

Tremblay's environmental record gets mixed reviews

The real test will come in the mayor's plan to reduce the number of cars on the road

HENRY AUBIN, The Gazette Published: Saturday, May 31 2008

An environmental group produced a report card this week on the Tremblay administration's environmental record until the end of its fifth year in power, 2006. The report card is full of objective information, and the fact that the administration collaborated with the research, and published it jointly, in no way compromises the document's credibility.

Let's start with the relatively positive aspects of this 103-page, data-crammed evaluation by the Conseil régional de l'environnement de Montréal.

First, water quality in the St. Lawrence River and Rivière des Praires improved slightly over the five years with more beaches safe for swimming - mostly on the western half of the island. Since water quality is the agglomeration council's responsibility, this reflects well on the aggro's boss, Mayor Gérald Tremblay.

Note, however, that the reverse is true in the island's eastern part, where water quality "diminished substantially." And the quality of water immediately downstream of Montreal "deteriorated significantly." The administration said yesterday that changes at the city's sewage-treatment plant would have improved matters since 2006, but we don't know by how much.

The amount of green space protected against development edged upward from 3.2 per cent to 3.4 per cent of the island's territory by the end of 2006. The administration said yesterday that since then, this has gone to 4.2 per cent.

This is progress. Still, as the Green Coalition points out, it is short of the six-per-cent target that the administration set in 2004 (and the eight-per-cent goal that Quebec has set).

Bicycle paths are booming, and so is cycling. The island this year has 400 kilometres of bike paths, twice what it had in 2000.

Excellent as this initiative is in terms of responding to public demand, let's be honest about the environmental benefits. Given Montreal's climate, cycling will never attract enough people from cars to make a real dent in fossil-fuel consumption. Indeed, many (if not most) cyclists would otherwise travel by public transit. You could argue that by encouraging cycling, bike paths actually reduce the number of riders on public transit - and thus help deepen its deficits.

Now for the report card's really negative aspects.

Let's not dwell on recycling, where Montreal is far, far behind Quebec's goal, set in 1998, that municipalities should recycle 60 per cent of recyclable materials. Also, let's not linger on industrial air pollution, which is up. Instead, let's move on to the overriding environmental problem, climate change, and to the motor vehicles that contribute to it.

Despite the stability of the island's population since 2002, the number of vehicles registered on the island rose by 6.5 per cent during the administration's first five years and, though the report doesn't say so, they have kept increasing at the same clip since then. The resulting rise in greenhouse gases is thousands of times more important than any benefits coming from cycling.

The administration is a big part of the problem. To be sure, it has made it illegal to idle a car for more than three minutes (a bylaw that is rarely enforced), adopted a policy of discouraging downtown driving by making parking harder (a policy that reduced only 400 parking spots last year) and started replacing some six-cylinder municipal vehicles with four-cylinder models. But, even if these steps lived up to their potential, their impact would be tiny in the full scope of Tremblay's record.

That scope includes agreeing to provincial plans to bring more highways (and thus cars) into the city. It includes support for major shopping hubs located far from métro lines and thus to depend largely on car-driving customers (as with the Griffintown, Viger station and St. Michel projects). And it includes Tremblay's passive acceptance, as head of the metropolitan council, of the off-island suburbs' resistance to curbs on the growth of car-reliant development.

This year's spiralling gasoline prices are slowing the public's increasing use of cars. So far however, neither Montreal's nor Quebec's policymaking reflects this new reality.

The big test of Tremblay's environmental maturity will come in several weeks when he unveils his final transport plan. The test will not be what he says he wants to do but, rather, what will actually be achievable. Keep your expectations modest. In his first 61/2 years as mayor, chipping modestly away at problems has been his way, not attacking them.

© The Gazette (Montreal) 2008

The Website for the Mayor's Conference - Local Action on Biodiversity is <http://www.iclei.org/index.php?id=6802> whence the attachment below and more. Under Urban Biodiversity and City Cases (briefcase) you can "Download a series of local case on biodiversity" profiling other cities as well as Montreal.

*David Fletcher
Vice President and Spokesperson
Green Coalition*

LOCAL ACTION FOR BIODIVERSITY

A SERIES OF LOCAL CASES



City of Montréal, Canada

Policies and plans to protect natural heritage

SUMMARY: As host city to the UN Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity, the City of Montréal has demonstrated special commitment to biodiversity for many years. The City of Montréal formalized local commitment to protecting biodiversity through a combination of the city's Master Plan, Heritage Policy, Policy on the Protection and Enhancement of Natural Habitats and first ever Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development. Spurred to action as a result of these plans and policies, Montréal has developed several exemplary new programs designed to protect and enhance biodiversity in and around the city.

Biodiversity & biodiversity management in Montréal

Ecological network

Montréal's Master Plan, which defines the framework for urban development, explicitly identifies commitments made to protect and promote Montréal's natural heritage. Under the plan, Montréal set up a network of twenty large parks, half of which are nature parks. Efforts are devoted to preserving these parks in their natural state, keeping invasive species in check, and providing educational opportunities for the general public. Montreal also



View of downtown Montreal from Mount Royal Summit.

established ten écoterritoires boasting high levels of biodiversity. Conservation efforts in these areas are based on ecological networks comprised of biodiversity core areas, buffer zones and ecological corridors which link various core areas with one another.

Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development

In 2005, Montréal adopted the city's first Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development. Drawn up collaboratively with eighty community partners and forty municipal administrative units, the plan is intended as a collective commitment to making sustainable development the foundation upon which future building in Montréal will be based.

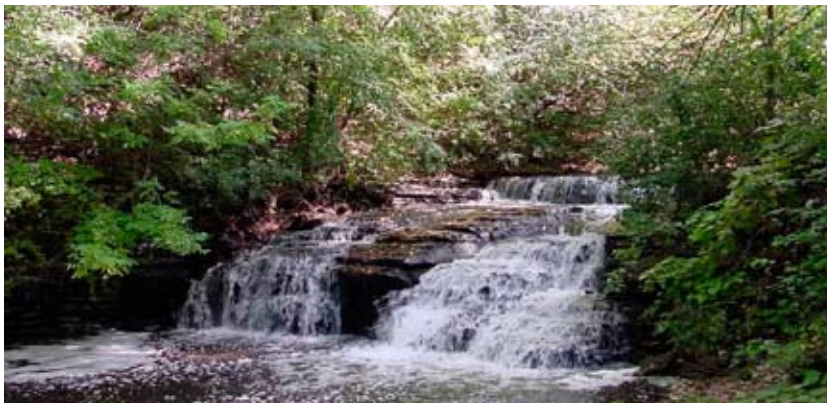
The 5-year plan focuses on improving air quality, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving the quality of residential living areas, practising responsible resource management, fostering sustainable practices in industry, business and institutions - both public and private, as well as protecting biological diversity, natural habitats, and green spaces. The plan defines action to be taken by municipal authorities and community partners to meet predetermined goals. During Phase 2 of the plan (2007-2009), biodiversity actions will include: increasing protected natural habitats to 8% of total island area under city jurisdiction, augmenting total biomass, signing a partnership agreement with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity providing for cooperation regarding training programs, and setting up a centre on biodiversity at Montréal Botanical Garden.

Heritage Policy and Policy on the Protection and Enhancement of Natural Habitats

In 2005, Montréal adopted a Heritage Policy which recognizes the conservation and enhancement of Montréal's natural heritage as a priority concern. A year earlier, the city adopted a Policy on the Protection and Enhancement of Natural Habitats with the primary objective to double the size of natural habitats under ecological management within the city. This is being achieved by careful monitoring and management of ecosystems in existing parks and by integrating significant conservation initiatives within major urban development projects in the urban fringe.

Tree policy

In 2005, Montréal adopted a tree policy to provide the city with an effective vision of tree-related issues and activities. The policy recommended the establishment of a tree inventory, arboreal plan and public tree maintenance program, as well as the adoption of regulations pertaining to the protection of trees on private property. In 2006, Montréal planted 9,000 new trees pursuant to policy guidelines which advocate “planting the right tree in the right place”.



De Montigny Stream Basin Ecoterritory.

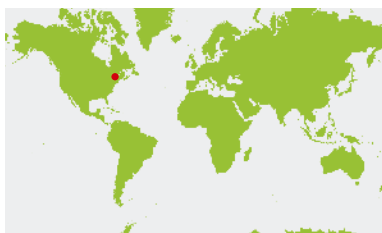
Saint-Michel Environmental Park

The 192-hectare Saint-Michel Environmental Park is a creation of the City of Montréal. The original site was transformed from a quarry/refuse disposal site into a vast environmental technology and educational complex set against an extensive backdrop of green. It now includes a circus arts centre, a recycling centre, a biogas power plant, environmental education initiatives, and traditional recreation areas.

Involvement in international initiatives

The City of Montréal continues to play a significant role in promoting biodiversity initiatives at the international level. Montréal is presently the host city for seven international organizations active in matters of the environment and hosts the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (since 1996). In 2005, Montréal hosted the 11th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Mayor of Montréal is also Vice Chairperson of the World Mayors Council on Climate Change with a special focus on biodiversity. Within ICLEI, Montréal has shown special commitment on climate protection and has linked this to biodiversity. The Mayor of Montréal figures among the original five mayors who signed the Curitiba Declaration on Cities and Biodiversity and, as a result, now sits on the steering committee of the Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity.

City contacts & profile



Biodiversity protection in Montréal takes many different forms, occurs in a multitude of locations and is shaped by numerous policies and partnerships.

With a population of over 1.6 million inhabitants, the **CITY OF MONTRÉAL** is the second largest city in Canada and the largest city in the Province of Québec. The city is located on the Island of Montréal in southwestern Québec at the confluence of the Ottawa and St Lawrence Rivers. As a result of unique geography, Montréal is home to 315 kilometres of shoreline. Riverbank and island waterway ecosystems represent significant sources of biological diversity. The city's green spaces make up 13% of the total land area and include Mount Royal Park, a 200-hectare oasis of green in honour of which the city was named.

Name: Michèle Picard

Department: Biodiversity Coordinator

E-mail: mpicard@ville.montreal.qc.ca

Website: ville.montreal.qc.ca/biodiversity

LOCAL ACTION FOR BIODIVERSITY is a global urban biodiversity initiative of ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability in cooperation with IUCN. This pilot project of 21 cities around the globe focuses on the key roles that local governments play in conserving the world's biodiversity and retaining the relationship between people and nature. See: www.iclei.org/lab; lab@iclei.org

COUNTDOWN 2010 is a powerful network of more than 600 partners working together towards the 2010 biodiversity target. Each partner commits additional efforts to tackle the causes of biodiversity loss. The secretariat – hosted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) – facilitates and encourages action, promotes the importance of the 2010 biodiversity target and assesses progress towards 2010. See: www.countdown2010.org

CITIES & BIODIVERSITY is an initiative of local governments and UN agencies to increase awareness on the relevant role of cities and towns for conserving and managing biodiversity. See: www.iclei.org/biodiversity

THE “CITIES & BIODIVERSITY CASE SERIES” is started in 2008 on the occasion of the UNCBD Conference of the Parties (COP) 9 in Bonn/Germany in May 2008. Funding is provided by UNEP, with co-funding from ICLEI, IUCN and the City of Bonn. The case descriptions are compiled by the “Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB)” project team in the ICLEI Africa Secretariat and ICLEI's International Training Centre.

© ICLEI, 2008. Pictures, texts and quotes are free of use with a reference to this source.