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Objet : Commentaires -- Informations

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## BRIEF: PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

First of all, let me congratulate this administration on looking at the protection and preservation of the natural environment, and for holding these public consultations.

Having followed the natural spaces issue for the last fifteen years, and having listened to the majority of the briefs presented at these hearings, I have these comments.

### COST OF THE NATURAL SPACES PROGRAM

What struck me the hardest was that it appeared that natural spaces program had to justify itself only if an overwhelming number of citizens answered yes to the question as to whether they were willing to pay the fifty or one hundred dollars (one time charges) which the natural spaces program would cost.

For initiatives of a more economic nature, no such test seems to apply. For example, are we asking citizens if they would be willing to pay the hundreds of dollars, per person, for such projects as: the remaking of the Notre Dame boulevard; the 600 million extension of the metro to Laval; the \$750 million redevelopment of the Bonaventure Expressway and the port area; the multi-million dollar extension of the 440, or any of the network of roads planned for the West Island?

Mayor Gerald Tremblay has publicly stated that the Natural Spaces program would cost between 100 to 200 million. Dividing these numbers by the 1,800,000 inhabitants of the Island means that the (one time) cost of the program per person would be \$56 or \$111 respectively. Amortizing over 20 years at 6% interest means an annual cost of \$4.84 and \$9.59 per person respectively or the annual price of an inexpensive meal in a restaurant. This is less than the price of a single pizza.

### IS THIS REALLY TOO MUCH OF A PRICE TO PAY????

The criterion for any project, whether environmental, economic, or social must be the benefits it contributes to society, whether it be a road or rail line which reduces the travel time for citizens to and from work, or natural spaces which provide a re-creative and restorative value to its citizens. The common denominator of all expenditure boils down to one thing: Quality of Life.

Had we taken the modest sum of only 10 million each year for the last thirty years from the capital budget and invested it in natural spaces, the Natural Spaces project would be complete. We would not be in the crises we are in now: that we have only 3.2% of the territory on the Island in natural green space, when national and international norms call for 8%.

Of the three spending axes of society: economic, societal, and environmental, the economic has received a disproportionate share of investment over the years at the expense of the environmental. Viewed in this light, the sum of money required for natural spaces is not large; it is simply "catch up" after so many years of neglect.

It is laudable that this administration has seen fit to make up for the failings of previous administrations.

## MONTREAL L'ILE VERTE

We currently have a very short window of opportunity to be as visionary as those who preserved Mont Royal. We have very interesting, ecologically diverse regions on the Island, that with some vision, could be a mecca for Citizen's on and off the Island: Montreal's L'île Verte.

## SMALL GREEN SPACES

I believe that small local natural green spaces, must not be overlooked in the Natural Spaces Program.

Near my home is a hectare or two of scrubland consisting of meadow, bushes and small trees. Despite its small size, there are thriving populations of various and interesting bird species, small animals, and in spring in a few small ponds of water, interesting aquatic life. This small plot of land has an advantage that large tracts of land do not have: it could be made readily accessible to the local inhabitants.

Not only could this small plot of land be re-creational and restorative to persons of all ages, but if we are to encourage the study of biology in our young people, then we must have on hand easily accessible Natural Spaces, where these interests can sprout.

## RE-NATURALIZING AREAS IN EXISTING PARKS

One way to make natural spaces more accessible, would be to naturalize areas in certain existing parks. Jarry Park has a very interesting natural area. We live in the natural world. It is easier to appreciate it, understand it, and treat it with respect, when we have contact with it in the neighbourhoods in which we live.

## MORAL OBLIGATION

We have a moral obligation, simply as inhabitants of this planet, to preserve some of the Natural Green Spaces where we live.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The compromises necessary to accommodate developers would be highly unsatisfactory. Because of the rather small amounts involved in amortizing the purchases over twenty years, I recommend that the City borrow what is required (at the current very advantageous rates), and purchase these ecologically valuable properties, which would allow the City to achieve its 8% objective, and truly, to call itself a "sustainable City".

Al Hayek, Citizen