

McGregor Lake Association Brief in Response to Val-des-Monts' Draft Urban Development Plan

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The McGregor Lake Association (MLA) commends the Municipality of Val-des-Monts for its progressive Urban Development Plan (UDP) which promotes a deliberate, well organized approach to the development of the territory of Val-des-Monts (VDM) while protecting the magnificent environment we all cherish. We are pleased to note that the pressure on the environment caused by residential developments in rural areas has been identified as a key issue in the UDP (4.4.4).

The increased concentration and density of residential and commercial growth in the three urban hubs makes sense to MLA, as does the planning for an urban expansion zone where thoughtful and organized expansion of the urban hubs can take place. However, the challenges lie in the details, and while the draft plan provides information on the municipality's priorities, objectives and planning parameters, the paucity of details leaves us wondering how this plan will be implemented and to what extent it will result in increased pressure on McGregor Lake. The impact of development on the health of the biggest lake in VDM and by extension, on its lakefront and properties must continue to be a serious factor in planning for the future.

Lake McGregor is so close to Perkins as to be practically contiguous with it. It is inevitable that growth of the residential community of Perkins will spread significantly in its direction in the next few years. Already the MLA, with the cooperation of VDM, has had to take measures to protect McGregor Lake against the negative effects of growth pressure on the quality of lake water and the shoreline. Promoting a careful management of septic systems, tracking invasive plant species and marking their locations, promoting the safe and environmentally sound use of watercraft (especially large and powerful motor boats) are but some examples. But many other effects of growth have escaped meaningful action. An example is the significantly increased access to McGregor Lake from residential developments beyond its immediate shoreline and the rental of properties and watercraft on McGregor lake, where activity takes place in disregard of the detrimental environmental consequences to the lake and its ecosystem.

As the municipality well knows, lakes and waterways are very fragile and can easily be pressured beyond their ability to recover. When that happens, we have all lost an invaluable precious asset; and in the case of McGregor Lake, an asset that is historically linked to Perkins, and in which many families have invested heavily of their time and resources.

The growth of VDM is inevitable, but the municipality has a clear responsibility to the population and future generations to manage that growth. The beauty, vitality and ecological role of our lakes are some of the principal reasons why people choose to establish their families in Val-des-Monts, and we must all work together to preserve them. This responsibility is in fact clearly stated in VDM's environmental policy whose ["main goal is to ensure the municipality can manage its activities responsibly and in keeping with the principles of sustainable development."](#) The MLA would like to support VDM in its efforts to ensure this policy underpins all aspects of its UDP in order to protect and preserve the health and beauty of our environment.

McGregor Lake is also the site of a municipal access ramp which is the subject of controlled management by VDM but increasing access continues to be a source of great pressure on the lake. This is why we strongly believe the time has come to do a boat load capacity evaluation study of the pressure McGregor Lake can sustain from the growth of residential development and increasing water based activities by lakefront and VDM residents and tourists. Such a study would provide scientific guideposts and markers to guide VDM in its expansion and policy planning. With a close, upstream collaboration with MLA and lake residents, VDM can use the principle of precaution to prevent ill advised development decisions and ensure the sustainable development of its territory.

Often in the past, McGregor lake residents have learned about questionable developments too late, making them near impossible to prevent or modify. Of equal importance is the responsiveness of VDM when inappropriate or illegal use of land on McGregor lake is brought to its attention. In the past there have been many cases of developments which have taken place in total disregard of legal parameters, such as the removal of mature trees, right down to the shoreline and their replacement by sod or rocks.

In a more specific way the MLA would like to make the following comments regarding individual aspects of the Draft Urban Development Plan:

Link to the Water Master Plan

The time is right for VDM to take a clear and courageous position on its vision to "conserve, protect the environment and increase accessibility to natural heritage". For example, is this vision short-term or long-term? Does accessibility to the natural heritage, of which McGregor Lake is a part, come at any cost?

More concretely, it is particularly distressing that the MLA has received numerous complaints from people who have felt their security in jeopardy both on the lake and on the shoreline. A key question to be addressed is the balance to be sought between the activities of a few and the security and peaceful enjoyment of the lake by the majority of its residents.

Precision needed to the chart on page 46

The MLA applauds the sustainable development approach adopted by VDM in the development of its UDP. However, we would like the plan to specify, in the dimension of the sustainability of natural resources, that the integrity and preservation of water bodies are also a priority concern.

Orientation 7.2: Ensure sound environmental management of the territory; and the integrity of the natural environment.

The objectives and actions of this orientation are well defined and quite relevant. The MLA looks forward to working with VDM to set targets and identify indicators to measure the success of the initiatives put in place. Actions that are of particular interest to the MLA are:

Action 17: Preserve green spaces and limit the cutting of trees in housing projects and developed areas.

Action 18: Impose a tree conservation strategy and the application of mitigation measures (impacts during work) during new residential constructions.

Action 19: Initiate a reflection on the supervision of AirBnb housing and short-term rentals. *(In our view, it is no longer time for reflection, but for decision-making. VDM must quickly clarify and communicate its position on the rental of private residences. According to [BDC](#) (Business Development Canada), the sharing economy (of which Airbnb is part) is one of the top five economic trends. In 2016, 45 percent of Canadians were willing to lease their property to other people. The growth in rentals of this type will certainly have a significant impact on the natural environment of VDM.)*

Action 20: Continue and strengthen initiatives and measures to protect banks, lakes and bodies of water.

Action 23. Ensure the planting of native species in gardens near a body of water and on lakefronts to prevent the spread of unwanted invasive species.

Communication and monitoring

As specified in the UDP, the protection of VDM's natural environment has been a priority for more than two decades. Numerous planning documents have been developed in recent years in support of this vision. The MLA believes that VDM needs to place more emphasis on communicating its actions to residents and developers to achieve this vision, and on monitoring to ensure compliance with regulations.

More specifically, the MLA wants better communication, promotion and monitoring of important provincial regulations regarding the construction and development of properties on the lake. Although MLA and VDM have worked together on these issues for years, some developers do not seem deterred by regulations designed to protect the environment and the fines, and continue to cut trees and modify riverbanks with impunity.

For several years now, the MLA has had a cooperative and useful relationship with VDM on all the issues identified in this brief. However much work remains to be done and a boat load capacity evaluation study would bring the plan to another level. Furthermore, the MLA wishes to see a better, more proactive communication by VDM on the specific details of the plan that have an impact on McGregor Lake. Finally, we believe a continuing spirit of cooperation is essential for the wellbeing of our community.