

Green leader calls on West Island to send eco-message to Quebec

BY ANDY BLATCHFORD *The Chronicle Article online since March 21st 2007*

Green Party of Quebec Leader Scott McKay says West Islanders can hammer home a point on the environment in the upcoming election.

As residential developments continue to stretch through the western end of the West Island, McKay said Monday that locals can demand better protection for the island's dwindling forests.

"A Green vote on March 26 is not only a useful vote, but an absolutely necessary vote to send a strong message to the next government," McKay said during a news conference at the edge of Beaconsfield's 250-acre Angell Woods. "We need a strong provincial government to put in the funds to buy the last remaining natural spaces (in Montreal)."

McKay said with some polls suggesting a tight three-way race between the Liberals, Parti Québécois and Action démocratique du Québec, the national question is no longer an issue in this campaign.

He said a PQ minority government would be too weak to hold a third referendum on Quebec independence, creating an opportunity for voters to tackle other concerns.

McKay said the Green Party consists of sovereigntists and federalists who care about the environment, and would not hold a referendum if elected.

The Green platform, meanwhile, proposes a \$15-billion investment in public transit on the island over the next 20 years. New tolls on Montreal bridges would foot the bill for electric tramways across the island.

"A great deal of that network would be right here in the west end," McKay said.

McKay's news conference was the first held by a Quebec political party leader in the West Island since the campaign began in February.

"I believe Mr. (Liberal Leader Jean) Charest has been taking the west end for granted for much too long," McKay said. "The west end should not be taken for granted. There are important concerns here that must be put on the agenda of the National Assembly."

McKay was joined Monday by Jacques Cartier Green Party candidate Ryan Young, who said local construction has changed little since the 1950s.

Young wants to see eco-friendly building practices, including energy-efficient homes and suburban designs to lower dependency on vehicles. He said unprotected forests, like Angell Woods, are threatened by rapid development.

"The Quebec government is not doing anything to curb urban sprawl," Young said.

The Ste. Anne de Bellevue resident said Montreal is at the bottom of the list among Canadian cities when it comes to per-capita green space.

Association for the Protection of Angell Woods (APAW) president Stephen Lloyd said more than a million square feet of the forest along Highway 40 is owned by Quebec. The Beaconsfield resident, on hand at the gathering, said the government should conserve it.

Jacques Cartier Liberal incumbent Geoff Kelley "has been very supportive, but we'd like the government to take an active step here," said Lloyd, whose association is made up of 600 members.