

Media Release

Attention: News, Community and Assignment Editors

Citizens launch last resort petition to save Benny Park

Benny Park rezoning process denies public rights promised by Montreal Charter of Rights, Responsibilities and Commitments

(September 2, 2008, Montreal) Today, a citizens group filed a petition under the UNESCO-recognized Montreal Charter of Rights, Responsibilities and Commitments calling on the Montreal Ombudsman to investigate faulty proceedings employed by the borough of Côte-des-Neiges- Notre-Dame-de-Grâce.

“Urban parks are a key tool to help city dwellers reduce their ecological footprint,” said Diane Chambers. “We need more green space, not less. So we’ve asked the Montreal Ombudsman to put the rezoning process for Benny Park under the microscope and suspend all development activities under way. We believe the faulty consultation process must be challenged and that the only adequate way to remedy that process is to have Benny Park returned to its ‘park’ status.”

Benny Park is an urban park located north of Benny Farm complex. It is slated to be redeveloped for a sports and recreation complex that was originally planned for an adjacent site. The re-zoning of the entire Park – not just the site currently selected for the sports and recreation complex - leaves it an open target for further development instead of a protected urban park. Citizens are petitioning to reinstate Benny Park’s status as a park and for mediation by the Montreal Ombudsman in the planning processes regarding the sports complex.

“My family uses Benny Park often,” said Rajeev Ramtuhol. “We cannot allow our community to be hoodwinked into losing this important urban park when everyone knows we need more, not less green space. Benny Park provides green space and clean air for our children and we can’t afford to lose it.”

Residents involved with the petition have requested that Friends of the Earth - well known environmental organization - monitor the treatment and progress of the petition to the Montreal Ombudsman.

“When you think of the Montreal Charter of Rights, Responsibilities and Commitments, and then consider the bumbling Benny Park planning process on the other hand, you’ve got to wonder if the Borough bureaucracy was paying attention to Charter compliance,” said Beatrice Olivastri, CEO, Friends of the Earth Canada. “As far as we know, no other Canadian city offers the same standards of environmental justice as Montreal does with its Charter. At the same time, you have to enforce a Charter to make it meaningful and we will be watching the Benny Park intervention with great interest.”

When the Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities was implemented in 2006, the Montreal Ombudsman became its ‘guardian’ and acquired broad investigative powers including the right to recommend appropriate corrective measures. Since 2006, the Ombudsman office has reported receiving 81 Charter requests with a resulting 69 investigations.

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Friends of the Earth Canada is a voice for the environment, working nationally and internationally to inspire the renewal of communities and the earth through research, education and advocacy. It is the Canadian member of the 69 country strong Friends of the Earth International (www.foecanada.org).