

A Brief to the Assemblée publique de consultation sur  
le Projet de schéma d'aménagement et de dévelop

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The Importance of Preserving Existing Green Spaces on the  
Island of Montreal and the Need to Develop the Brown Fields  
on the Territory of the City and the Municipalities on the Island

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## **Introduction**

Green space on the Island of Montreal is under constant threat of development and much of what remains continues to be developed in small and large pieces, which threatens the long-term survival and viability of local ecosystems and the wildlife that inhabit them – be it year-round or during the spring and fall migrations. Close to nine percent of the total area of the island consists of brown fields and therefore it is unacceptable that the City of Montreal and the independent municipalities can allow green spaces – large, medium, and small - to be developed until all the brown field properties are developed.

This brief calls upon the City of Montreal, in conjunction with the independent municipalities, to agree upon a plan to immediately place a moratorium on the development of green spaces and to develop a program to identify all brown fields on the island so that they can be cleaned up in terms of pollution and neglect so that sustainable and green projects – commercial, residential, industrial, and institutional can take place over several decades. This can be done – it will not be easy, but as the City of Montreal prepares to celebrate its 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary, there can be no better gift to the current (and future) residents of the island than to preserve what green space we have and to restore green spaces and ecosystems that have been lost, damaged, compromised, and face threat daily from development.

## **The Brief**

Montreal, like Manhattan, was once a verdant green space and ecosystem where wildlife and forests had developed over thousands of years to create a balanced system. Today we only have fragments left and areas under threat include Angell Woods in the West Island, the Meadowbrook golf course (57 hectares) in the West End, several thousand hectares of farmland in Pierrefonds, and other disconnected areas throughout the island in the East End and along the

shoreline, which at the moment (in some situations) are linked only by the rail lines found throughout many parts of the island.

The preservation of green space not only benefits ecosystems and wildlife, which should also be considered as residents of the island, but provide great value to the citizens of the island in terms of places to visit to experience nature – not everyone can travel to the countryside for the day or extended periods of time, play and relax, and help to mitigate the impact of climate change. One can easily argue that the “unsustainable development model” can no longer be supported and because we know that this as a fact, now is the time to act while we still have opportunities and window to preserve large portions of the island as green space and to link them via green corridors so that biodiversity is protected for current and future generations and that proper and efficient planning can be determined so that urban sprawl is stopped and all sites slated for development (brown fields) can be fully maximized.

The plan is thus:

### **For Green Spaces**

- place an immediate moratorium on the development of green spaces and at the same time, create a complete list of what exists that is not protected and what exists on those sites.
- fully explore all the legal opportunities to re-zone these properties. The tools exist and municipalities should not be threatened or bullied by developers, especially those who make it a business practice to purchase green spaces at a low price and re-sell them to municipalities at high price. They know that many of these properties cannot be developed, but use them as leverage. This must be stopped.
- have the City of Montreal not only restore its fund to purchase threatened green spaces, which was cut in half by the Coderre administration only a few months ago, but to also substantially increase it so that much can be purchased rapidly and at a minimal cost.

### **For Brown Fields**

- simultaneously create a list of all the brown fields on the island and determine who owns them. This is essential so that we know what can be developed and how such properties can be unified for development by bringing together the various owners – be they companies, individual, and municipalities - to embark on joint-ventures.

- we also need to know the level of pollution at each site so that the costs of cleaning them can be determined, which will help to determine what sites can be developed and when and that a long-term remediation plan be prepared for the island. These polluted sites should be cleaned up due to their toxic nature, but all the more so in order to promote development on them.

### **Overall**

- create public body, using existing employees from all municipalities, to collate the information concerning green spaces and brown fields and to help develop a plan to preserve green spaces and to clean up and develop brown fields.
- develop methods to involve citizens from across the island to help preserve, protect, and restore green spaces. The effort to save green spaces and biodiversity cannot be a top-down initiative, but one that is top-down and bottom-up because when all stakeholders are involved and engaged, serious solutions can be found.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this brief identifies the problem of how existing green spaces on the Island of Montreal are under constant threat and why a moratorium on developing them is needed now. It also explains why and how brown fields must be developed and how they compromise nearly nine percent of the total space on the island. It would be criminal to kill green spaces while brown fields remain undeveloped and left to fester.

In addition, a plan is put forward, along with steps on how to achieve a successful program to develop brown fields, that can be created and implemented. The time to act is now and the clock is ticking. We know the disasters of development on the island – Nuns Island, vast urban sprawl in the West Island, East End of the island, the Southwest, and other parts areas where poor planning has led to the needless destruction of forests, swamps, farmland, and fields.

The mistakes that have been made are well known and further lessons are needed in terms of unplanned and ridiculous urban development. Developers have had a field day and municipal administrations going back decades have not looked after the public interest – short-term and long-term. Some mistakes cannot be repaired or set right – which is tragic, but much can be fixed

and many avoidable errors and catastrophes can be avoided easily. The ball is in the courts of many stakeholders and the sooner we act, which must be now, the sooner we do what is right for present and future generations.