

Home construction project bulldozes over protests: Contracts awarded for groundwork.

Pierrefonds residents oppose plan to build on one of last natural spaces in Montreal

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The city of Montreal is laying the groundwork for the construction of 4,500 homes in western Pierrefonds's natural spaces despite protests from preservationists.

The city executive committee this week awarded two contracts worth a combined \$4 million to build a massive underground water main and a water-retention basin west of Highway 440, near the Riviere des Prairies.

The work, to be paid for by taxpayers, is required to permit construction of 530 homes in a development known as Heritage sur le lac to proceed, says a civil service report presented to the executive committee on Wednesday.

For instance, the retention basin, which will resemble a lake, is required because the site where the 530 homes and other projects are to be built is subject to flooding, the city says.

And the 400-millimetre (16-inch) diameter water main will service western Pierrefonds, where the city would like to see another 4,500 residential units built, said Sammy Forcillo, the executive committee member responsible for infrastructure.

The \$1.43-million contract to Construction Frank Catania & Associes Inc. to build the water main will go to city council Feb. 26 for approval. It will then go to the island council March 1 for approval, because Montreal considers the work to be an island-wide expense to be shared with the demerged suburbs.

The \$2.58-million contract to Construction Garnier Ltd. to build the retention basin, which will also go to the Feb. 26 council meeting, will be paid by Montreal alone, Forcillo said.

The water main will be twice the standard width because it will service more than the Heritage sur le lac site - so the city doesn't expect the developer to pay, he said. The retention basin, meanwhile, is oversize and will service more than one project, Forcillo said.

The civil service report states the water main will be built in line with "the future Pierrefonds Blvd. extension" and will cross "the future Highway 440" to ensure there's adequate water pressure as the new neighbourhoods are built.

Residents of Pierrefonds/Roxboro borough who oppose the march of bulldozers through one of the last natural spaces on Montreal Island say the city has no business financing infrastructure work for developers who are making private profit.

"The city is in a deficit but giving tax money out to developers," resident Susan Kiepprien said.

Green Coalition member Sylvia Oljemark described as absurd the idea of diverting waterways with rich habitat to build a lake to function as a retention basin next to a river.

She called the mention of the future extension of Highway 440 and Pierrefonds Blvd. in the civil service report "a grave concern," because conservationists say that could lead to bulldozing and development through the Anse a l'Orme forest.