

ADM: 'It's not our role to preserve city's greenspace'

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The Aéroports de Montréal (ADM) is still at war with environmental activists over the development of Golf Dorval's land for airport use.

The ADM announced in December 2006 plans to bulldoze across 18 out of 36 holes at the golf course in order to expand the airfield at Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport.

Construction is currently underway.

"We're destroying nothing," said Christiane Beaulieu, vice president of public affairs at ADM. "I think for the municipality, if they want green zones, it's for them to do it. Don't ask the airport. It's not our role to make sure there are enough greenspaces in Montreal," she said.

The remaining 18 holes of the golf course, which are intact for the time being, will be developed in seven years, said Beaulieu.

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

Environmental activists have been fighting to stop the development of Golf Dorval, but their concerns have been repeatedly brushed off by ADM, said Paul Wilkinson of SOS Dorval, a group that aims to preserve the city's green space.

Wilkinson said the airport is being expanded at the expense of migratory birds (such as blue herons, ducks and egrets), other fauna (like red foxes) and wetlands located on the golf course.

"For them to allow the bulldozing of a migratory bird habitat violates the International Migratory Birds Act," he said, adding that "thousands of migratory birds" are at Golf Dorval.

"They've bulldozed one area and filled in a huge pond," said Wilkinson. "I took pictures of Canada geese" in that exact spot in fall 2006, he said.

But Beaulieu said the birds near the airport create a danger.

"We have to chase them away because we don't want them to be in the engines of airplanes and cause an accident," she said. "Right now, we're trying to make sure they don't come near the airport too much, because it's a dangerous mix, birds and airplanes."

Beaulieu said the land, which "has always been earmarked for development" will be beneficial not only for airport operations, but for industrial real estate, too.

"It will certainly be beneficial for those companies that benefit from the proximity of an airport for their business. There are some companies that are making parts that have to be transported by aircrafts, so it's good [for them] to be near the airport," she said.

Although Wilkinson conceded that using the land for airport use, such as the construction of new hangars, is "legitimate," he maintains that the ADM's plans to use a significant portion of the property for industrial real estate is "not acceptable."

Wilkinson said he is "100 percent convinced it can be stopped," as long as Dorval Mayor Edgar Rouleau "decides he wants to preserve the golf course."

Wilkinson said he believes the ADM will have to eventually request a zoning change in order to continue to build on the land.

"Where the city holds the upper hand is where the city would provide services, like roads, water and sewage... You can't get very far if you don't have those things," Wilkinson said.

Rouleau said the ADM hasn't yet asked for a zoning change.

"They might ask, I don't know," he said, adding that "we're always concerned whenever the land is in Dorval. We're responsible... We still have the green space, we haven't lost that. [The birds] have changed houses, but they're still on the golf course."

According to Beaulieu, the zoning was temporarily changed by Dorval while they were leasing the land from the airport.

"They re-zoned it as parkland... So they don't have to pay heavy taxes on the golf course," she said.

"But the real zoning of that land, according to our plan, which has been approved by the city and government, is industrial."

Wilkinson is not going to give up fighting for the greenspace, and is appealing to the federal and provincial governments for their help.

He recently sent a second petition Jan. 5 to Transport Minister Lawrence Cannon.

"The Island of Montreal's [greenspace] is down to 3.2 percent. The provincial norm is supposed to be eight percent," Wilkinson said.

He added that he hopes Rouleau will "negotiate" with the ADM. "I hope he says, 'I will provide [infrastructure] services for the shops and hangars, however, in return for that, I want you to back off your plan to put in industrial sites.' That's what [SOS Dorval] is hoping is going to happen."



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