

Protecting All of L'Anse-à-l'Orme is Essential

**A Brief by Irwin Rapoport to the
Office de Consultation Publique de Montréal on the Proposed
Development of 185 Hectares of L'Anse-à-l'Orme**

Introduction

I am a member of Les Amis du Parc Meadowbrook, a group dedicated to the preservation of the 57-hectare Meadowbrook golf course in Lachine/Cote-St.-Luc and its conversion into a municipal nature park, and I along with more than 17,500 who signed a petition to stop the proposed development at L'Anse-à-l'Orme, are calling for the complete preservation of the 365 hectares of the L'Anse-à-l'Orme wilderness in western Pierrefonds. Currently, developers, supported by the City of Montreal, are planning to destroy 185 hectares of pristine wilderness to build 5,500 plus homes.

This wilderness area must be protected from development and all of the 365 hectares must be converted into a nature park/wildlife refuge, be it a municipal park or via a federal/provincial urban nature park.

This brief will explain why the wilderness area must be preserved, provide alternatives for development in Pierrefonds, and call for a complete moratorium on the development of all the remaining wilderness, wetlands, farmland, and green spaces on the island of Montreal and to only allow development to occur only on brown fields, parking lots, and urban sprawl – commercial and industrial.

In case you did not know about the organization I am a member of, Les Amis du Parc Meadowbrook was founded to protect the Meadowbrook golf course, and a key element of its mandate is to help protect other threatened natural areas on the island. Its members have worked hard to protect Meadowbrook and Angell Woods from development during the PMAD hearings, and the protection of L'Anse-à-l'Orme is critical to it and other environmental groups, along with the protection of adjacent wilderness and green space and the nearly 25 hectares of threatened wetlands, forests, and fields at the Technoparc Montreal in the Borough of Saint Laurent.

Preserving and Protecting L'Anse-à-l'Orme

Under the current development plan, 185 hectares of woods, wetlands, fields and former farmland is slated for the construction of 5,500 plus homes, schools, roads, small parks, and businesses. Currently the area is pristine and is home to many threatened and endangered species of birds and reptiles, many species of mammals – including a herd of 40 plus deer, a variety of wetlands and many small rivers. Essentially, it is a thriving and self-sustaining wilderness in (the heart of the West Island) Pierrefonds that has escaped development and we want to keep the area as is. When added to the wilderness area that is being retained, it will make an excellent nature park that all can enjoy. It will also ensure the protection of biodiversity on the island, which is under serious threat. Non-stop development has resulted in the loss of vast tracts of wilderness, wetlands, green space, and farmland across the island.

This is why more than 20,000 people are calling for all of L'Anse-à-l'Orme to be protected and converted into a nature park for all to enjoy and to protect Montreal's fragile biodiversity. And this is why we are calling upon the federal and provincial governments to work together to create either a federal or provincial park or a joint-federal/provincial urban park that encompasses all of L'Anse-à-l'Orme, adjacent territories in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue that are under threat from development, and all the wetlands and green space at the Technoparc Montreal in the Borough of Saint Laurent.

The threatened wilderness/green space in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue have been included so that we can have a continuous green space/wilderness area from the Morgan Arboretum, and (Angell Woods to L'Anse-à-l'Orme) Cap-St.-Jacques, with a satellite park at the Technoparc wetlands. This would send a strong message to all Montrealers and municipal governments that the citizens of our island value and cherish wilderness and green space and have a serious desire to protect our environment and biodiversity.

An excellent and recent example of the creation of an urban national park/wildlife refuge is the Rouge National Urban Park in Toronto, which protects vital wilderness in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). This included federal government support, which included the passage of a bill in the House of Commons, which sends a strong message for all to hear. If organizations, environmentalists, and concerned citizens can save these wild spaces in the GTA, we can initiate such an action in Montreal and the Greater Montreal Area. It just requires all the various stakeholders to work together for a common cause and you can count on thousands of citizens, Les Amis du Parc Meadowbrook, Sauvons L'Anse à l'Orme, the Green Coalition, and other committed environment groups and associations to pitch in to make that a reality for L'Anse-à-l'Orme.

Protecting the remaining wilderness, wetlands, green space, and farmland is a must because once these areas are destroyed, they are essentially lost forever. We've lost so much already to rapacious and needless and unnecessary development already, that we cannot afford to lose a single hectare in the future. But sadly the City of Montreal is pursuing a policy that is putting nearly all the remaining wilderness areas under threat of destruction, particularly with its support of the proposed REM commuter train that will destroy vast tracts of farmland, wilderness, and green space in the South Shore and Montreal, especially the West Island.

**An Alternative to Developing L'Anse-à-l'Orme that Protects Wilderness
and Promotes Sustainable Residential and Commercial Development in Pierrefonds**

We can easily promote residential development in Pierrefonds in a sustainable way and ensure the survival of L'Anse-à-l'Orme, wilderness and green space, and biodiversity via easy and simple actions.

The alternative plan for development in Pierrefonds calls for all of the low-density commercial and industrial sprawl, massive parking lots, and failing shopping centres and strip malls to be redeveloped into quality and tastefully designed high-density condo and apartment towers, complete with several floors of underground parking, one or two stories of commercial/office space, and eight to 10 storeys of residential units.

The residential component can range from two- to three bedroom units, complete with living rooms and dining rooms and a small office/extra room. This would meet the needs of couples and young families and allow the units to retain value in terms of re-selling. You can even have some buildings with two-storey units. All the buildings can have well-landscaped terraces with green roofs and magnificent views.

To redevelop these properties, we would need the City of Montreal to create an office with authority to bring together landowners and developers to plan a phased redevelopment initiative that would ensure existing businesses are not lost and can be relocated. This ensures that the city receives the tax revenues from businesses and from new residential properties on the upper floors. It would be a win-win for all and set the bar for new sustainable developments on the island.

The advantages of this plan is that development would occur along existing arteries that already have bus service and can easily be connected to existing municipal water and sewage infrastructure and gas and electricity grids. This would also result in sustained construction over several years, and create many job opportunities for general contractors and subcontractors, which benefits provincial government revenues and creates jobs in other sectors.

Russell Copeman, the City of Montreal's Executive Committee member responsible for urban planning, claims that the L'Anse-à-l'Orme development is needed to retain people and young families on the island. Both he (Copeman is also the mayor of the CDN/NDG Borough) and Montreal Mayor Denis Coderre stress that sustainable development, to them, means that you develop some green space and save the rest. This is a false premise and a dangerous one considering how little remaining wilderness and green space that we have left. Nor do we do have that luxury if we are to meet the 10 percent wilderness protection goal set for the island under the PMAD and the loftier 17 percent goal for the CMM. As noted, we cannot afford to lose a single hectare and he just witnessed how the City of Montreal started the destruction of 1,061 trees in Jean Drapeau Park – a needless act of wanton violence against the ecosystem and biodiversity.

Copeman has publicly stated that the 10 percent goal can be reached by destroying the 185 hectares at L'Anse-à-l'Orme, which is incorrect. Declaring cemeteries as green space is a serious ruse and this will not only be done for the City of Montreal proper, but for cemeteries in the West Island and in other municipalities. Recently the CDN/NDG Borough has just approved the redevelopment of the Wilderton Shopping Centre to have a residential/commercial designation.

This is a very solid move that should be applauded as it preserves green space and sends a message that we can easily redevelop other such properties.

We have many examples of converting brown fields into housing, institutions, and commercial space. The borough of Lachine is working with developers to build 6,500 homes - primarily townhouses over the next 10 years – on brown fields, which comprise 10 percent of the island of Montreal, and you can add another 15 to 20 percent via existing parking lots and low-density commercial and industrial sprawl. Cote Saint Luc, over the past few years, has converted half of the Cavendish Mall site into a mixture of single-family homes and townhouses, and we all know that the new MUHC is on a brown field that was cleaned up. There are many such sites on the island that are similar to the former Glenn Yard and we have an obligation to clean them up.

It must be stressed that by having well-designed 10 to 12 storey residential towers with one or two floors of commercial space, you not only retain businesses and tax revenue, but create customers from the new residents who will be moving in and you get the municipal tax revenue from the new units. This ethos is being adopted by many cities in North America who realize that urban sprawl poses a serious danger – a danger that has to be recognized, stopped, and reversed.

Also to be stressed is that 5,500 plus new homes in Pierrefonds translates into a minimum of 16,000 new residents based on two parents and at least one child per-couple. There are already existing schools in the West Island that can handle the influx without the need to build new ones and most importantly, it would save all of L'Anse-à-l'Orme and give new and old residents a massive nature park to enjoy year-round. Having the park creates value for the existing housing units.

If such an experiment with L'Anse-à-l'Orme is permitted to succeed – bringing landowners and developers to redevelop low-density commercial and industrial properties, then we could take it to other boroughs and it could be an excellent way to avoid abandoned buildings becoming eyesores and fire traps. There are many urban planning disasters in Montreal that have to be remedied and as a city that is recognized for its creativity, it would provide amazing opportunities for architects, designers, and urban planners to excel in their fields and influence others across the globe.

The Need for a Moratorium on the Development of

Wilderness/Green Space/Farmland/Wetlands on the Island of Montreal

The hearings for L'Anse-à-l'Orme provide an excellent opportunity to once again call for a complete moratorium on the development of green space, wilderness, wetlands and farmland on the island of Montreal and to only permit development on brown fields (10 percent of the island) and low-density commercial and industrial sprawl (15 to 25 percent of the island).

The call for such a moratorium has been put forward by the Sierra Club Quebec and by the Green Coalition, and it has been supported by many environmental groups. It is essential for all municipalities on the island of Montreal to agree to such a moratorium as soon as possible so that we can protect the above-mentioned areas and threatened biodiversity.

This can be done and everyone benefits as it provides an excellent opportunity to redevelop our island in a sustainable way and sets an example for other cities and jurisdictions to follow. Montreal could become an environmental leader and this is something that can unite all Montrealers.

Supporting “A COMMON VISION” for the

L’ANSE-À-L’ORME CORRIDOR

I and thousands of other fully supports the document entitled *A Common Vision FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE L’ANSE-À-L’ORME CORRIDOR AS A NATURAL SPACE.*

The document states:

“For presentation to the Office de Consultation Publique de Montréal (OCPM) in its hearings in May 2017 on the proposed Special Planning Program (SSP) for Pierrefonds-West

1. The L’Anse-à-L’Orme Corridor must be entirely preserved in order for the City of Montreal to comply with its own conservation commitment.

The Plan métropolitain d’aménagement et de développement of the Montreal Metropolitan Community (PMAD) requires the protection of 17% of the territory of the CMM.

The Schéma d’aménagement et de développement de l’agglomération de Montréal requires the protection of 10% of the territory of the agglomeration (5,000 hectares).

By its own calculation, Montreal has protected only 6% of the territory of the agglomeration (3,000 hectares), leaving more than 2,000 hectares to be preserved. (in order for Montreal to reach its own conservation target [of 10 percent])

As only a limited amount of green space remains available on the island, all of it must be preserved, and this obviously includes the 185 hectares of wet meadows in Western Pierrefonds that face elimination through a massive real estate project.

2. The L’Anse-à-l’Orme Corridor is a unique and irreplaceable haven of biodiversity that should be preserved on its own merits:

3. The proposed development contemplated in the proposed PPU is a bad deal for the taxpayers of Pierrefonds-Roxboro and the City of Montreal:

4. The proposed development is in the wrong place and should be relocated in order to comply with the City of Montreal's own principles of sustainable development:

5. The mandate given by the City of Montreal compromises the OCPM's independence and neutrality:

The brochure for these hearings invites the public "to come validate and improve the vision" of the proposed development, while at the same time stating that the "OCPM was created specifically to ensure that certain public consultations in Montreal are led by a neutral and independent organization." Given that the issue of greatest concern to the public is whether or not the L'Anse-à-L'Orme Corridor should be developed at all, the OCPM's independence and neutrality are compromised by its very terms of reference.

The OCPM is asked to recommend to the City of Montreal that future OCPM mandates explicitly address the issue of conservation first, and the details of actual development scenarios second."

Conclusion

We – over 20,000 Montrealers, Les Amis du Parc Meadowbrook, Sauvons L'Anse à l'Orme, the Green Coalition, and other organizations and individuals, are insisting that all of L'Anse-à-l'Orme be preserved and fully protected from development now and in the future. We cannot afford to lose this pristine wilderness that is key for the protection of wilderness and biodiversity – not just for the threatened area at L'Anse-à-l'Orme, but also for the defense of other threatened wilderness/green space/wetlands/farmland in the Greater Montreal Area. If we can stop this development, and redevelop urban sprawl as an alternative, we will have won a major victory for the environment and environmental awareness and responsibility.

We have an obligation to defend these areas for all citizens – now and in the future. This is something we can do and still allow for development on the island – sustainable development that is.

And thus we call upon this Commission to recommend that the proposed development of L'Anse-à-l'Orme be scrapped and that all of L'Anse-à-l'Orme be protected and converted into a nature park/wildlife refuge. Your rejection of this development proposal would give so many the hope they are looking for to reverse that environmental tragedies that have marked residential, commercial, and industrial development on the island. Just look at the disaster that is Nuns' Island – once a pristine wilderness area and now a perfect example of rampant and rapacious development.

Annex #1

This is a list of some of the threatened wilderness, wetland, green spaces, and farmland on the island of Montreal that need to be protected from development and converted into nature parks. We are mentioning them because these hearings deal with the bigger picture of wilderness and biodiversity protection.

- The Technoparc Montreal wetlands in Saint Laurent and the adjacent wetlands that are part of the Aeroport de Montreal lands.
- The entire L'Anse-à-l'Orme Corridor, including the portion in Ste.-Anne-de-Bellevue.
- The remaining sections of the Dorval golf course and green areas adjacent to Trudeau Airport and within its jurisdiction, which are slated for the development.
- The golf course in Anjou.