

Move on green spaces, mayor urged

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At last month's City Council meeting, Mayor Gérald Tremblay certainly got an earful from a dozen conservationists urging him to move on acquiring new green spaces and ensure the protection of existing ones.

"We're concerned that you could be backing away from commitments to the protection of natural spaces across the city and boosting the dismal three per cent protected lands," declared Sylvia Oljemark, a leading Green Coalition member.

"I just want to assure you that my commitment remains firm," the mayor replied.

During the 2001 election campaign, Tremblay proclaimed that "What's green will remain green." Six months later, he lifted the MUC's 10-year freeze on green-space acquisitions. Last December, the City of Montreal committed \$36 million over three years to acquire green spaces, and OCPM public hearings were held last spring on its proposed natural-spaces policy.

However, besides acquiring some of the Rapides du Cheval Blanc woods last year in a land swap with the developer, green advocates have seen little to show for their efforts. Several wondered when the long-awaited natural-spaces policy will be released and whether it will include those in demerged boroughs.

Mile End councillor Helen Fotopulos, recently made Executive Committee member responsible for green spaces and parks, stated that the City has every intention of going ahead with its natural-spaces policy that should be ready by October. Agreeing with citizens' calls for an island-wide policy, she added that "we're also looking at other greening methods that would positively affect built-up, city-centre areas."

Conservationists also wondered whether City Hall would heed the OCPM's call to protect the Meadowbrook golf course (bordering Lachine and Cote St. Luc) and Beaconsfield's Angell



Green activists want to ensure that natural spaces such as the Meadowbrook golf course are conserved.

Woods from developers' imminent plans. Avrom Shtern, a supporter of the first green space, asked if it would declare a construction freeze on natural spaces until its policy is adopted.

He also asked how the City will spend its first year's allocation of \$12 million. Technical committees are working on various transactions, replied Fotopulos, with the aim of putting that amount to "good green use by the end of 2004."

Others expressed concerns that existing nature-parks may be threatened. Activist Richard Marcil brought up two recent public notices concerning a meeting that seem to allow the transfer of two sectors of an east-end regional park to developers for a golf-course extension and the construction of luxury housing as well as the extension of a street and housing construction in the Bois-de-Liesse nature-park.

Regarding the former plans, Fotopulos said the encroachment was on residential part of the

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project, while the mayor denied that Bois-de-Liesse would be affected in any way.

With Transport Québec scheduled to make known its West Island highway plans this fall, Green Coalition member David Fletcher asked that any decision regarding them be deferred until the natural-spaces policy is in place.

Several borough mayors there have pushed for more roads there to ease traffic congestion – a plan that may cut through Bois-de-Liesse park. Tremblay replied that he hasn't heard of such a plan, adding that they're looking at alternatives to that scenario.