

Submission to the Office de consultation publique de Montréal (OCPM) sur le ***NOUVEAU PARC-NATURE DANS LA COUR TURCOT***

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Citoyens pour le Bois Franc

The proposed parc-nature du Turcot is a very welcome plan to rehabilitate the industrial and transport wasteland of the Turcot yards. However, it seems that the plans may not be the optimal choice as to the geographical limits of the park. In particular, the adjoining Falaise St. Jacques territory does not appear to be included.

The Falaise St. Jacques is a unique forested natural area in urban surroundings. Such a forest seems to be an endangered species in itself on the Island of Montreal. Its neighbours include the Turcot yards, and industrial, residential, and commercial buildings. The former highway and railyards are a very disturbed site. On this land the parc nature is to be established. It is not an easy task to re-establish a natural area. Nature can take a long time to arrive at an ecological balance and requires bio diversity if it is to become a healthy ecosystem. It also requires a minimum threshold acreage. It is hoped that the parc nature is not intended to be a sterile manicured lawn covered recreational area, but truly a nature park where nature can be enjoyed in its natural state. The neighbourhood is very much lacking such an element of nature, and this can be a very important component, to provide relaxation from our stressful urban environment, educational, and recreational elements and positive health impacts, as well as its ecoservices. Its character can also be an important factor in attracting and maintaining families in the neighbourhood.

In order to achieve these objectives, the Falaise should be incorporated into the park for the following reasons. If the nature park is to be truly natural, many aspects need to be considered. One of these is

size. Biodiversity, including a healthy forest, increases with area, in an exponential manner from the minimum threshold up to a point (many square kilometers), after which it starts to level off. Similar behaviour is exhibited by many other features such as water retention, noise abatement, and pollution mitigation, all important eco services in an urban setting. So, in order to maximize these features, the area of the park should be as large as possible. This can be simply achieved by incorporating the Falaise into the nature park.

The park is to be reconstituted from the rubble of the construction site. It will require landscaping and planting bushes, vegetation and trees. If done with expertise and sensitivity, it will set the stage for nature to take over and produce a natural environment in time. Please note however, that such an environment cannot be truly constructed artificially, for it will remain artificial for a long time. Nature needs the time and opportunity to re establish an ecological balance, and biodiversity. In this case, the Falaise presents a golden opportunity, as it is already natural, and can be allowed to “re seed” the new park in much less time.

Furthermore, from a management standpoint, it is much more efficient to incorporate the Falaise into the parc nature for planning, and operational integration considerations, than to handle them as separate entities. However, given the unique sensitive ecological nature of the Falaise it must be stressed that very little intervention be allowed, except perhaps a trail or two, but no (healthy) tree cutting be permitted at all. The Falaise portion should be the focus of future public consultations.

The Lien nord-sud, or Dalle parc component is an integral part of the parc-nature. It provides for the access from the north and south, as well as a corridor for nature. Both of these aspects are vital. In order for the NDG etc. community to access the parc-nature, some sort of pedestrian bridge is necessary. In keeping with a parc nature, this access should be wide and green, so that anyone crossing it would have the impression that they are in a park, not over a highway and railroad. The specifications or details of this connector is even more important for biodiversity. While a portion of it should accommodate pedestrians and bikes, another portion needs to be in a verdant state, a green corridor, preferably with bushes and maybe even trees to allow animals to cross. This will aid the new park to transition from its newly constructed phase to a true natural environment. It will also be a key part of the green belt that has been proposed that would interconnect other green spaces such as Meadowbrook, Angrignon, and Mt. Royal.

The proponents of the park, especially the Ville de Montreal, are to be congratulated for having the wise vision to establish the park in this manner in this location. Hopefully the key objectives of a natural environment providing for biodiversity as well as low environmental impact recreational opportunities, and ties to a green belt will be achieved. Future and current generations will prize this innovation.