

## Groups blast airport authority on expansion into Golf Dorval

BY ANDY BLATCHFORD The Chronicle, West Island Edition Article online since May 11st 2007

West Island environmentalists teed off on Aéroports de Montréal president James Cherry last week over the public corporation's repossession of a local golf course.

Citizens grilled the federal organization on its decision to expand operations from Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport onto the 25-year-old Golf Dorval.

"Why is ADM insisting on ruining a perfectly good green space?" asked Dan Goyens of SOS Dorval at ADM's annual general meeting last Thursday.

Goyens, who heads the group dedicated to preserving Golf Dorval, questioned Cherry on the expansion even though the airport forecasts moving operations back to Mirabel as early as 2040.

"This is forever," he said of building on Golf Dorval.

SOS Dorval collected 20,000 signatures last summer on a petition to save the course.

Still, ADM reclaimed 18 holes of the 36-hole city-operated course this spring.

Golf Dorval has been redesigned and preliminary work has begun at the south end of the course.

ADM, which leases the land to Dorval, aims to expand its international jetty and create more manoeuvring room for taxiing aircraft.

Properties at the north side of the course will be reserved for airport-related businesses, ADM has said.

Cherry called the golf course land an "airport asset."

"We have an obligation to provide airport services to the area. There is a limited amount of land that has direct access to a runway," he said.

"It is our decision and our right to exploit that property according to that mandate."

Following through with the project is important to the economic vitality of Trudeau Airport, and by extension Montreal, Cherry said.

More than 11 million passengers used Trudeau Airport in 2006, a jump of nearly five per cent from the previous year.

Cargo also rose by 5.4 per cent last year, ADM said.

With expected competition from an airport in Plattsburgh, N.Y. and high operating costs at Trudeau, ADM faces considerable economic hills, Cherry said.

"Montreal is still the most taxed airport per passenger in Canada," said Cherry, who is calling for the elimination of rent for Canadian airports.

But Green Coalition vice-president David Fletcher said ADM has a responsibility to its shareholders, who are Canadian taxpayers.

Expanding the airport onto the golf course property will have a long-running impact on local quality of life, he added.

"You now have a serious commitment to the public to behave in a sustainable way," Fletcher told Cherry.

"The impact of this development will be very negative. You are, point of fact, becoming a landlord to derive revenue at the expense of a quality social and environmental space."

Cherry said ADM "consulted widely" on the potential impacts of the expansion.

"Our environment record is actually quite strong," he said, adding the airport recently installed high-efficiency lighting for its runways.

However, the ADM president invited the Green Coalition to contact him for further consultation.

Questioned on whether a municipal zoning change from parkland is needed to proceed with the expansion, Cherry said the land-use plan has long been set.

"Quite frankly, any actions in that regards taken by the City of Dorval really don't have any bearing on the federal government's designation of that piece of land," Cherry said.

The leases for Golf Dorval and the nearby Dorval Municipal Golf Course have been renewed until 2013, when ADM could effectively reclaim the remaining land.