

Time runs out for Golf Dorval

The Suburban West Island News By Kristin Morency, 2007-05-09

Environmental activists trying to save the green space at Golf Dorval say the Aéroports de Montréal (ADM) is going around the law to avoid a public consultation on developing the land.

The ADM announced last December plans to bulldoze across 18 holes at the golf course in order to expand the airfield at Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport, and members of SOS Dorval and the Green Coalition have been fighting to stop the development.

Golf Dorval has rented the land from ADM for 25 years, but their lease expired in 2001 and since then have been renewing on a yearly basis.

The plan calls for the demolition of 18 holes of Golf Dorval's Gently and Oakville courses, while 18 holes will remain untouched for the time being.

Paul Wilkinson of SOS Dorval, a group that aims to preserve green space in Dorval, says the ADM has never cared about how its activities affect the environment and surrounding communities — a fact that Wilkinson said was proven at last Thursday's ADM general meeting.

"It's a sad thing ... It's about the economy for ADM. It should be about sustainable development, it's what they committed to when they signed the accord in 2003 and they're not adhering to it," Wilkinson said.

On the ADM's website, it is stated that the not-for-profit corporation "is an active partner in several organizations working toward sustainable development" including Montreal's first strategic plan for sustainable development, Wilkinson pointed out.

"But when it comes to ADM, they seem to be allowed to do whatever they want."

According to municipal bylaws, the land where Golf Dorval is situated is zoned recreational, and the ADM, theoretically, should request the land be re-zoned for industrial use before they bring out the bulldozers.

"But Cherry says he doesn't have to follow [the law]," Wilkinson said.

Members of SOS Dorval have been trying for months to get in touch with James Cherry [ADM president] — they say the ADM shouldn't go ahead with the project until they have held a public consultation.

Wilkinson obtained a copy of the ADM's lease on the land from MP Marlene Jennings and said the document stipulates the ADM must consult community organizations before proceeding with land activity.

Additionally, Wilkinson said the northern portion of the course is set to be used by the ADM for industrial real estate.

"If Cherry wants to put hangars [on the south side], okay. He can justify that it's for airport operations...But on the north side of the course, where there are still thousands of trees, there's no other justification for putting anything there, than going for the bottom line, for dollars, to develop industrial condos," Wilkinson said.

Green coalition spokesperson Sylvia Oljemark said she was among the countless concerned citizens at last week's meeting. During question period, Oljemark asked Cherry when an environmental impact study would be made to assess how the wetlands and streams at Golf Dorval will be affected by the airport's expansion. She also asked Cherry when the Green Coalition would receive a reply to a letter they sent to the ADM March 9, asking that their group be included in consultations about Golf Dorval.

"He didn't give much of a definitive answer," Oljemark said in a phone interview Monday morning.

"He said he would look into why we hadn't received a reply to our letter. There was lots of just skating around," Oljemark said, adding, "Over and over, Cherry said, 'You're having [your public consultation] right now,' when he was asked by various people whether he would hold a public consultation on the topic of the golf course.

"Sorry, this is not a consultation; this is your annual meeting with a question period. That does not constitute a consultation, it's not a forum for consultation at all," Oljemark said.

Calls made to the ADM by The Suburban were not returned. David Fletcher, another Green Coalition spokesperson, said the ADM's 2006 annual report presented at the meeting "had an emphasis on economic development."

"We heard of [statements] like, 'We're proud to contribute to Montreal's economic growth' well that's fine, but that growth can't be at the expense of social and environmental considerations," Fletcher said.

"I'd like to remind Mr. Cherry that [ADM is] a public corporation ... We have the entitlement as taxpayers to give our input on what happens to the quality of our living space," he added.

Both SOS Dorval and the Green Coalition plan on devising new tactics to fight the encroachment on one of Montreal's few remaining green spaces.

"There are other avenues open to us, including political ones," Fletcher said without giving any specifics.

"We haven't given up," said Wilkinson. "One of the things we're doing is discussing a change in tactics," he added, not wishing to elaborate.

But they will likely have to act fast: When contacted about a month ago, Cherry said he "[expects] to start working on Golf Dorval this summer."

In fact, just last week Wilkinson said he noticed surveyors and engineers at the course taking soil samples in preparation for the demolition process. Cherry also said he had no plans to consult any community groups before proceeding.