

Fight still on for Golf Dorval By Kristin Morency, The Suburban

Plans to demolish 18 holes at a Dorval golf course could be illegal and should be suspended until certain protocols are followed, say representatives of the group SOS Dorval.

Aéroports de Montréal (ADM) announced last December that part of Golf Dorval's land will be used to expand the airfield at Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport.

Paul Wilkinson, a member of SOS Dorval, a group dedicated to preserve greenspace in Dorval, said the ADM isn't authorized to touch Golf Dorval unless Dorval grants the company a zoning change.

"[The golf course] is zoned as recreational, so Dorval has to agree to change that [...]. The Minister of the Environment said they will not give [ADM] the go-ahead until the zoning has been changed," Wilkinson said.

He also said the ADM must consult citizens' groups, such as SOS Dorval and the Green Coalition, before bulldozing across "literally thousands of trees" because Golf Dorval is "crown land that belongs to everybody."

He added that ADM's plans to use half of the land for "real estate" is questionable.

"We've asked for a copy of the lease so that we can ascertain what it is that they have been empowered to do by the Ministry of Transport," Wilkinson said.

"It's one thing to say this land is required for airport business, and quite another to suggest they have the license to turn around and sell off or lease the land, especially given that ADM signed a protocol for sustainable development. Is that signature not worth something?"

ADM spokespersons were not available to comment by press time.

Though more than 20,000 people in Dorval and the West Island signed a petition opposing ADM's development plans, Dorval Mayor Edgar Rouleau sat alongside ADM president James Cherry at the December press conference to announce the project — an act that sparked criticism from residents.

In an interview with The Suburban last week, Rouleau said, "I do not co-operate with ADM, my responsibility is with the city of Dorval."

But he added the land "belongs to ADM" and that a zoning change isn't required for the company to build.

"It's federal land, it wouldn't be illegal. The law allows them to do whatever they want," he said.

Nor does ADM have to consult with citizens' groups about the project, Rouleau said.

"I'm not aware of a company or a city or anybody that has to have permission of some group to do [something]."

But Wilkinson said Rouleau is simply misinformed on the topic.

"ADM is not a private company. They're a non-profit corporation created by the Minister of Transport to run all the airports in Montreal," he explained.

"There is a protocol they must follow and for Mr. Rouleau to say they can do what they want, it's their land, I disagree 100 percent. They definitely have to follow a process. If Mr. Rouleau is not familiar with that, it's okay," Wilkinson said, adding that the mayor has come "a long way" since the December press conference.

Nonetheless, Rouleau said the city is not interested in hiring lawyers to defend Golf Dorval, as Wilkinson suggested.

"Even if I hire lawyers and say 'well look, we're going to take \$100,000 and fight them' we'll lose at the end because we've done it before [...] Even if we go that route, and I told Mr. Wilkinson, it would be money not well spent. We know what the results are going to be," he said.

But at a council meeting Monday night, Rouleau agreed to look into making SOS Dorval's petition more available to Dorval residents by putting copies in libraries and community centres, Wilkinson said.

He added that MP Marlene Jennings will present the current petition this week to the House of Commons.

Wilkinson said his biggest concern is that ADM will start the bulldozing process before the legalities are out of the way.

"This is something unfortunate, and especially in Montreal it's been going on a long time. There's a sad and sorry history in Montreal where developers have gone in, bulldozed whatever, and been given a token fine. They've done it with beautiful buildings and this is a beautiful community resource. Once they bulldoze it [...] it's hard to put it back, so that's a major concern."

2007-02-28 10:41:43