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## Sierra Club Québec

Montreal, November 3 2014

### **Brief on Schéma d'aménagement et de développement de l'agglomération de Montréal Projet - septembre 2014**

Dear Commission members,

Sierra Club Quebec is pleased to submit a brief on the *Schéma d'aménagement et de développement de l'agglomération de Montréal* (Schéma), as presented by the Commission permanente sur le schéma d'aménagement et de développement de Montréal on September 22 2014.

Sierra Club Quebec is the Quebec chapter of the Sierra Club Foundation of Canada, a grassroots environmental organization with a history that dates back to 1892, when the first Sierra Club Chapter was founded by John Muir in California. Sierra Club Quebec draws upon the knowledge and energy of engaged citizens who care about a healthy planet.

The world population is growing exponentially and our lifestyles are increasing the pressure on our planet's limited natural resources. Climate change is occurring right now, with catastrophic consequences for the world's ecosystems and for humanity. We are witnessing unprecedented rates of species extinction. Environmental problems are by no means an issue of the past and to face these challenges requires vision and courage.

As mayor Denis Coderre correctly observed during his public visit to le Bois de Liesse, Saturday, October 25, 2014, it is the cities that will dictate the future of the planet, rather than countries and continents. With this in mind, we expect the city of Montreal, host of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the historical Montreal convention on protecting the ozone layer and home to countless environmental organizations and citizen

groups, to see beyond the symptomatic problems of today and to put forth a vision on how to resolve the long-term issues of our generation.

We are disappointed with the lack of vision in the current *Schéma d'aménagement et de développement de l'agglomération de Montréal*. Factors such as urban sprawl, loss of biodiversity, loss of accessible green space, the need for sustainable jobs that contribute to the environment and the need to decrease our dependence on fossil fuels are either entirely absent or strikingly under-acknowledged in the Schema document. The importance of continued citizen engagement after the completion of the Schema document is not included as part of the ongoing process. Not only is the importance of consulting citizens and civil society ignored in the text, but the time frames within which citizens can participate in the current consultation process are extremely short; the delay between the hearings and the adoption of the final Schéma is even shorter, leaving us with sincere doubts about whether input given during the hearings will even be taken into consideration.

While we see serious gaps with respect to sustainable transportation, reduction of greenhouse gases, water management and air, soil and water pollution, our brief focuses mainly on the protection of green spaces.

The importance of proximity to nature for people's health and well-being is being increasingly recognized and scientifically documented<sup>1</sup>, in particular as it relates to the development of young children<sup>2</sup>. Nature and natural spaces in the form of forests and wetlands in the city provide a broad range of services such as retention of rain water, buffering of extreme weather conditions, air purification and absorbing soil contamination. These services represent an economic value estimated to be several billions per year<sup>3</sup>, but these benefits are rarely taken into consideration in economic evaluations. The proximity of green space has a direct proven effect on the value of property, increasing values up to 12%, particularly in denser neighbourhoods<sup>4</sup>. The importance of urban nature, biodiversity and green spaces of all sizes for recreational purposes are easily underestimated, accounting for more than 50% of all North American's recreational activities.

With respect to an official protection status for natural spaces, Montreal's target is set at 8 percent of its terrestrial surface, 5.6 percent of which has already been protected. The island of Montreal measures 499.19 km<sup>2</sup>, which indicates that Montreal intends to protect an additional 12 km<sup>2</sup>. We strongly encourage Montreal in its efforts in protecting natural spaces. However, given the context of the *Plan Métropolitain d'Aménagement et de Développement* (PMAD), which forms the legal framework for the Schéma and which prescribes the protection of 17 percent of terrestrial green spaces of the Montreal Metropolitan Région (CMM), we insist that Montreal increase its target beyond 8 percent.

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<sup>1</sup> Francois Reeves, *Planète coeur: santé cardiaque et environnement*, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Richard Louv, *Last child in the woods: saving our children from Nature deficit disorder*, 2008

<sup>3</sup> Fondation David Suzuki et Nature Action Québec, *Le capital écologique du Grand Montréal: une évaluation économique de la biodiversité et des écosystèmes de la ceinture verte*, 2013

<sup>4</sup> Soren Anderson and Sarah West, *Open space, residential property values, and spatial context*, 2006, *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 36 (2006) 773–789

The 17 percent mentioned in the PMAD originates in the revised Aichi targets to which the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) committed in 2010. The CBD headquarters are based in Montreal attracting worldwide attention to Montreal's performance as a "green city". Montreal has a moral obligation to respect the CBD targets. The achievement of protecting 17 percent of Montreal's terrestrial surface by 2017 would be a gift of great symbolic significance to its citizens and to all future generations as Montreal celebrates its 375th birthday.

The increase of Montreal's protection targets from 6 percent to 8 percent is a small step in the right direction, but the Schéma remains largely silent about how and where those 12 km<sup>2</sup> are going to be found. Maps 14 and 15 on pages 74 and 75 of the Schéma show Montreal's natural spaces and spaces of ecological significance 'à titre indicatif'. We ask that these maps be used to formulate a proactive, island-wide policy for the acquisition and protection of the green spaces that are shown on them, as well as for several important spaces that are not on the maps.

An image on page 78 of the *Schéma*, which also features in the *Politique de protection et mise en valeur des milieux naturels* (the planning time frame of which ends this year) shows the concept of an ecological network. However, there is little information given about how this theoretical concept will be translated into policy. As most of the large surfaces of green spaces have been protected under the above mentioned policy, we ask that a new policy be put in place to ecologically connect the core areas through a patchwork of smaller protected areas that are either purchased for this purpose, or for which long term conservation contracts are signed between the city and private owners.

Traditionally, Montreal's environmental community has viewed natural spaces as areas that need protection; once they are developed, it is no longer possible to bring them back. While protection and conservation is certainly the best way to deal with the few green spaces that are left on the island of Montréal, we want to emphasize that it is also possible, in our opinion, to create new green spaces of ecological value. Opportunities for renaturalization present themselves in the planning stage of large infrastructural projects such as the Turcot yards. We ask that the *Schéma* include a directive for boroughs and municipalities to take advantage of such opportunities to the greatest degree possible.

We ask for the following elements to be included in the *Schéma d'aménagement et de développement de l'agglomération de Montréal*:

- The recognition of urban sprawl and the loss of green spaces as a problem;
- The recognition of the absolute need to protect 17 percent of Montreal's terrestrial territory as green space;
- To renew the *Politique de protection et mise en valeur des milieux naturels*, of which the planning deadline is in 2014;
- To involve all relevant stakeholders, including environmental organizations and citizen groups, in an early stage of the process of formulating the above mentioned policy;
- To formulate a policy to buy and protect green spaces of more than 0.5 ha when they are put on sale;

- To formulate a policy to sign long-term contracts with private owners of green spaces of more than 0.5 ha to protect their natural integrity;
- To assure a unit exists within the public administration at the level of the island of Montreal, or at the CMM level, that has concrete targets regarding the acquisition and protection of green spaces, that has all the required knowledge and expertise to reach these targets, that has sufficient financial and human resources to meet them and that has sufficient legal and procedural tools to do so;
- To include Meadowbrook, all of Angell Woods, all of Anse à l'orme, all of Mont-Royal, and all undeveloped spaces south of Autoroute Ville Marie in the maps 14 and 15 on pages 74 - 75;
- To rezone the Lachine part of Meadowbrook as recreational, as Mayor Dauphin himself has indicated his personal preference is to see it become a park;
- To respect the motion unanimously passed by the Agglomeration council following the tragic events of Lac Megantic and to include and respect the guidelines of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Railway Association with regard to buffer zones around rail lines and rail marshalling yards;
- To acquire and renaturalize brownfields using phytoremédiation techniques;
- To adopt a policy regarding renaturalization of land that becomes available in infrastructural projects;
- To petition the government of Quebec to be instrumental in the establishment of Montreal's green belt.

We will be more than happy to further elaborate on our propositions and to answer any of the commission's questions in an oral presentation.

Sincerely yours,

Floris Ensink

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Floris Ensink', written in a cursive style.

Chairman of Sierra Club of Canada Foundation, chapter Quebec