

It's time to save L'Anse-à-l'Orme woodlands

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Published: Thursday, May 15 © The Gazette (Montreal) 2008

Recent reports in the media indicate that yet another piece of the Rivière à l'Orme eco-territory is slated for development in Ste. Anne de Bellevue. This time it's the east side of L'Anse-à-l'Orme Rd., an area bordering the backyards of many people in Kirkland living on streets like Old Forest and Timberlea.

When most people bought their homes in that area, they were assured the woods behind their homes would be protected. Just north of the power lines are woods that are indeed protected and form part of the L'Anse-à-l'Orme Nature Park of Montreal. It baffles me why the city of Montreal did not purchase the now threatened woodlands when it created the park in 1992.

Ecologists know that once you start fragmenting an ecosystem, its integrity becomes compromised and its biological diversity becomes immensely reduced. The land back then was also much cheaper to acquire. It was former Montreal mayor Pierre Bourque and the Montreal Urban Community who set up a moratorium on buying natural spaces just after 1992, so I guess some of the blame can be placed on those administrations.

The fact of the matter is, this century-old forest, now seriously threatened by a residential development, is part of an area that is the last continuous natural area that contains forests of many types, fields and meadows, and wetlands on the island of Montreal.

We know that Montreal is dead last among Canadian cities when it comes to protecting natural spaces. It has one last chance to protect an area that will be highly valued, especially in the future as priorities change, and nature near urban areas becomes increasingly scarce. In a situation like this, it is imperative that the provincial government step in and protect this ecological oasis.

But where have the two local Liberal MNAs Geoffrey Kelley and Yolande James been on this file?

It would seem that of all the local issues in the West Island this would be a top priority judging from how the environment has become such a major concern in the last two years. But there has been seemingly no action on their part.

Ste. Anne presented its urban plan at a public consultation forum in November 2006. A majority of residents present opposed it. The city promised that night to take some of the residents' concerns into consideration about what it would mean to the beautiful natural area that is also home to a population of deer and is part of the natural heritage of Ste. Anne de Bellevue.

In the end, however, it passed the urban plan exactly as it was presented. The borough council also failed to consult its own environment committee about the urban plan even after members of the committee voiced their opposition to the plan.

Ste. Anne likes to claim it needs the tax revenue. However, it has one of the best financial situations, with a federally-owned hospital, an industrial park, a CEGEP and a university all paying an ample amount of taxes in addition to ordinary residents.

So in the end, we have a situation where three different levels of government have been and continue to be myopic, archaic, undemocratic and unable to look to the future and do what, in this day and age, is common sense.

The right thing to do would be for all three levels of government to co-operate to protect this area in its entirety and create the largest nature park on the island, which could be an incredible recreational and educational resource for people living in and visiting our area for decades to come.

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