

l'Anse à l'Orme to be expanded

Next step is securing swath of Angell Woods

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Last week's announcement of an expansion to the l'Anse à l'Orme nature park will have consequences in many West Island cities.

Montreal's executive committee announced it will protect 180 hectares of mostly wetland in Pierrefonds, southwest of the current park, which is currently about 80 hectares in size. Most of the land is owned by developers, but they have agreed to cede their land – for a price. The next step is to come to agreements with developers in Ste. Anne de Bellevue, where Morgan Blvd. is expected to expand, and then to protect another swath of land in Beaconsfield's Angell Woods, a greenspace the town has been trying to protect for decades.

Beaconsfield Mayor Bob Benedetti said it will take time for Angell Woods to be protected.

"Last week's announcement shows that we're serious about this," Benedetti said. "Once it's all completed, it will be a huge regional park that we can all be proud of for years to come. But there are still many steps to go. We only now own 25 per cent of Angell Woods. We have been telling the developers we're ready to deal for the land, but for the moment, they seem to want to hold on to that land."

As for Ste. Anne de Bellevue, negotiations seem to be going well and Daniel Hodder, a bureaucrat heading up the natural spaces policy downtown, said he expects an agreement to protect a segment of woods adjacent to l'Anse à l'Orme will be reached by the end of the year. However, Ste. Anne de Bellevue Mayor Bill Tierney says he wants compensation from Montreal in return for giving up land that could be developed.

Tierney said protecting the land would mean the town can't take advantage of \$500,000 of potential annual tax revenue.

"We don't want to pay for this with future revenues, and neither do our citizens," Tierney said.

"We don't mind paying our fair share, but to give up this land without compensation is out of the question."

Tierney said he has been assured the town would be compensated if the land is protected.

But while there is a lot of talk of protecting greenspace, the nature park will also serve as a catalyst to build more housing units in Pierrefonds and Ste. Anne de Bellevue. In fact, one of the reasons developers are selling off the land in the wetland area is so that they can build on land adjacent to any eventual park.

Pierrefonds-Roxboro mayor Monique Worth said between 5,500 and 6,000 new homes are planned for the western sector of Pierrefonds.

But she said both the new nature park and any new housing would require a road.

"We are limited as to how much we can develop now, because there is no road," Worth said. "So we're hoping to get permission to build a road there."

Worth said the city will ask the Quebec government for permission to build a road on land reserved for a link to Highway 440 in Laval including two new bridges that would be built on Île Bizard. The strip of land passes through Beaconsfield, Kirkland and Pierrefonds. While there is little chance a highway would ever be built on that strip, Worth said a major thoroughway is needed in that area, to alleviate traffic congestion on St. Charles Blvd. Such a road has been outlined in the city of Montreal's transport plan. It is slated to be built within five years.