

## **Urban Ecology Centre (SodecM) Position Paper**

Submitted to the CMM public hearings on the proposed waste management plan  
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The goal of the Urban Ecology Centre is to build and share expertise concerning the most viable approaches to sustainable urban development and how they may best be implemented in our neighbourhoods and city. We see ourselves as a think-tank with an important social action dimension. We aim to stimulate reflection, debate and practical intervention in the field of urban development on the part of experts as well as the lay public. By helping to promote greater awareness of the imperatives and challenges of sustainable urban development we aspire, ultimately, to contribute to changes in policy and in day-to-day habits of Montréal's citizens.

We strongly support the efforts of the CMM to implement a regionally integrated approach to waste reduction and management. Solid waste production is a major environmental problem of urban areas and environmentally responsible waste management is one of the keystones of sustainable urban development. In striving to make the plan as economically and environmentally responsible as possible we also support the recommendations made by the signatories of Rebut Global.

We wish to emphasize to members of the commission that waste reduction and management is not only an important environmental objective with a direct impact on our quality of life but also a vital step in achieving the first objective of the CMM, namely, to help the Montreal region compete at an international level (CMM, 2003).

The environment places limits on the type and amount of development in a region. Across North America the continued growth and prosperity of urban areas has begun to run up against environmental limits. In Los Angeles this has been air pollution and water shortages due to the failure of the region to plan within the confines of an arid coastal climate. In Detroit it has been water and soil contamination due to industrial processes that failed to consider the long-term implications of industrial pollution. In New York, Chicago, and Toronto, it has been waste disposal as landfill sites reach their capacity due to a mentality that out of sight is out of mind.

The environmental limits imposed by water, air and land place real constraints on urban development and may translate into significant economic costs for both industry and government as their capacity to absorb the wastes of the city is surpassed. In terms of solid waste, the cost of waste disposal has economic consequences for both municipalities and industries in the Montreal region. In the long term, waste reduction will cost municipalities less and ensure the future potential for development. Furthermore, industry will be attracted to an area where waste management practices mean that, rather than a cost of doing business, industrial waste becomes an asset of value to other businesses and industries specialized in reusing and recycling.

The Urban Ecology Centre believes that sustainable solutions to urban environmental issues such as air pollution, water pollution, mass transit, and waste reduction require a strong regional government that integrates policy across the urban region and seeks the participation of its citizens in the decision making process. The waste management plan is the first regulatory action taken by the CMM. If the CMM is to be an effective regional government it must demonstrate its ability to set clear, enforceable policy objectives for municipalities, to lobby provincial authorities for laws that support sustainable urban development, and to engage the public in the policy making process. From this perspective we have several criticisms of the draft waste management plan.

The plan fails to lay out explicit strategies for waste reduction and management to be followed by all municipalities. In particular, the plan reveals that the CMM is either unwilling or unable to require that municipalities negotiate new waste collection contracts that respect the 2008 timeframe for 60% diversion of residential waste. The CMM is also unable to respond to the concerns of citizens living in the vicinity of the Lachenaie dump who want an end to the dumping of Montreal's garbage in their area. The CMM could take clear action in favour of equity across the region by requiring that each of the 5 sub-regions of the CMM be responsible for the disposal of residential waste originating from their area. These shortcomings suggest the CMM is unable to effectively set planning and development goals for the region.

The plan also fails to effectively address the primary objective of the waste management vision for the region: to reduce residual materials at the source (CMM, 2003). Measures such as lobbying the provincial government for stricter packaging laws or complete bans on certain types of waste producing products are not in the plan. The CMM represents 50% of the population of Quebec and manages economic development for an area that produces the majority of Quebec's wealth. As such the CMM should expect and demand regulatory and financial support from the Quebec government to reduce waste at the source. There is also limited attention paid to changing consumer practices in order to reduce residential waste. In fact, the CMM waste management plan projects a 1.8% increase per year in residential waste production, a rate that far exceeds any estimates based on population increase alone. Thus the plan assumes waste reduction at the source is not achievable.

Finally, while the public consultation process does allow for some citizen participation in CMM decision making both the plan and the consultation process have several shortcomings. The time period between the release of the draft plan and public consultation was too short to allow groups to read and respond to the report. Some information, such as the consultant's report, was only released to the public after requests made by environmental groups. Public awareness of the draft plan remains low due to limited media coverage and CMM publicity. In order to successfully implement regulations that will have a direct impact on citizens' daily lives a much greater public awareness and dialogue between government and citizens is necessary from the beginning. The extensive public discussions and media coverage leading up to the waste management plans in Halifax and Toronto were an important factor in making the new regulations acceptable to residents of both cities. The plan also fails to include any

support for or cooperation with community groups already active in waste management and waste reduction in Montreal. If the plan is to be successful we believe it must include the participation of community-based organizations in both raising public awareness and putting the plan into action.

The central vision of the CMM is the building of a community focused on sustainable development and endowed with transparent institutions and participatory democracy (CMM, 2003). The waste management plan will be the first action taken by the CMM that allows the citizens of the Montreal region to gauge the organization's commitment to achieving this vision. We hope the CMM is able to live up to its stated objectives and deliver a waste management plan that achieves 60% diversion of residential waste by 2008. We also hope that in the future the CMM will develop a plan to manage the remaining 3.7 million tons of waste produced by industry and construction in the region.

Communaute metropolitaine de Montreal. 2003. Charting Our International Future: Strategic Vision Statement, Vision 2025. CMM: Montreal.

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