

This is in response to an article on page A6 by James Mennie in today's Gazette (April 05, 2006). I am hoping it is short enough to make the cut. We have not been getting much response from the Gazette, with the same info before. Keep fingers crossed.

-Dave Fletcher for the Green Coalition Verte

Dear Mr. Mennie,

Here is my response to your article on the \$163 million surplus:

The surplus of \$163 million should go to improving quality of life and into something having lasting value. This is a windfall after all. Let's spend it on ourselves.

I would propose that the city pick up where the MUC left off in October 1992 when a moratorium was placed on spending to protect natural spaces for public use. By that time the MUC had spent half of a \$200 million budget commitment, made in 1990, to the enlargement and enhancement of its Nature Park network.

Today, these Nature Parks, with all their native biodiversity intact, are well used and contribute immeasurably to the physical, mental and social wellbeing of all Montreal Islanders. What grand vision. What a grand gift — paid for with our own money.

But the job remains only half done. On-island municipalities have saved, collectively, barely 3.25% of Island's territory in ecologically intact natural space, against a benchmark of 8% recognized by Montreal and the province. Island-wide we can achieve only six percent in total if we save everything of value left. If Montreal and the Agglomeration Council proceeds with its Natural Spaces Protection Policy the way it has to date, we will remain forever at the bottom of the heap among North American cities for these sorts of asset.

The \$163 million, devoted to finishing the job started by the MUC, would be one time spending on natural space that is self-maintaining and that would be part of our city's heritage forever. The loss of those precious places would also be forever. And the loss proceeds apace: 70 hectares per year on average.

Quality of life means different things to different people. But let's just say that improved garbage pickup would be put at the top of the list only by the terminally cheerless — read our political class. Ditto "turning it over to the boroughs and reducing administration costs." Potholes? Fill 'em and they'll be back in equal numbers next year. These, and other like expenditures, would be throwing good money that could be better spent down powerful, all-sucking blackholes. These are the sort of "priority" that will demand our attention next year, and the year after that, and on ad infinitum. They deserve to be planned for within the bounds of the regular budget.

Let's spend that bonus money on a relaxing vacation away from the noise and bustle of the workaday grind. A vacation at our doorsteps, enjoyed, virtually, whenever the mood strikes. Where the sounds and smells and colours — and serendipity — round about calm the frenzy of the streets. Where our young people can let their imaginations soar.

Has anyone ever heard of "nature rage?"

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