

Forest, wetlands to be preserved; Environmental gem.

Beaconsfield, Montreal buy 22.2-hectare chunk of Angell Woods

CHERYL CORNACCHIA The Montreal Gazette 12 April 2007

The city of Montreal and the West Island municipality of Beaconsfield announced yesterday they have concluded an agreement that will see a 22-hectare tract of West Island green space turned into parkland and protected from development.

The site is part of the Angell Woods in Beaconsfield, an 80-hectare environmental jewel situated west of St. Charles Blvd. between Highways 20 and 40. Conservationists have been fighting for more than 20 years to save the woods.

Yesterday, Beaconsfield Mayor Bob Benedetti congratulated the owner of the 22.2-hectare tract for selling his property to Beaconsfield, Montreal and Ducks Unlimited, a conservation group.

"These people deserve a lot of credit," Benedetti said of ALTA Industriel, the Montreal-based company that owned the property, which consists of mature forest and wetlands.

The Angell Woods were homesteaded in the 1850s by William Angell, the first English-speaking farmer in the area. They are one of the few parcels of buildable land remaining on the western part of Montreal Island.

ALTA's move might well encourage others to abandon long-held aspirations to develop Angell Woods land and follow suit, Benedetti added.

The remaining parts of the Angell Woods are owned by Quebec's Transportation Department, CEDA Holdings Ltd., the St. Patrick Society of Montreal and Yale Holdings, an international company.

Helen Fotopulos, the Montreal executive committee member and responsible for green space, said she was equally pleased with the agreement.

"This is one of the rare occasions where this is a straight deal," said Fotopulos, alluding to the fact previous agreements to save green space have required the public sector to sweeten the pot for developers by offering them developable land elsewhere on the island.

The new deal will see Montreal, Beaconsfield and Ducks Unlimited pay \$4 million to ALTA for one part of the 22.2 hectares. Another part, valued at \$4.5 million, will be donated by ALTA to Ducks Unlimited.

After factoring in the tax benefits from the donation, the overall deal is worth \$6 million to

ALTA.

The deal is to be tabled before the Montreal executive committee within the next few days.

David Fletcher, vice-president of Montreal's Green Coalition, was on hand for yesterday's announcement. He said he couldn't praise Benedetti and Fotopulos enough.

There was significant pressure on Beaconsfield to allow development in Angell Woods to expand the city's tax base and keep a lid on municipal taxes, Fletcher said.

Beaconsfield property taxes went up an average of 30 per cent last year.

"This is a key domino piece," said Fletcher, clearly happy about the Angell Woods preservation.

The fact the ALTA land is situated in the middle of the Angell Woods "will render any of the remaining lands less developable," he said.

Bernard Filion, manager of provincial operations for Ducks Unlimited, said the deal is the largest in which the conservation group has been involved.

"It's close to being a new model," said Filion, noting the land will eventually be converted into public park.