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Meadowbrook An Endangered Ecosystem, Save or Destroy

In a person's lifetime there is a destiny which will make that individual's role in life stand out over and above his fellow man. History will record, however prior to this, men and women must play their part.

Generations come and go but the land and its natural surroundings remain unless man destroys.

Vast stretches of former natural habitats have declined all over the world. It is to the credit of some, who in their wisdom and power helped to preserve these endangered lands, that whatever is left we can behold and savour

Studies reveal that there are many ecosystems which have declined to proportions of 98 percent of their area and there are many more that are considered as considerably endangered. Although the plight of individual species has been the focus of public interest, the health of the larger community of plants, animals and microbes of which they are a part of the ecosystem, nature's functional unit, reports show that these systems have declined on a grand but unappreciated scale.

We are not only losing single species here and there, we are losing entire assemblages of species and their habitats.

In the immediate area of the Island of Montreal, there is such an endangered place. It is the property of Fairmont Hotels, that is managed (owned) by its subsidiary Immeubles Canadien Pacifique Inc. It is the Wentworth Golf Course lands, better known as Meadowbrook and the subject of this presentation.

The words that are written here are many, therefore I ask for your indulgence and patience, to take into account what is proposed and not jump to immediate conclusions, with the thoughts that you have heard all this before. This presentation will not only indicate why we must preserve this oasis in a desert of asphalt and concrete but how we can all benefit.

As part of this package, I am including herewith a pictorial taken of Meadowbrook, showing the different seasons, summer, autumn and winter, the trees and other growth, plus animals and birds. The beauty of Meadowbrook is a sight to behold. It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words, given that, I will attempt to write the rest.

Between Mount Royal Park on one side and the Arrondissement/Borough of Dorval on the other, there is only one green area of any significance and that is Meadowbrook. Its majestic attributes are not a difficult proposition to describe.

A first visit indicates the presence of trees that are of great value. Many of these trees have a history of over seventy - five years or date from the beginning of the 20th century. One cannot give a precise account of all of this, however, there are trees of basswood, white oak, a few cherry trees, butternut hickory, white willow and silver maple. The dimension of these trees are of a large size, of course there are other trees and plants of a more recent vintage but in all they constitute a priceless heritage of the past.

There are great concerns concerning the survival of many of these trees. A large space would be required and it would be difficult to maintain this growth should there be any development involving the Meadowbrook property. This comment was made by no less an authority than the "Institute de Recherche en Biologie végétale" which is a part of the City of Montreal's "Jardin botanique".

In view of this fact there is no substitute for the real value of these trees that grew to their size ,after many decades ,which will now be destroyed.

The principal ecological interests of this territory is in it's role as a buffer zone, It separates vastly different areas ; on one side are the industrial zones of the former city of Ville St.Pierre and it's neighbour Lachine, on the other side are the residential quarters of Côte St.Luc and Montreal West.

There are other concerns that the quality of life for the residents of the communities mentioned ,will be threatened, faced with the danger of the disappearance of the animal and vegetable life of this territory, resulting from the proposed development.

To add to the seriousness of the problem, city streets like Westminster and Côte St.Luc Road would suffer in the face of gridlock which will not be of a temporary nature but will continue over a period of many years ,not just months, while construction is going on and thereafter.

Presently to find green spaces on the Island of Montreal is very rare and each time a tree disappears, a piece of nature and all it's diversity is gone.

The territory of Meadowbrook constitutes a treasured place, nearby in the Arrondissement/Borough of Lachine is an area, of contaminated soil ,abandoned buildings, factories that spew their wastes and contaminants round the clock, to the detriment of the entire neighbouring areas. The buffer to all of this, is Meadowbrook, it must survive ,there is no other way. A project to developing this jeweled retreat is a menace to the survival of the population of plants, trees, birds and animals that are assembled in the environment of this region.

Considering the extraordinary potential of this territory there is only one choice that we have, which is to preserve it.

How!

There have been many different proposals on what to do with Meadowbrook. From expropriation by municipalities, to assistance from higher levels of government, restrictive zoning, with the worst scenario, to develop and complete the asphalt and concrete monument of folly. Now being studied and seriously looked at by the Arrondissement /Borough of Lachine

None of these appear to be satisfactory to Immeubles Canadien Pacifique or the general public whatever the choice.

In the matter of development for the years 1993,1994 there were only six building permits issued by the City of Côte St.Luc, zero in 1994. the indications of a flat market was fairly obvious. The MUC as it was then constituted ,missed a golden opportunity to acquire Meadowbrook.

Reversing this situation ,there has been a turn in the construction and development sector. This should not in any way become a reason to destroy Meadowbrook. Except for higher costs the reasons for acquiring Meadowbrook and preserving it as a green space have not changed one iota.

In December 1994 I visited a community north of the Toronto Metropolitan

Area ,the City of Vaughan. This city, during the height of its development in 1988, the mayor and her constituents saw in their wisdom the dangers of unlimited development. As a result the council of the City of Vaughan purchased the Uplands Golf and Ski Centre located in it's territory for 6.2 million dollars .The 6.2 million was the cost of 23.3 acres of tableland. While the Uplands property is not the size of Meadowbrook, which is approximately 141 acres, by using the cost of the Uplands property it could serve as a guide to establish a cost to purchase Meadowbrook. Basically the cost of purchasing Meadowbrook should be much less per square foot than the Uplands property that is that the Uplands course was serviced land, where as Meadowbrook is

not.

Another option to acquire Meadowbrook would be an exchange of properties ,which should be a part of any negotiations with Fairmont Hotels and its subsidiary Canadien Pacifique. Then there is a matter of tax breaks. In the past large corporations have asked for and in many cases have received tax breaks from the Federal government, even though their financial status was on the rise .The loss of Meadowbrook by Fairmont Hotels (Canadien Pacifique)could be easily justified as a tax break. This, in turn ,would give Fairmont Hotels the opportunity to play its part to preserve the territory of Meadowbrook as a green space.

To my knowledge and I could be corrected, I have been informed that Canadian Pacific Railway, though not in similar circumstances, has saved a golf course in Vancouver, B.C. which was its property. A precedent has been set, let us continue.

What are my wishes? If the loss by Fairmont (Canadien Pacifique) of Meadowbrook is acceptable to governments as a tax break or there is a purchase made for Meadowbrook within the policy for the protection and enhancement of natural spaces, then Fairmont (Canadian Pacific) should make any turnover of its Meadowbrook property conditional that, in perpetuity, it remains a green space.

For the many months there is a lawsuit in progress, by which the City of Montreal and the former City of Côte St, Luc are being sued for \$20,000,000 by Canadian Pacific as a result of the passing of the by-law which rezoned the Meadowbrook Golf course to recreational/commerce. The amended zoning by-law was a milestone in the ongoing struggle to preserve Meadowbrook. Now that the City of Montreal is faced by this lawsuit, the resolve to preserve Meadowbrook must continue.

I have been informed by both Councilor Dida Berku and Borough President Robert Libman that this case is going very well and that the City of Montreal would be successful in the defense of the by-law. Should this be the result, then a solution has been found to effectively help to preserve the Arrondissement /Borough of Lachine portion of Meadowbrook in the same manner as Côte Saint Luc. In other words pass a by-law similar to the one passed by Côte Saint Luc. (A copy of this by-law has been included with this presentation)

It is amazing that a corporation such as Canadian Pacific Railway and its successors, Fairmont Hotels (Immeubles Canadien Pacifique) that pride themselves on being good corporate citizens do not act in this manner. For years the Canadian Pacific Railway has been preaching to its neighbours, in reply to the many complaints regarding train noise, air pollution and other detriments with matter of fact answers. We were here first, if you build your homes near the railroad suffer the consequences, too bad.

Now, these self righteous corporations want to develop a property, which will face the same conditions, as its neighbours, without even a single thought given to its wrongful action. What irony, what a disgrace.

I have mentioned a number of possibilities on how to preserve Meadowbrook as a green space, unfortunately there has not been any mention of Meadowbrook of any kind either in the City of Montreal capital expenditures budget or the Sommet de Montreal conferences Workshop 2.3 which designated a number of locations for preservation. Nor in the latest information published re the policy for the protection of natural spaces. Truly this is a dilemma which should be rectified. Once the case of the Canadian Pacific lawsuit is finalized, then the by-law to amend the zoning by Lachine, of its Meadowbrook portion as per the Côte Saint Luc by-law, should be immediately implemented. That is until such time as funds can be made available to effect the other possibilities proposed. .

To further qualify my statements and show what the will of the people can do,I would like to take you back to the years of the 1860's and how Mount Royal Park came into being.(Reference City of Montreal Archives)

Montrealers were infuriated when a person by the name of Lamothe cut all the trees from his land which was not as yet a park.The wood was to be used for heating purposes .Montrealers were scandalized at this gross disfiguration of the mountain,public meetings of protest were held and the reaction was that the City of Montreal expropriated the mountain to form a park.Negotiations took place between 1869 and 1875.Finally, for a sum of a million dollars considered as considerable for the time,the mountain for the most part was expropriated.

Men of the stature of Sir H.Allen,Hugh Taylor and others had their mountain properties expropriated for the betterment of the community at large.

Much of the natural and unspoiled beauty that Mount Royal retains to this day,is due to the efforts and vision of it's designer,Frederick Law Olmstead.Also due to his philosophy of what such a park should be like.

With his departure from Montreal his parting warning was:

bring the park to the city but do not bring the city to the park. And so it is with Meadowbrook.

At the beginning of this presentation I wrote about man's destiny and history.Let the preservation of Meadowbrook be yours Mayor Tremblay , in the grand scheme of things, I have played only a small part to inform,the rest is up to you.

To Councilors Dauphin,Cowell-Poitras and Blanchet of Lachine,as good neighbors come on board you will never regret the choice.

Let us together,work to preserve Meadowbrook,as the people of Montreal did in the 1860's;as the City of Vaughan did in1988 and as the inhabitants of other communities who preserved their environments did in the face of what is ironically called progress.

Jack Cabot

May 3,2004