

# Mémoire

the future of L'Anse-à-L'Orme in  
Pierrefonds West

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I'm Carole Reed, a retired teacher. I grew up in Pointe Claire in the 1950's and I remember the woodlots, farmers fields and creeks that have all but disappeared from the West Island. And the rate at which they have disappeared has been accelerating over the last 30 years.

But I am not here because of nostalgia or any desire to return to the past. I am well aware that housing is needed to support our growing population, but I have serious questions about the Cap Natur development on L'Anse á L'Orme, one of the few untouched wildlands remaining on the island.

So I am here to address two questions:

- what are the real costs of the Cap Nature project to the public?
- and what are the alternatives to this development?

In (the Schéma d'aménagement et de développement de l'agglomération de Montreal, published in) 2015, Montreal committed to protecting 10% of the green spaces on the island, (an increase of 4.4% over the 5.6% presently protected.)

Montreal has made its environmental commitment with the understanding that the benefits of wild fields, forests and wetlands are incalculable. Green spaces improve public health, protect communities from flooding, preserve biodiversity, and provide our communities with recreation areas available to all citizens, not just those privileged to live in certain communities.

I will address each of these benefits in turn.

First, **public health.**

Trees clean the air of excess CO2 and reduce warming.

In contrast, asphalt, along with carbon emissions from vehicles and manufacturing, raises the ambient temperature. When temperatures are 41° Celsius in industrial areas and 37° in commercial areas, they are as low as 27° in green spaces.

Prevailing winds blow from west to east, bringing cleaner, cooler air to the city centre from the west island green areas.

By lowering temperature and by reducing air particulates and greenhouse gases, green spaces reduce the risk of heat related and pulmonary illnesses. That's why Wildlife International reports higher life expectancy among those living close to or within green spaces.

One cost of the development of green space is public health.

Second, **flood control.**

L'Anse á L'Orme is connected to the watershed which drains into the Lake of Two Mountains. This green space absorbs and channels water into the lake, mitigating flood damage to surrounding developed areas.

I sent my written brief to you before the flooding in Pierrefonds north. Since then I've done a little more investigating. What I have learned is that the flood maps for the Pierrefonds area were created in the 1980's and were taken out of circulation in 2006 because new studies needed to be done. The most recent useable data I could find are the maps for the Lake of Two Mountains and Mille Iles River. But even these maps are out of date. The hundred year maximum flood level of the Lake of Two Mountains is 24.42 metres, but on May 8 flooding peaked at 24.68 metres.

No development of any flood plain or potential flood plan should be undertaken without up to date flood maps.

No permit should be given for construction of housing in areas that can be flooded.

All those residents suffering flood damage will also suffer the cost of increased insurance premiums. And this is not the only financial cost of unrestrained development.

In the not so distant future what is being called Climate Change litigation may well be a reality. Last fall Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson, discussing a proposed storm barrier to stop flooding, said "There are direct costs to our taxpayers, but this is not an act of God. This is tied directly to human activity."

Issuing permits to build based on out of date flood maps in areas where there is now danger of flooding could open the city to climate change litigation.

Litigation and increased insurance premiums are among the financial costs of development without respect for the environment.

### Third, **Protection of Biodiversity.**

Environmental agencies such as the Sierra Club and the World Wildlife Federation alert us to the dramatic loss of species over the past few decades.

L'Anse à L'Orme and the other connected green spaces, Cap St. Jacques, Angell Woods and the Morgan Arboretum, are habitats for more than 270 plant, animal, bird and insect species. (Herons, bald eagles, hawks, the great grey owl, otters, beaver, muskrat, fox, porcupine, white-tailed deer, coyotes, and fishers make this wild space their home.)

Some of these species are endangered, such as the Bobolink, Canada Warbler, the Jefferson Salamander, Canada Black Snakeroot and wild gingerroot.

The development of this area will result in fragmentation that will have an impact on Angell Woods and other surrounding areas.

- Construction of roads interrupts animals' routes and cuts off access to water (ISFORT Report "The impacts of the Cap Nature real estate project Pierrefonds West on ecological connectivity" Feb. 2016).
- Fragmentation of wild green spaces destroys biodiversity.
- Destruction of fields will also reduce habitats for pollinating insects.

While the proposed Cap Natur development does allow for the replanting of trees and protection of a few hectares, no developer will be able to replicate the natural biodiversity that will be destroyed or bring back species that will be lost through fragmentation.

The cost is extinction of species.

#### **Fourth, Recreation.**

Along with part of our natural heritage, the public will lose one of the few recreational spaces available to both rich and poor.

#### **What are the costs of the Cap Nature project to the community?**

- traffic congestion
- compromised service to off island communities
- urban sprawl
- future tax increases

#### **traffic congestion:**

The addition of 5,500 homes will certainly increase traffic congestion on the West Island.

The proposed Skytrain is supposed to address this problem by reducing congestion. But the Skytrain may actually contribute to urban sprawl and traffic on the West Island.

Because the Skytrain is automated, the number of stations built along the line has to be reduced to contain operation costs, which means that most commuters will have to drive some distance to and from train stations.

Huge parking lots will have to be constructed for these cars. More asphalt contributes to higher ambient temperatures. More fields will be destroyed.

#### **Compromised service to off island communities**

The Skytrain can only operate on the island, leaving the rapidly growing communities of Vaudreuil/Dorion, Pincourt and Ile Perrot with the underserved Vaudreuil/Dorion trains and small CIT buses as the only alternative to public transportation.

Overall, traffic congestion and emissions will increase rather than decrease.

## **Urban Sprawl**

The suburbs were made possible because of the car. The dream was that people could all enjoy a little slice of the country. But in the early 1900's, we were not aware of the effects of carbon emissions, of the heat generated by asphalt, of highways that isolate communities from each other, or the loss of the green space that suburban dwellers were supposed to be enjoying. We now see the many problems that result from suburbia.

We must reduce urban sprawl, especially on a small island where we are quickly running out of space for expansion.

## **Future tax increases:**

Yes, 5,500 new houses filled with tax payers will increase the city's revenue. But the City of Pierrefonds will need to increase its infrastructure to support development in an area that has no roads, sewage or electricity. According to Francois Lemieux, reporting in Cité Nouvelles (February 23 2017), "Les revenus de taxes liées au projet Cap Nature, dans Pierrefonds-Ouest, risqueraient d'être nuls au bout de 10 ans avec la hausse de la facture d'entretien des nouvelles infrastructures urbaines."

Pierrefonds will not gain in revenue through this project because in the long run taxes will increase.

## **What are our alternatives?**

### **Housing Alternatives**

We can repurpose wasted spaces and brownfield lands in already existing communities.

- Spaces with one story buildings and parking lots can be repurposed to support multi-storied buildings.
- Brownfield spaces can be cleaned and reclaimed.
- The City of Pierrefonds can connect owners of these properties with developers.

Imagine the benefit to the city if brownfields and asphalt parking lots can be transformed into domestic oases with multiunit dwellings, gardens and trees.

Our goal should be to reclaim and repurpose land in order to reduce urban sprawl, not to develop our few remaining wild spaces to increase urban sprawl.

### **Transportation Alternatives**

The eight billion dollars budgeted for the Skytrain would be better spent

- to extend the metro into the West Island,
- to add more trains to the Vaudreuil/Dorion commuter train line
- to improve our local bus service connecting commuters with metro stations and trains.

In short, we need to work with what we already have rather than develop ourselves right off the island.

### **Finally, Conservation Alternatives**

According to an article in CNW published March 26, Cap Nature Pierrefonds “combines a sustainable solution to the West Island’s residential needs through the creation of an environmentally responsible neighbourhood and the preservation of 180 hectares of natural habitats, which will significantly contribute to the City of Montreal’s objective of designating 10% of its territory as protected areas.”

If only this were true. Cap Nature is not an environmental project. The heavy equipment with attendant emissions, the bulldozing and the digging required to build sewage systems, roads, and housing will not protect the local flora and fauna.

Cap Nature cannot facilitate “active transportation” that includes shuttle buses, bike paths and pedestrian walkways without pavement.

Proposed “on-site management of rainwater” cannot replicate the natural management of rainwater in wet meadows and wetlands.

Replanting trees that are cut down will not replace the complex forest ecosystem that would be destroyed.

The developers of Cap Nature may want to build a lovely neighbourhood, but they are not conserving natural space.

We need to preserve the few wild habitats remaining on the island.

For these reasons, my fondest hope, and **my final alternative**, is that L’Anse à L’Orme become a protected space on the Island of Montreal and be integrated with Cap St Jacques and Angell Wood to create a small provincial park.

Thank-you