

Dumping on escarpment is slippery slope, activists say

by Martin C. Barry

The Monitor, Serving the West End since 1926 Article online since August 26th 2008, 11:35

<http://www.themonitor.ca/article-n243049-Dumping-on-escarpment-is-slippery-slope-activists-say.html>

The Falaise St. Jacques, a lush linear greenspace ranging along the southern border of Côte des Neiges-Notre Dame de Grâce, is in danger of reverting to its former state as a hillside dump because of abuses some businesses are alleged to be committing, according to local conservation activists. The St. Jacques Escarpment, as it is also known, hangs down a cliff on the south side of St. Jacques Street in NDG.

It was created by the City of Montreal during the 1980s to rejuvenate a site that had been a notorious dumping ground, for everything from junked refrigerators and old building materials to wrecked cars.

The City of Montreal, which created the space and has part-ownership, carefully planted the once barren ground with a wide assortment of trees and bushes in an effort to stabilize the earth on the steep slope.

While plans were initially to allow public access, that subsequently changed when it was discovered in more recent years that parts of the slope remain unstable and are a potential danger to anyone visiting the site. Montreal has bestowed the Falaise with "eco-territory" status, which is supposed to afford it a degree of environmental protection.

"There are all kinds of things there, including construction materials, roofing materials," said Avrom Shtern, a local environmental activist. "You go a few feet and you see wonders, and then you go another few feet and it's a bunch of junk."

"And they're saying this is an eco-territory? ... It's in danger of reverting to its former self." Among the companies Shtern suspects are responsible for the dumping are a roofer and a renovation supplies business, both located on St. Jacques at the top of the escarpment.

"We saw roofing debris, we saw bits of concrete and stone," added Peter McQueen, who went with Shtern this past spring on a field trip to the area. They believe the dumping may have been done in past winters, when snow was plowed from parking areas at the top, down the escarpment.

Responding to questions on the escarpment's condition during the borough council's monthly meeting on Aug. 4, Mayor Michael Applebaum acknowledged that responsibility for it should rightfully belong to Côte des Neiges-NDG, because the businesses at the top are in the borough, and they also own the land below.

However, CDN-NDG can't take action because the hillside where the junk and garbage are landing is actually part of the Sud-Ouest borough. And while there have been discussions between the two boroughs about CDN-NDG annexing the area, Sud-Ouest "feels that it is in their territory, they want to keep it, and they're not open to any discussions," said Applebaum.

"The provincial government, which has jurisdiction to decide on what the electoral maps are, hopefully they will rejig the map and realize that it should be totally in our territory," he added. "When it comes to cleaning up the Falaise, it sounds very, very interesting. But I would have to speak to the Sud-Ouest because it's located in their area."

(Martin Barry)



This old tire dumped at the Falaise is one of many such objects in the area.