

Protect Montreal region greenbelt: MoWest

By Joel Goldenberg, The Suburban 2008-06-04

Montreal West was the first Quebec municipality last Tuesday to declare its support for the creation and protection of the Montreal Archipelago Ecological Park, a greenbelt for southwestern Quebec and "mosaic of forests and floodplains" stretching from Sorel to Mirabel to the U.S. border.

Councillor Elizabeth Ulin read the resolution, pointing out that more than 50 environmental activist groups and other organizations, including Greenpeace and the Sierra Club, support the saving of the maple-hickory forest domain in the area "by ensuring that a minimum of 12 percent of the ecological zone is protected in perpetuity.

"This natural heritage has the greatest biodiversity in all of Quebec while, at the same time, it is the most seriously threatened by urban development," the resolution says. "The region of Montreal has the lowest percentage of greenspace of 14 Canadian metropolitan areas. The Canadian and Quebec government have a duty to fulfill treaty obligations stemming from the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, which they both endorsed."

Members of the Green Coalition and Les Amis de Meadowbrook, present at the meeting, hailed the resolution's passage.

"The target area is a little more than half the size of Vermont," said the Green Coalition's David Fletcher. "There are a lot of plant and animal species that are normally found further south, in the U.S. down to the Carolinas, and it's very unique.

"If you look at the Quebec biodiversity atlas, you'll find most of the hotspots for species lost are right in this zone, so it's critically important. The Quebec government is claiming there's enough conservation, six percent, and we're saying it's three to four percent. The international standard is 12 percent. While the government is getting a lot of press and credit for doing stuff up at the tundra and boreal forest, it's ignoring the deciduous (trees that lose their leaves seasonally) forest part, particularly this corner of it that's under severe pressure."

Sylvia Oljemark of the Green Coalition said the Montreal region does not have a substantial greenbelt.

"Why not Montreal?" she said

"Even cities like Chicago and New York are doing better than we are," Fletcher said.