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Hudson Council authorizes release of Eco2Urb report

July 8, 2020 — Hudson council has authorized the release of the Eco2Urb report, a key component in guiding this and future administrations in the resilience planning required to deal with environmental challenges facing the municipality.

Commissioned in June 2019 and delivered to council Jan. 21, 2020, the 97-page report builds on the 2008 Teknika HBA wetland/woodland audit and the 2016 CIMA+ conservation plan to provide the technical basis for a comprehensive approach to land use and management planning in all sectors of Hudson.

The study's objective was to prioritize and rank natural areas for conservation across the entirety of the town's natural areas in harmony with the Montreal Metropolitan Community's goal of conserving 17 per cent of its total surface area. [The MMC's Metropolitan Land Use and Development Plan (PMAD) seeks to concentrate development in sectors already supplied with roads, potable water, sewers, public transit, schools and businesses.]

"This prioritization will help inform urban planning initiatives and achieve the objectives set by PMAD, promoting biodiversity, ecosystem services, connectivity and resilience," the report states.

"Certain key elements of interest emerge from this extensive work, namely the importance of maintaining and expanding the network of blue-green corridors naturally found within Hudson due to its waterways and surrounding green infrastructure. This would contribute to supporting biodiversity while providing essential ecosystem services in suburban contexts."

Eco2Urb's report also provides recommendations to steer conservation efforts, which include guidelines such as:

- Conserving wetlands to improve overall tolerance to waterlogging, especially in the flood zone along the Ottawa River;

- Promoting tree functional group diversity to improve forest resilience;
- Favoring a range of forest management practices (e.g. planting, selective harvests) that contribute to stand- and landscape- level habitat diversity;
- Focusing conservation efforts on forests with higher levels of functional diversity;
- Focusing restoration efforts on forests with poor resilience;
- Sensitizing residents as to vectors of invasion for exotic pests and diseases (e.g. firewood), and on how to identify main biotic threats;
- Restoring blue-green corridors between fragmented habitat patches;
- Conserving fragments of quality habitat that can serve as steppingstones facilitating animal movement;
- Protecting ecological corridors essential to biodiversity.

Eco2Urb begins by identifying some of the global drivers of the environmental challenges to conservation: "Many of the challenges faced by [Hudson] are expected to grow in severity in the next century. A 3.1◦C increase in mean annual temperature is predicted for the municipality by year 2070 under a high carbon emissions scenario, which is expected to lead to more frequent flooding and drought events. […] Invasive pests and diseases, such as the emerald ash borer, are already impacting Hudson's urban canopy. Additional accidental imports, such as the Asian longhorned beetle, have been recorded in southern Ontario and threaten the integrity of the Town's forested ecosystems."

Added to that, habitat fragmentation caused by urban development facilitates the widespread propagation of exotic plants that displace native species. "In a context of urban expansion and global environmental change, science-based solutions are needed to help maintain key natural areas, biodiversity and ecosystem services (e.g. climate regulation, flood control, recreation)."

In response, Eco2Urb introduces the concept of resilience planning, "an approach that aims to optimize an ecosystem's ability to resist and recover from disturbance. It ensures a natural area's ability to keep providing ecosystem services despite environmental stressors such as invasive pests and disease, drought, and floods. Resilience planning maximizes an ecosystem's biodiversity (including genetic, species and functional diversity) to better adapt to change."

Applied at the policy and operational levels, resilience planning:

- Links connectivity with the need to protect Hudson's potable water source;
- Supplies the basis on which to immunize infrastructure from the effects of climate change (eg. control stormwater surges in the Viviry watershed);
- Prioritizes the need to ensure the long-term health of Hudson's forest canopy with a policy of diversifying the number of species with an emphasis on overall sustainability;

- Supplies a theoretical framework within which this and future councils can direct development in harmony with our architectural and natural heritage;
- Offers a range of measurement tools allowing Hudson's urban planners and property owners to identify environmental constraints on a lot-by-lot basis.

Conservation: A shared responsibility

Eco2Urb's report emphasizes that conservation is a responsibility shared by all Hudson residents, said Mayor Jamie Nicholls. "It is not the burden of the municipal governments alone to protect important ecologies of our region. Community associations, private landowners and non-governmental organizations play a necessary role in mobilization and acquisition of sensitive landscapes for the greater good.

To that end, Mayor Nicholls said council intends to build partnerships with community associations, private landowners and non-governmental associations. "Working in partnership, we can get a lot done."

The mayor emphasized that the Town's existing policy framework will remain in place and that decisions already reached on major development projects will be honoured. "We can't be continually looking backwards to see what was done and what was not done. We have to work in the now.

"The Eco2Urb report has provided the administration with an updated snapshot of the state of Hudson's environment that will serve as an important tool in decision-making for the Town of Hudson for years to come," Mayor Nicholls added. "It does not give us the right to cancel decisions made by this and previous councils."

This administration has had to prioritize core issues — Hudson's infrastructure deficit, potable water production and the need to regularize the Town's books and bylaws, the mayor explained. "The Town of Hudson does not have unlimited capacity to deal with ecological conservation issues.

"It has been recommended to council that we find a biologist who can assist us with these issues. Council has been dealing with the pandemic since early March and COVID-19 has brought many unknowns for us as a decision-making body. Outside of foundational issues such as infrastructure and finances, we are reluctant to create new positions without a clear plan for implementation of the recommendations of the Eco2Urb report."

Mayor Nicholls sees the translation and release of the Eco2Urb report as the pivot toward the realization of longer-term goals. "Council has identified the resilience of our forests and blue-green corridors as areas of priority. There's an urgency for canopy planning due to the very real biotic threats our forests are facing, very real problems like the emerald

ash borer, and other tree diseases. Like under COVID-19, the town and its citizens working together to address these issues leads to better outcomes then when we are working at cross purposes."

For further information, please contact Mayor Jamie Nichols at maire@ville.hudson.qc.ca

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