spending. One hundred million 1992 dollars, one half out of what had been committed 2 years earlier, went unspent. No one at city hall took up the cause when economic times improved to get the unfinished job done. By the end of the 2 year acquisition period leading up to Ms. Danyluk's decision, barely more than 3% of Montreal's territory, a little more than 1600 hectares had been secured.

Only when GC executive members met with Gérald Tremblay in June 2001, ahead of the merged city election, was the issue once more placed on the agenda — reluctantly. By then over 1000 hectares of potential conservation land had been lost to development. At the GC's persuasion, Gérald Tremblay lifted the moratorium on the \$100 million dollars left unspent. What he did not do was put that amount back back into the budget. Since then only about 2% has been added to bring Montreal's actual figures up to 5.3% of natural space holdings, with the city claiming credit for what is designated "terrain en voie," or land promised. Since taking office the Coderre team, by adding a mere 61 hectares, has plumped the Tremblay administrations bogus claim of 5.7% up to 6.1%

Since Mayor Coderre assumed office in November 2013, things have not gotten better. While the Tremblay administration allocated a token \$12 million per year over two mandates and two triennial budgets, it mostly went unspent. The current city budget has included an item for natural space acquisition that is even more meager than Tremblay's, claiming it will find the money if and when it needs to.

In February 2015, Mayor Coderre did raise by 2% the target for natural space protection from Tremblay's 8%. Mayor Coderre's new Schéma designated for conservation both the 57 hectare Meadowbrook site in Lachine and the 80 hectare Angell Woods in Beaconsfield; both locations are mired in law suits launched by the proprietors, rendering the outcome of that designation moot for now. Activists now wait anxiously for a solution in their favour.

Meanwhile, the Coderre administration continues to favour the development of the Cap Nature project. The fields constitute the single largest and best quality tract of land on Montreal Island that can significantly contribute to reaching the city's conservation objective. To add 1000 hectares to Montreal's holdings, 5.4 sites the size of the one at issue will have to be found, and to make up the 2000 hectares needed to achieve the ultimate 10% goal nearly 11. And our city is dragging its heels while committing to destroy a major part of a major urban ecosystem. Montreal has no like site, a unique wet meadow, that it can claim elsewhere on island.

Twenty five years after the MUC stopped its spending program, citizens still have so little progress to see.

III SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY: THE INTERNATIONAL MANDATE:

SUSTAINABLE MONTRÉAL 2016-2020

The current version of Montreal's sustainability plan, elaborated under Mayor Coderre's administration, sets the goal of being an exemplar to the world on sustainability (see page 11 of this document deposited online). Our mayor regularly presents our city as a model on the international stage, and himself as a champion of the cause. Montreal and its Agglomeration aim to show innovation and creativity "... by integrating sustainable development principles into all facets of their activities."

While the plan, admittedly, embracing much avant-garde planning, the orientations largely focus on development, intended to create a vibrant, progressive economy for Montrealers.

That being said, one missing element in the plan betrays a meager understanding of what sustainable development principles entail. That element is **biodiversity conservation**. Without that foundational priority satisfied nothing can follow in providing for humanity's long term survival and prosperity. In preparing ourselves for a sustainable future, it is critical that everyone understand what biodiversity is and what it needs from us in order to flourish

Sadly, Montreal's conception of biodiversity, as revealed on pages 9, 13, 18, 21 and 26, is simplistic. It conflates planting of trees, adding vegetation to walls and roofs, and protecting the urban "forest" with increasing the city's biodiversity. And while those are worthy activities in their own right, they do not meet scientific criteria for the purpose intended. We must start with a clear understanding of what biodiversity is.

World renowned ecologist Edward O. Wilson offers up this succinct definition of biodiversity as it is understood by researchers in the life sciences. The quotation is from his 2002 book THE FUTURE OF LIFE.

“Regardless of its magnitude, biodiversity (short for biological diversity) is everywhere organized into three levels. At the top are the ecosystems, such as rainforests, coral reefs, and lakes. Next are the species, composed of the organisms in the ecosystems, from algae and swallowtail butterflies to moray eels and people. At the bottom are the variety of genes making up the heredity of individuals that compose each of the species.

Every species is bound to its community in the unique manner by which it variously consumes, is consumed, competes, and cooperates with other species. It also indirectly affects the community in the way it alters the soil, water, and air. The ecologist sees the whole as a network of energy and material continuously flowing into the community from the surrounding physical environment, and back out, and then on round to create the perpetual ecosystem cycles on which our own existence depends.”

So, from Wilson’s explanation, biodiversity occurs at 3 levels: ecosystems, species and genes. From this we get an idea that biodiversity is multilayered and complex. While a wide variety of species is one feature of biodiversity, it is the interactions among them, ideally free of human interference, that create stable, functioning communities that both serve and constrain each member within. These are what ecosystems are about. And there must be genetic diversity to allow members of each species to survive as inevitable change occurs.

Montreal’s RAPPORT SUR LA BIODIVERSITÉ 2013 states the situation clearly on page 25:

“En conclusion, il faut néanmoins souligner que l’urbanisation, qui façonne l’environnement physique majoritairement en fonction des besoins de l’humain (donc, d’une seule espèce), tend vers l’uniformisation de cet environnement. Les espèces floristiques et fauniques en mesure de s’adapter aux conditions du milieu urbain en comparaison avec les conditions des habitats naturels d’origine, sont, somme toute, peu nombreuses.” . . . L’expansion des milieux bâtis affecterait ainsi, de façon générale, la diversité biologique, notamment indigène.”

There is here, then, an acknowledgment that the “mineralization” of built sites incurs a general loss of biodiversity. This will certainly be the outcome if Cap Nature is allowed to proceed. It will not matter what we plant on street sides, walls or roofs, indigenous wildlife with its rich genetic inheritance, separated from the crucial habitat in which it thrives, will be lost.

Does Montreal City Hall, even while admitting the loss, not care? We citizens do! City plantings are mass produced, genetically restricted “cultivars” — read clones.

The RAPPORT (deposited online) was published in recognition of Montreal’s partnership with **LAB – Local Action for Biodiversity** (referred to further on)

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS THE WORLD UNDERSTANDS IT

OUR COMMON FUTURE, published in 1987 for THE WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT, and popularly known as the Brundtland Report, set the global sustainable development agenda for the years to follow. It still does: on page 4 of the recommendations of most recent update for the **United Nations General Assembly — *Sustainable development: Convention on Biological diversity, Report of the second committee***, dated 14 December 2015 (deposited online) — we read:

Recognizing that the achievement of the three objectives of the Convention is crucial for sustainable development, poverty eradication and the improvement of human well-being and a major factor underpinning the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals,
. and, at the end

[The Second Committee] 22. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its seventy-first session a report on the implementation of the present resolution, including progress in the implementation of the Convention and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and on difficulties encountered in the process of their implementation, and decides to include under the item entitled “Sustainable development”, the sub-item entitled “Convention on Biological Diversity” in the provisional agenda of its seventy-first session, unless otherwise agreed in the discussions on the revitalization of the Second Committee.

That the word environment precedes development, in the name of the commission mandated by the United Nations General Assembly in 1983, is not of incidental significance. On the 12th page of the accompanying pdf document, OUR COMMON FUTURE (deposited online), is the following:

8. There has been a growing realization in national governments and multilateral institutions that it is impossible to separate economic development issues from environment issues; many forms of development erode the environmental resources upon which they must be based, and environmental degradation can undermine economic development.

Given the just cited UN General Assembly report (14-12-15 N1542605) it is clear that environment meant a resilient living environment within a physical and social context conducive to its continuance and biological integrity.

THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

In 1992, following on the mandate given by Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland's commission, the World's nations convened at the **Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro** to adopt the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**, alongside the closely linked Conventions on Climate Change and on Desertification.

The Foreword to the 2003 edition of the *Handbook of the Convention on Biological Diversity* has this to say:

Biological diversity — the variability among living things and the ecosystems they inhabit — is the foundation upon which human civilizations have been built. Its conservation is a prerequisite for sustainable development and, as such, constitutes one of the greatest challenges of the modern era.

and . . .

The World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in 2002 to review progress made since the Earth Summit and to chart the way ahead, confirmed that biodiversity plays a critical role in overall sustainable development and poverty eradication. The World Summit also identified the Convention on Biological Diversity as the key instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits.

The Handbook's Preamble begins with:

The Contracting Parties,

Conscious of the intrinsic value of biological diversity and of the ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational and aesthetic values of biological diversity and its components,

Conscious also of the importance of biological diversity for evolution and for maintaining life sustaining systems of the biosphere,

Affirming that the conservation of biological diversity is a common concern of humankind,

before elaborating the 40 Articles and accompanying three Annexes that define the objectives, expectations and procedures that guide the Conventions signatories.

(Handbook excerpts deposited online)

COP10 AND THE BIODIVERSITY TARGETS

Since Rio, regular CONFERENCES OF THE PARTIES (COP) are held as part of an ongoing process. Shortly after the CBD's DECADE OF BIODIVERSITY 2010-2020 was launched at Montreal City Hall, with Mayor Gérald Tremblay hosting dignitaries from around the World, COP10 was convened between October 18 and 29 in Nagoya, Japan. The DECADE, which ordained significant progress on conservation by 2020, will soon be over, with Montreal having achieved very little since its start.

Out of **COP10** emerged the **Aichi Biodiversity Targets** and the **Aichi-Nagoya Declaration** setting the benchmark to be reached by 2020. Targets 11 and 15 offer up the critical numbers against which progress must be measured:

Target 11

By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes.

Target 15

By 2020, ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks has been enhanced, through conservation and restoration, including restoration of at least 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems, thereby contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and to combating desertification.

CITIES ACCEPT BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION MANDATE . . .

The Strategic Goals and Targets were accompanied by the *Aichi/Nagoya Declaration On Local Authorities And Biodiversity*, which in its opening statement announced the unequivocal, active support of sub-national jurisdictions, including cities:

We, Mayors, Governors and other high-level officials meeting in Nagoya, Aichi, Japan, from October 24-26, at the occasion of the City Biodiversity Summit 2010 during the International Year of Biodiversity . . . recognize that rapid urbanization is one of the drivers of global biodiversity loss, and local authorities have a critical role to play in implementing the objectives of the CBD to prevent the continuation of this loss, and we commit to pursuing this goal . . . This Declaration outlines our reasons, our actions, and our intentions.

In a **Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB) Press Release** of October 26, 2010, under the banner **Mayors Urge Parties to Adopt the Plan of Action on Cities at the City Biodiversity Summit**, we read:

“In the opening session the Nations of Japan, Spain, Brazil, Singapore, Mexico, Canada, South Africa, and the United Kingdom highlighted the pivotal role cities and local authorities play in the implementation of the CBD in their countries.”

[Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity, Dr. Ahmed] *Djoghla* said the new *Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO)* noted **urbanization as one of the main causes of biodiversity decline**. *“Thus engaging the local authorities for the preservation of biodiversity is important and has to be done in partnership with national governments.”* he said.

... EXCEPT FOR MONTREAL?

Our own mayor of the time, M. Gérald Tremblay, was featured among the leaders of Local Action for Biodiversity in a photo accompanying the LAB Press Release, **astounding given Montreal’s dismal conservation record then and to date!** The current administration’s commitment is even more egregiously wanting.

WILL M. CODERRE STEP UP AND DO WHAT M. TREMBLAY WOULD NOT — HONOUR SUSTAINABILITY VIA CONSERVATION?

If M. Coderre hopes to leave a sustainability legacy of which he and the city will be proud, he must note that it will be gauged against the standard set in Aichi-Nagoya.

IV FISCAL SOLVENCY ISSUES

Daniel Hodder, at the information and public question period held on April 4, 2014, stated that the Cap Nature development in Pierrefonds Ouest would provide the city with needed tax revenue. My response, as I recall, was that it has not been demonstrated that it does so, at least according to any document to which I have had access, to the contrary. I asked if any **long-term, cost benefit analysis** had been undertaken, taking into account fiscal revenues and the material expenditures that will have to be figured in **over the next century**, to demonstrate a public benefit. No one presiding could answer as to whether it had.

The question was given to address the criterion wherein sustainable development **“meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,”** the definition found on page 8 in OUR COMMON

FUTURE. Montreal aspires, as mentioned, to be an exemplary model of sustainability, and so the question does appear to be a reasonable one. Sustainability time frames are measured not in years, nor even in the length of 4 year electoral mandates, but in generations, which nowadays stretch out to 25 years each. So generations, plural, means at least 50 years, and 100 years being not unreasonable for a near future expected life span, a century was my choice.

The document offered up on April 26 as an answer to my question, was in fact no answer. The financial analysis done by the City in 2007 tells us that by the end of a little more than a decade there will be a “municipal investment recovery” and that beyond that we will only benefit. But that sort of accounting is an insufficiency. It tells us nothing about what happens at 25, 50, 75, 100 nor any other multiple of 25 years beyond.

Surely, evidence-based fiscal/expenditure analysis, would take into account the historical record. It would examine not merely revenues from property taxes and other potential sources, and not only the costs of maintenance of infrastructure and expansion of services. Externalities involving the costs passed on to neighbouring communities and the subsidies from superior levels of government covering installation, maintenance and eventual replacement of enabling infrastructures need also be factored in on a time scale that reaches into the far distant future. That sort of calculation has not been done.

Eventually, deep costs, associated not just with upkeep but with inevitable replacement of old and degraded infrastructure, much as are being incurred across Montreal Island as we speak, will be passed on to future ratepayers, including those not yet born. Ubiquitous orange cones bear witness to this. This leads to the serious disruption, and even abandonment, of business enterprises. This happens everywhere eventually, not only in the city core. Significant parts of Roxboro, as an example, recently underwent replacement of sewer and water lines, surface drainage conduits, the entire road-bed having been excavated to a depth of twelve feet, followed with emplacement of new curbs, the repaving of the road surface, and the restoration of landscaping, this after 60 years of service. This legacy of indebtedness is not compatible with sustainability.

It seems that we are to take on faith claims by our politicians and functionaries that the public purse will not only balance but produce a surplus. However, rarely do we see a reduction in our taxes. Whatever short term proceeds do emerge while urban developments are new, they go towards the upgrades elsewhere that time imposed deterioration demand. This not uncommon but highly questionable practice amounts to “robbing Peter to pay Paul” and like a classical pyramid scheme it collapses once the local jurisdiction runs out of new land to develop. Financial life support from elsewhere, perennially sought out, must now become a necessity.

OUR COLLECTIVE GROWING DEBT BURDEN

Nowadays, it has become clear that neither Montreal, nor any other large Canadian city is capable of making fiscal ends meet without substantial contributions from either Provincial or Federal governments. While this help serves to keep municipal tax rates down, the money being contributed from above does not come from nowhere. While municipal levies come out of one taxpayer's pocket, federal top-up subsidies are ultimately drawn from another, and provincial handouts from yet one more.

While we rely on federal and provincial largesse to keep the cities head above water, it shouldn't be assumed that we do not, as citizens, face consequences. On March 22 the Trudeau government announced that the federal debt stood at \$635,410,734,334 and, since the start of the current Trudeau mandate, is growing by about \$20 – 25 billion/year — an additional 4% — until the end of the 2018-2019 fiscal year. We may be well over \$700 billion in debt nationally by the next election. Meanwhile, the gross debt announced by the province stands at \$206 billion. Montreal's budget for this fiscal year indicated that 17% of a \$5.24 billion budget, totalling \$890.8 million, is given over to debt servicing.

On Tuesday, April 18, Federal Transport Minister, Marc Garneau and Quebec Public Security Minister, Martin Coiteux announced that they would be contributing just over \$50 million and just under \$34 million respectively to Montreal's Clean Water and Waste fund. The two Ministers made the announcement, with Denis Coderre at City Hall, of the funding to help with the repair of broken sewers and water mains, which Montreal cannot afford to undertake entirely on its own. Still, the lion's share of the expenditures must come from municipalities.

The above figures are those given by all three government levels since January.

A FAILED MODEL

And so, the plan as it has always been is to make up for fiscal shortfalls, and to keep municipal taxes bearable, on the back of developable land. But this isn't working, and never has, and so the collective debt chasm grows and grows and property owners never see their taxes drop. The hole is deep — its time to stop digging.

We are asked to believe that there will even be a flush of cash to ease the burden of expenditures by the city. But this is never demonstrated. Indeed, a number of analyses of the past decade debunk the idea that there is a net cash inflow even in the short term. An analysis done for the Town of Beaconsfield showed no benefit from additional development in the Sunrise sector due to the costs of resolving problems created elsewhere.

That the Cap-Nature project will not be profitable, one need only examine the ANALYSE DES CONTRAINTES, COÛTS ET IMPACTS D'UN ÉVENTUEL PROJET IMMOBILIER DANS LE SECTEUR DU PARC L'ANSE À L'ORME by Juste Rajaonson, now an analyst at Développement économique Canada - Canada Economic Development DEC-CED at the Université de Montréal, and previously at the École des sciences de la gestion at UQAM. Mr. Rajaonson is the same analyst who, under the supervision of Dr. Florence Junca-Adenot, demonstrated that condominium/apartment development at the southwestern end of Île Charron, in Boucherville would not be in the public interest either fiscally or environmentally. Sensibly, that project was abandoned. Similar conclusions are drawn for the L'Anse-à-l'Orme sector and the Cap Nature fiscal pitfall. It can be hoped that our leadership sees the light and sensibly steps back from the edge.

The Rajaonson report is deposited online.

THE GROWTH PONZI

Exactly the case being made has been taken up by Charles Marohn, a member of the Order of Professional Engineers of the State of Minnesota, an area climatologically similar to Montreal. He has done the sort of analyses I believe necessary and has come to the conclusion that the way we finance cities is a GROWTH PONZI. This is how he describes our fiscal and development model on his STRONG TOWNS website:

“. . . the American development pattern of the post-WW II era entices cities to exchange the near-term cash advantages of new growth for the long-term maintenance obligation of new infrastructure. This is a bad trade, because . . . the pattern of development costs more to maintain over the long run than it produces in revenue. In short, our development pattern is not productive enough to sustain itself.

A new development goes in. The developer builds the street and then turns it over to the city for maintenance. Houses are built and the city sees its property tax receipts rise. Imagine for a moment that the city took and saved the portion of those new receipts that was to be used for street maintenance. If the city did that every year throughout the life of the street, adding the new tax receipts to those already saved, and then used the cumulative savings to repair the street, here is how the cash flow diagram would look.” (graphic found in deposited The Growth Ponzi blog pages.)

“Revenues are from collected taxes and expenses are due to infrastructure maintenance costs. Everything looks great until the end of the street's life cycle. At that point, the cost of the repairs far outweighs the revenue collected. If the city were reduced to this one street, it would be insolvent.”

“When the private-sector investment does not yield enough tax revenue to maintain the underlying public infrastructure, the balance can be made up in the short term with new growth. Over the long run, however, insolvency is unavoidable.”

The urban planning advocacy group Vivre en Ville concurs with Marohn’s viewpoint. Between pages 7 and 9 in a document entitled **“Et si le PMAD ne changeait (presque) rien?”** presented before the PMAD hearings in October, 2011, they offer up a position roundly endorsing that of Marohn and cite his stance as inspiration. From page 8:

“Au fil du temps, les municipalités se sont ainsi retrouvées avec tout un parc d’infrastructures publiques à entretenir... et la responsabilité de leur remplacement au terme de leur durée de vie utile. C’est au moment précis du remplacement nécessaire des infrastructures publiques que le piège de la chaîne de Ponzi s’enclenche.”

Vivre en Ville’s document is deposited online.

ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF VALUE

There are other ways to derive value from land other than transforming it. These values are manifest without the otherwise necessary costs associated with emplacement, management, repair, eventual replacement of infrastructure, and the provision of services. They arise out of the land being left alone.

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND CAPITAL – PIERREFONDS WEST DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, a report prepared for the GC by Gestion Environnement MM makes the case succinctly. On page 13, under the heading 3.1 Methodology the report states that:

“Understanding the economic value of these services can be quite useful in cost-benefit analysis when comparing land use alternatives. The benefit transfer method is widely used to transfer a monetary value to non-market environmental benefits.”

And in the CONCLUSION, on page 19, author Mathieu Madison, biologiste, M. Env., provides us with a number:

“In total, the study evaluates that the current natural ecosystems are providing services that accounts for a total economic value of more than 285 000 dollars per year.”

He ends by saying:

“These various issues could all be considered in a broad cost/benefit analysis.”

I agree completely, but would like to read “could” as “should.” Thinking back to my question posed on April 4, this sort of accounting was in mind. The city’s analysis, offered in response to me, lacked the sort of rigour seen in this report and is, simply put, not credible.

M. Madison has impeccable credentials and is well respected in his field. He does analyses for municipal clients and would have been the ideal independent evaluator to prepare a report — with merit — for our City.

NATIONAL PARK STATUS AND TOURISM

The Gestion Environnement MM report invokes, among the other benefits of conservation, the value of leisure and specifically ecotourism. It is a case not new to Green Coalition and has had that organizations full support in the past.

The “eco-recreo-touristic” potential of saving the Western Pierrefonds lands, in their entirety, was not lost on former provincial Environment Minister, Tom Mulcair, when Green Coalition representatives first met with him in 2003.

He was approached him with a vision, not just for he natural landscapes in Montreal West Island, but for the entire Lake of Two Mountains basin. He was presented with the ecological, leisure and touristic potential of bringing all the available pieces together in a proposed Lake of Two Mountains National Park. To him the environmental, social and economic spinoffs were obvious. The proposal was genuinely a sustainable development initiative that could have been a draw to the world.

In fact, Mr Mulcair put his functionaries to work on elaborating an even more ambitious scheme to incorporate all lands available in the Montreal Archipelago. Green Coalition was delighted, and ran with the enlarged concept. When it took its brief before the hearings on the draft Sustainable Development Strategy, with Mr. Mulcair presiding, he asked us enthusiastically, once we had done presenting, to explain for all the intervenors present, our National Park concept. The GC Brief is posted online.

The week before Mr. Mulcair was asked to step down from his Environment Ministry post, he stated publicly on CBC Radio, in response to a call in question, that he was about to make an announcement on a first phase. The news that he would not be able to fulfill the dream was devastating for all those who had worked so hard on the idea. None of his successors were able to see the importance of what together we had worked on.

Now, nearly a decade later, we see people of lesser vision proposing to put housing in place that will forever rob the site, and others associated it, from fulfilling their true vocation.

V CONCLUSION

While a grander dream has died — for now — a more modest one for the fields of Western Pierrefonds persists. Citizens understanding the stakes, have gathered and will continue to grow in their numbers to save the 185 hectares from a disgraceful fate. At this time, a petition with over 18,000 signatures continues to circulate. There is no like citizen initiative to the contrary, and it is unimaginable that one will take place. Only a very small number of interests stand to gain from development. Citizens know where their best fortunes lie; they have nothing to gain from the travesty this project represents; it is bitterly risible but no cause for laughter.

“Towards Sustainable Development,” Chapter 2 in Our Common Future concludes with:

In its broadest sense, the strategy for sustainable development aims to promote harmony among human beings and between humanity and nature. In the specific context of the development and environment crises of the 1980s, which current national and international political and economic institutions have not and perhaps cannot overcome, the pursuit of sustainable development requires:

- political system that secures effective citizen participation in decision making,
- an economic system that is able to generate surpluses and technical knowledge on a self-reliant and sustained basis,
- social system that provides for solutions for the tensions arising from disharmonious development,
- production system that respects the obligation to preserve the ecological base for development,
- technological system that can search continuously for new solutions, an international system that fosters sustainable patterns of trade and finance, and
- an administrative system that is flexible and has the capacity for self-correction.

Please take particular note of bullet points 1, 3 and 6. Advocates for conservation come to these hearings hoping to see their participation be meaningful. They do not appreciate suffering the tensions arising from the disharmonious development planned. They certainly hope we have an administration that is flexible and able to self correct.

Sustainable Development principles require that our leadership act accordingly.



*Wary deer
emerging from hedgerow in
development area*







*Coyote scat
containing deer hair
found in the A 440 servitude in 2015*



*Bobolink on field edge
with nest in field east of the Lauzon Marsh
where development will take place*



*Vole tunnels under grass
in early spring
in fields within the development area*