

The (OCPM) consultations on the Turcot Yards and environs consist of four distinct parts:

The falaise St. Jacques; the Turcot Yards: the North South link known as the dalle parc and the connections between neighbourhoods and green spaces that this project can engender.

The Québec Chapter of the Sierra Club Canada Foundation is committed to the protection and restoration of the natural environment of Québec. We have active groups in the Montreal region and elsewhere. The Sierra Club Canada Foundation has been involved on a wide variety of issues ranging from the protection of wildlife and wilderness, loss of biological diversity, climate change, sustainable energy, nuclear waste, environmental toxins, clean air and water, and genetic engineering.

The falaise St. Jacques

La Falaise Saint-Jacques -- or the St. Jacques Escarpment -- is one of 10 eco-territories on the Island of Montreal “slated for priority protection and enhancement,” according to Montreal’s Policy on the Protection and Enhancement of Natural Habitats.

The falaise stretches from Vendome Metro to the Montreal West Interchange just below the businesses on the South side of St Jacques St. in NDG, ending at the Turcot Yards, and bordering the Southwest Borough, Westmount, Montreal West, Lachine and Lasalle.

There are 65 species of birds which use this area including the Chimney Swift and the Wood Thrush, both of which are threatened according to COSEWIC. Two rare plants, the ostrich fern and Hackberry grow on the falaise. As well, it is home to the brown snake.

Beyond the rich ecological value of the falaise, this green space diffuses the effects of the air pollution from traffic. Situated as it is between an industrial zone on St Jacques and the Turcot, the falaise acts as the lungs of NDG and the SouthWest, filtering pollution and contributing to the health and well-being of hundreds of citizens.

Though the falaise was supposed to be part of the future Turcot grand parc, it has not been a subject of any of the consultations or ateliers. OCPM literature does refer to the falaise and the substantial changes that are envisioned for it. The community organizations who have been working to protect this ecoterritory, such as Sierra Club Quebec and our partners, want to see the falaise protected and left natural to encourage biodiversity. It is our recommendation that important decisions as to the future of the falaise be made with input from the public and that the falaise St. Jacques be part of the grand park.

Further, we recommend that:

No trees be cut in the falaise; that the falaise be used only as an educational resource; Native wildflowers and milkweed, as well as indigenous plants and trees should be planted which contribute to biodiversity and enhance the habitat of the threatened and other species that use it. These species should be introduced slowly to get rid of invasive species.

The Turcot Yards

The Turcot Yards, formerly a major rail yard, has since become the site of the new Turcot Interchange project and the new route for Autoroute 20. Once the Turcot project is completed, there will remain 30 hectares of available land which will be used as the Grand Parc.

The OCPM consultations have covered different visions of what this future green space could look like in four ateliers. Constraints were established that 75% of the park could be green, but 25% had to be some sort of infrastructure, and the latter could include water features, pedestrian paths, etc. Our first question is: why were these constraints added to the consultations when it was evident during the ateliers that most people wanted the area to be 100% green? Reconstruction of a water body, either the St. Pierre River or Lac à Loutre on the site would also be a priority. Accessibility of and connections between the surrounding boroughs would be paramount.

The North-South Link or Dalle Parc

The Dalle Parc is a projected north-south cyclist-pedestrian link from the top of the Falaise across Autoroute 20 which was included in the original Turcot plans and, through the work of over 60 community partners as well as the public and politicians, has now been re-incorporated into the Turcot project. At this present time a feasibility study is being conducted by the MTQ and the Ville de Montréal on the mechanics of the Dalle Parc bridge itself.

First and foremost the Dalle Parc should be a piece of green infrastructure connecting to the natural world and acting as a bridge over the Turcot to biodiversity. It should be a signature piece that is inviting for everyone to the great city of Montreal. Some key reflections :

It needs to be a minimum of 30 meters wide so that cyclists and pedestrians will be able to share in harmony.

The Dalle Parc needs to connect the Falaise, the Bande Verte and the Cour Turcot Parc with the surrounding neighbourhoods and green spaces.

There should be various access points to get on and off the structure.

Connections to surrounding areas

The Turcot Interchange effectively cut off several neighbourhoods from each other when it was first built in the 1960s. St. Raymond, St. Henri, Ville-Émard and Ville St. Pierre are among some of the most disfavoured areas in the City of Montreal and they all border this new Grand Parc. Each of them has suffered years of construction, dust and noise for a highway project which does not benefit them and is for people to get downtown from the West Island.

All of the areas around the Turcot project now have a chance to share in a beautiful new park which would ideally link the north and south and the east and west.

If we could ask for just one thing it would be accessibility.

The Green Belt

There has been for several years the idea of a green belt with the falaise St. Jacques at its center. This greenspace would stretch west to the future Meadowbrook park; south to park Angrignon, the Douglas Hospital Grounds and Parc des rapides; and east (or north east) through bicycle paths to Mount Royal.

Montreal has the least amount of green space of any major city in Canada. Here we have a chance to create something special and lasting that would connect up the entire city and create corridors of biodiversity for the natural world. The dalle parc is a major infrastructure component which is necessary to create this green belt. The other is the connection to Meadowbrook. Though Meadowbrook is very close to the falaise, there is a major highway and several train lines separating it from the western edge.. The St. Pierre Interchange Reconstruction, which is forthcoming, will provide a not to be missed opportunity to create a connection between meadowbrook and the falaise. After that is just a matter of municipalities linking up creating bike paths and presto – instant green belt!