

Tax rate up 3.4% for single-family homes City's operating budget climbs \$4M to \$118.6M

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

A record-setting city budget of \$118.6 million calls for a rise in taxes of \$530 on the average single-family dwelling evaluated at just under \$2 million, according to the budget speech of January 17.

At an increase of 3.75 percent, below the 4-percent cost of living, this is described as "a reasonable amount," explains Councillor Antonio D'Amico, finance commissioner, in the speech provided to the *Independent* before press time.

This represents a tax rate of \$.7459 per \$100 of valuation for residential properties of five housing units or less – the largest category of tax payers. The mil rate for buildings of six units or more (apartment buildings) is \$.7558 while the non-residential (commercial) mil rate is \$2.9659.

"The current situation with COVID-19 still presents and brings its share of uncertainties," the speech states. Among these challenges is an increase of 10.4 percent in the city's share (*quote-part*) of agglomeration services.

This means that of the \$118.6-million budget, a total of \$67.4 million, or more than 57 percent, will go for these island-wide services such as fire, police and transit, over which Westmount has no cost control. This is further boosted by the city's required contribution of \$1 million to the Montreal Metropolitan Community (MMC) for regional expenses.

The budget is to be financed without borrowing and mainly from direct property taxes of \$97.7 million, the projected welcome tax from the sale of properties of \$8.5 million *continued on p. 1*

Skating! What else is there to do? (Apart from school work)



In Westmount Park on January 14: the refrigerated skating rink is rarely seen with so few skaters. But maybe the cold weather or online learning kept others away. Seven-year-old Mila had finished her online schooling by 10 am and by lunchtime she was out enjoying the park with her dad, Jhonny Dandy. Mila, a fan of Skywalker, attends the International School and the family loves coming to Westmount from NDG.

PHOTO: RALPH THOMPSON.

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Denis Ferland started Jan. 17

City clerk/legal director named after 4-month vacancy

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

City council December 20 filled the position of city clerk and director of legal services by appointing Denis Ferland during the virtual session. He was to start January 17 after the post had been vacant four months.

Ferland, who has been city clerk in the city of Mercier, located south of Chateau-

guay on the South Shore, was officially welcomed by Mayor Christina Smith and Councillor Jeff Shamie as commissioner of administration, joined by the rest of the council. "We have a lot to do," Mayor Smith told Ferland when the camera was turned on him for a screen shot.

City director general Hadi Hakim, who had been filling the role as substitute city clerk since *continued on p. 15*



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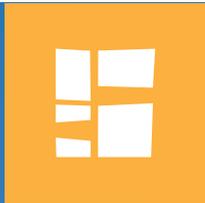
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Man arrested for drunk driving after Public Security call police

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

Public safety officers patrolling west on Sherbrooke December 30 at 1:52 am noticed a mini-van swerving from side to side.

Public Security officials said it went through the red light at Arlington and then at Grosvenor as well as Victoria until stopping briefly at Grey in NDG.

Though the driver seemed to be asleep at that point, he suddenly turned the vehicle around and headed back east to Prince Albert, where he stopped and was approached by officers asking him to turn off the engine.

Police, who had been called, gave the driver a sobriety test and then arrested him for impaired driving. His car was towed away.

Hurt ankle sends woman to hospital

Public safety officers flagged down a passing Urgences Santé ambulance January 3 in Westmount Park when a woman found seated on a bench said she had twisted an ankle, Public Security officials said. She was reported to have been taken to hospital but no further details were provided.

Inebriated woman driven to uncle's house

A woman found leaning against a traffic light at Arlington and Sherbrooke December 31 at 11:30 pm was reported to be heavily intoxicated, Public Security officials said. Police were called and drove the woman to her uncle's house close by at her request rather than her own home. She was described as 34 years of age. There was no mention of action taken regarding the 10 pm curfew that had gone into effect that day.

Optimism!



City council issues ‘potential’ dangerous dog alert

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

City council adopted a resolution December 20 notifying a local dog owner of the city’s intention to declare her dog “potentially dangerous” and to require it to be submitted to various restrictions.

Identified as “Bellingham,” the dog was described as having bitten and injured another, reportedly in King George (Murray) Park.

As outlined in the resolution, the owner has 20 days after receiving notice of the city’s intent to submit written observations and, where applicable, to produce documents to complete the legal file for the city’s legal services department.

Among many provisions, a dog declared potentially dangerous must have its rabies vaccination up to date and may not be kept in the presence of a child age 10 or under, unless under constant supervision of someone 18 year or older.

It must also be prevented from going beyond the borders of a private property, wear a basket muzzle at all times in public places and be kept on a leash not longer than 1.25 meters except in a dog run facility. A sign must also be posted on the prop-

erty where the dog is located.

These are some of the restrictions based on provincial law (an *Act to promote the protection of persons by establishing a framework with regard to dogs*) rather than Westmount’s own dog by-law (1522), updated in May 2018 to include provisions for “a dangerous dog.”

Asked why the city is using this way to proceed rather than under the city’s own by-law, a reply from city director general Hadi Hakim stated that “as this is an active legal file, we unfortunately cannot comment.”

As a result, the owner, identified in the council resolution as Nicole Hesler, “is provisionally ordered to submit her dog to standards applicable to dogs declared potentially dangerous under provincial law section 22 to 25,” the resolution states.

Hesler is widely known as the first woman appointed chief justice of Quebec. She retired from the Quebec Court of Appeal in 2020.

The city’s own by-law was updated after the mauling to death of a dog in May 2017. This resulted in many veterinary bills (see letter July 11, 2017, p. 6 and story September 12, 2017, p. 4.)

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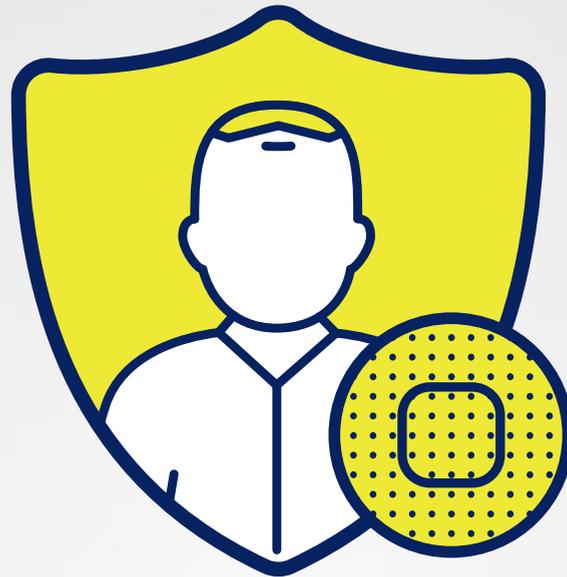
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Cited for leadership, attitude, team support

Cecilia Chadwick named player-of-the-month for December

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

Westmount's hockey player-of-the-month for December is Cecilia Chadwick, as announced last week by Andrew Maislin, operations manager for the Sports and Recreation department. He launched the program in 2019 for the Westmount Minor Hockey Association.

Cecilia, who plays with the U/M11 A "Wings" team, is one of two girls on the team and is playing inter-city this year for Westmount for the first time after partici-

pating in the fall youth league and development clinics in the past.

"Since Cecilia started playing team sports with Westmount in 2017, I have never seen her not smiling from ear to ear," Maislin said. "She has developed into a strong leader within our association who is always up for a challenge."

Maislin said when he asked the coaches why they recommended Cecilia for December's player he received this response: "Honestly, we could give Cecilia player-of-the-month every month just for her posi-

tive attitude and the support she gives her teammates."

Head coach Dominic Plante explained that "She's always smiling, she wants to learn and she works really hard all the time. She is a quick and eager learner. She also contributes on the ice. She's one of the best defencemen on the team."

The program was launched not only to highlight the contributions of players, but also to acknowledge the opportunities and skills that hockey, and sports as a whole, can offer young people, Maislin explains.

In the face of Omicron...

Library closed, but curbside service comes to the rescue

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

As the Omicron variant and attendant restrictions have kept the Westmount Public Library shut after the holidays, there's good news for members who hoped for reinstatement of the curbside service available during previous COVID outbreaks.

Effective Monday, January 17, "curbside" is now available again but only for pick-up at the Sherbrooke St. door, as originally

done during phase 1 of the library's gradual re-opening, according to library director Julie-Anne Cardella.

"I am so happy to get up and running again, and for people to get the books and materials they reserve," she said last week, adding "just as long as it's safe for the residents and safe for the staff." The library had been almost entirely open just before the municipal buildings were closed December 20.

In this current phase, business hours are modified: 1 to 5 pm daily including weekends, except for Wednesday and Friday, when they are 10 am to 5 pm.

Library members may reserve material by phone as well as via their online library account or at reservations@westmount.org. They will be contacted when items are ready to be picked up. The book-drops are also open for returns 24/7 as of January 17.



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EDITORIAL

Province makes boosters available to many, but not all

I received an AstraZeneca vaccine dose last spring, followed by two mRNA doses in the summer. Given the more than five months that have elapsed since my last dose and that the news is telling us all, over and over again, that immunity wanes, I went to the Palais des Congrès last week to get a booster. I was told that, due to having had these three doses, I could not get one.

It's a long way from spring 2021! GenX had a rare moment of unity and positive news coverage when its members were asked to take up leftover Astra doses to help with the overall vaccination effort, even though everyone knew that better Moderna/Pfizer doses were soon to be available. Many of us, including three others that I know, did so, and were happy to help. Sure enough, a short time later, the mRNA vaccines arrived in large quantities.

Once others had benefitted from these plentiful Moderna/Pfizer doses, we were treated well and allowed a first and a second Moderna/Pfizer dose, so that we had one full series of a vaccine, as prescribed by the manufacturer. Also, because this full series was either Moderna or Pfizer, we had a regimen that would be useful for travel to places that did not recognize Astra at all.

Now, it seems that we are being treated

badly, even though there is no lack of vaccine doses at the moment and everyone is being encouraged to get boosted.

Very importantly, I don't think that it is to society's benefit to leave us un-boosted. Does that long-ago extra Astra dose make us as safe - for ourselves and others - as a booster today?

I have written to Westmount's provincial legislator, Jennifer Maccarone, who is - I realize - in opposition. Her team replied in three days' time - thank you! - saying that they were researching the topic. Surely she could reach the relevant authority and make a non-partisan case?

I also wrote to Quebec's minister of health, who replied in 24 hours, in both languages - thank you! Here is the English reply in full:

"In response to your message regarding a 4th dose of vaccine for people like you who have a special vaccination situation, please be advised that since there are still uncertainties about the benefits and risks associated with administering such a booster dose, a 4-dose schedule is not yet authorized by Health Canada, except for people who are immunosuppressed and on dialysis.

"The guidelines followed by health care professionals in vaccination centers are consistent with the recommendations made by Health Canada. In this sense, no

clinic or vaccination center in Quebec will administer a 4th dose of vaccine if it is not recommended by Health Canada.

"We understand that this may be a cause for concern, but rest assured that if such a booster dose were recommended for people with a vaccination status such as yours, it would be publicly announced and immediately published on the government website."

* * *

I am all for experts investigating "benefits and risks," but are there any incremental risks here? And while I know next to nothing about biology, I do know a bit about how a question can affect an answer.

At a time when most people have yet to have a third dose, asking "Should some people get a fourth dose?" will more likely lead to a "No."

At a time when doses are plentiful, asking "Should people who received their last dose 5+ months ago get another dose now?" will more likely lead to a "Yes."

Or ask the experts: "If you were in this situation and free to choose, what would you do?"

Obviously, all sorts of other people should be ahead of young-ish, thrice-vaccinated people, but given that convincing people to get the vaccine seems to be the larger challenge right now and that supplies seem plentiful, shouldn't this group be greenlit for a booster now or soon?

As far as I know, GenXers are just as capable of spreading and succumbing to the virus as anyone else.

David Price is the editor of the Independent.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FLAWED MT. PLEASANT SURVEY

I received a survey from the city of Westmount regarding the reconstruction of Mount Pleasant between Sherbrooke and Rosemont Cres. as part of the city's aim to implement new street designs and features. I was upset when I read the letter for the following reasons:

- It did not state why the reconstruction for this section of Mt. Pleasant was required, and not the whole street.
- It did not show a map of this street section vs. the surrounding area.
- It did not state how much of the taxpayers' money the planned reconstruction could cost given various items.

• When I responded to the survey to share my views, I could not rank the various items properly as some of the rankings were grayed out. This will skew the results of the survey.

• When I tried to contact Mr. Shamie [city councillor for District 3] to inform him of the problem with the online survey, it was not easy to reach him. I understand that this may be due to COVID measures.

While the survey process is commendable in order to reflect the views of the residents, I decided to write to you so that the city as well as the residents are aware of how this survey process is flawed.

LESLEY WRIGHT, OLIVIER AVE.

Budget, cont'd from p. 1

as well as government properties and grants.

Among some of the other highlights is an appropriation of \$15 million from the city's accumulated surplus to reduce local expenditures in order to present a balanced budget as required by law.

The largest allocations of the city's own "controllable expenditures" are \$27 million in employee remuneration, \$21 million in pay-as-you go and \$16 million in departmental expenses net of remuneration.

Of these, the budget speech mentions an increase in maintaining parks and green spaces, though these are not itemized but are included in Public Works, the largest city department with a budget of \$10 million. This is followed in budget size by Library and Community Events at \$1.2

million and then Sports and Recreation at \$1 million from which the city will derive \$1.3 million in revenue from various activities and rink rental at the Westmount Recreation Centre.

One of the city's well-used departments, Public Security, has a decrease in budget for 2022 to \$317,200 from \$321,500 but whose work will contribute to the city's \$5 million in budgetted revenues for parking meters and permits, tickets and fines.

There will be no repayment of the city's outstanding debt of \$9.3 million during 2022 though debt service will cost \$304,000.

Tax bills are expected to be sent out by the end of January in two installments due February 25 and May 27.

WESTMOUNT INDEPENDENT

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Required before partial demolition**Work resumes by restoring brickwork at 500 Claremont**

BY LAUREN SWEENEY

After lying dormant for some two years, work to convert a vacant century-old institutional building at 500 Claremont into a large and residential complex began shortly before Christmas. The site is at the corner of Windsor.

The recent activity began with the cleaning and re-pointing of brickwork, described by developer Gideon Pollack as restoration. “We need to fix the building before we can build,” he told the *Independent* last week. “It will be many months of restoration work before construction begins.”

While the interior of the Category II heritage-rated building had been entirely stripped in 2018, the work ahead includes removing and re-building the top, fifth storey and roof that had been added in the 1950s as well as the southern façade. This is where a large addition is to be erected as part of the proposal to create some 20



500 Claremont, looking southeast from the dead-end of Windsor Ave. on January 14.

PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.

high-end apartments.

The required demolition was approved at a city hearing May 21, 2019. Since then, however, little noticeable work had taken place except for a number of “exploratory” holes in the façade (see photo, bottom left). These left neighbours questioning the reasons.

Many challenges

It was only August 16, 2021, two years after approval of the demolition portion that city council okayed a permit for work to start (see story August 24, 2021). This

was followed by Councillor Conrad Peart referring to how the developer had “navigated” through many construction challenges and now satisfied the city’s regulatory requirements.

“After almost four years, we look forward to seeing progress at the site,” he had said.

Since first proposed publicly in November 2016, the project has survived two SCAOPI hearings for non-conforming projects that included a referendum registry and change of interior plans. The building dates from around 1908.



Two of the exploratory holes at 500 Claremont, as seen October 18, 2019.

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WESTMOUNT 2021 REAL ESTATE REVIEW

Source: Centris.ca & Christina Miller Group data @ January 1st, 2022

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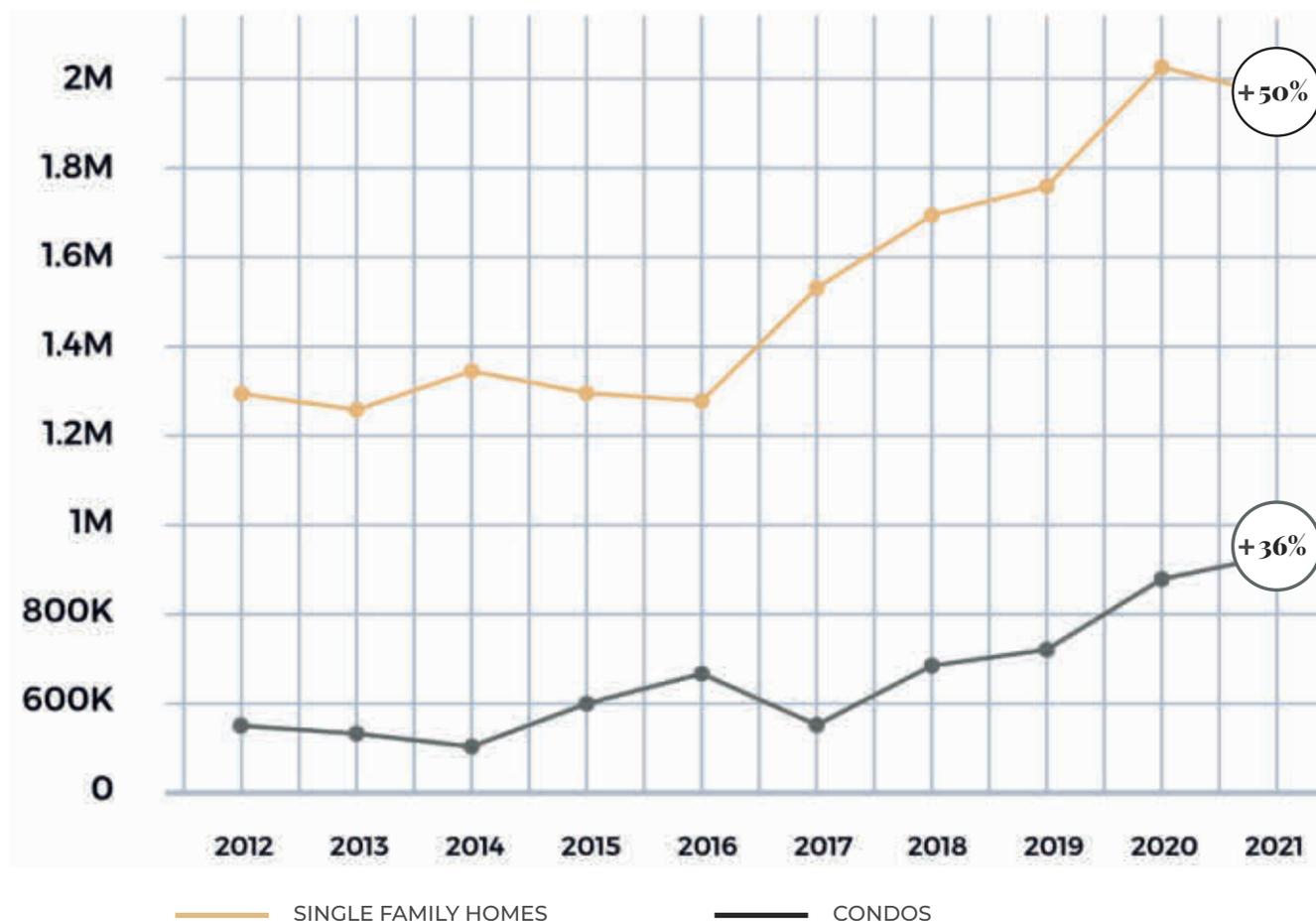
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MEDIAN PRICE

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COMPARED TO 2020	

AVG. DAYS ON MARKET

SINGLE FAMILY HOMES	CONDOS
DAYS ON MARKET - 75	DAYS ON MARKET - 88
- 55%	+ 3.4%
COMPARED TO 2020	

NEW LISTINGS

SINGLE FAMILY HOMES	CONDOS
213	150
+ 1.8%	+ 20%
COMPARED TO 2020	

SALES VOLUME

SINGLE FAMILY HOMES	CONDOS
\$352,183,486	\$99,096,702
+ 3.6%	+ 24%
COMPARED TO 2020	

NUMBER OF LISTINGS SOLD

SINGLE FAMILY HOMES	CONDOS
148	82
EVEN 0%	+ 24%
COMPARED TO 2020	

PRICE DISTRIBUTION OF SALES

	SFH	CONDOS
\$0 - \$999,999	4 vs 1	36 vs 45
\$1,000,000 - \$1,999,999	65 vs 75	14 vs 27
\$2,000,000 - \$2,999,999	59 vs 46	9 vs 6
\$3,000,000 - \$3,999,999	12 vs 13	1 vs 1
\$4,000,000 +	8 vs 13	2 vs 3

2020 VS 2021



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New demo hearing for Hillside armoury set for Feb. 17

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

A special public meeting is to take place February 17 on an application to tear down 87 percent of the long-vacant Hillside armoury to develop it into residential use. The hearing by the demolition committee is set for 4 pm and will be broadcast on Zoom.

The Category II heritage building dat-

ing back to 1910 is located at the corner of Hillside Lane and Hillside Ave. directly across from the Westmount Athletic Grounds (WAG).

Anyone wishing to oppose the demolition has 10 days to send written comments to the city clerk's office from the date of the legal notice January 11. This will give them intervener status at the demolition meeting.

An original hearing for last June 23 was postponed, with no reasons given except that Mayor Christina Smith told the *Independent* at the time it had to do with "various calculations" that had to be re-done (see story July 6, 2021, p. 12).

Information presented last week as part of the city's notification on its website of the new hearing date states that if the demolition request is approved, a separate

interest and the interest of the parties" as well as "the condition of the building, the character of the neighbourhood, cost of restoration and other pertinent criteria."

Under the proposal, 100 percent of the front façade on Hillside Lane would be demolished along with 43 percent of the south side facing Hillside Ave. and 67 percent of the east side as well as 58 percent of the rear elevation.



Renderings of the proposed project. Illustration at left, looking northwest from the intersection of Hillside and Hillside Lane and, illustration at right, southwest from near the intersection of St. Catherine St. and Hillside Lane.

SOURCE: DEVELOPER'S FILING ON CITY OF WESTMOUNT'S WEBSITE.

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public meeting would take place later on the preliminary replacement program. This would be subject of a SCAOPI application for projects that do not conform to current zoning.

A brief summary of this proposal shows a five-storey development of 27 residential units that does not comply to density and height requirements.

The demolition hearing itself is to examine the reasons submitted by the applicant (developer/architects) for justifying the request to demolish and re-build much of the building that was built as a riding academy.

These include the deteriorated state of the building, better harmonizing it with the current residential character of the neighbourhood, a \$10-million cost to restore the building without changing its industrial use, and to respect the residential use of the area and prescribed setbacks.

Given some incomplete wording at the end of the city's website presentation, Councillor Conrad Peart, as urban planning commissioner, later told the *Independent*, that according to the city's demolition by-law, the Demolition Committee in its evaluation of the request must be convinced that "the proposed demolition is advisable taking into consideration the public

A Canadian two-pack



This pedestrian, seen January 17 seemingly on the way to work entirely on foot, carried both a shovel and a snow brush for cleaning off vehicles.

PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.

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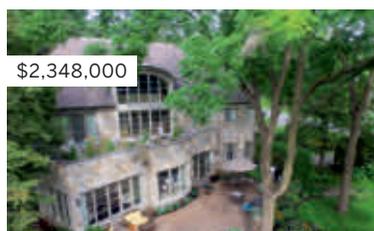
Amazing waterfront home, L'Île-Cadieux
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Monique Assouline* 514.219.5897

« EXCEPTIONAL HOMES »



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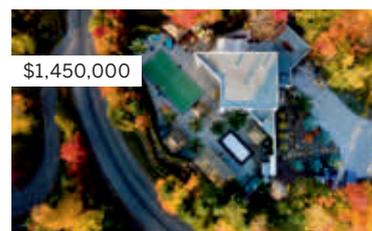
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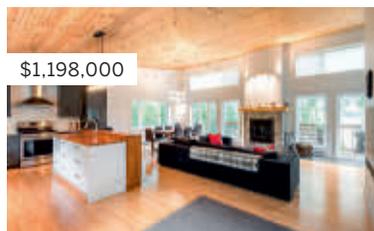
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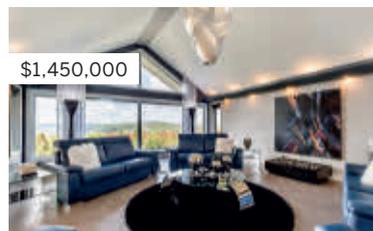
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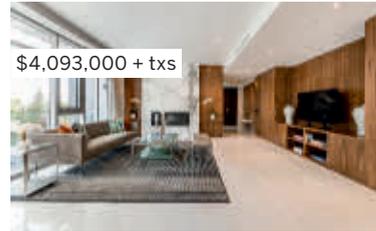
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Ville-Marie
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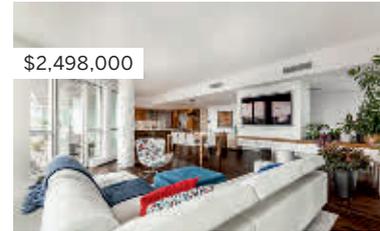
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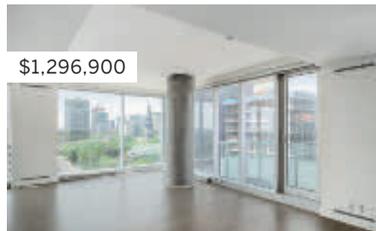


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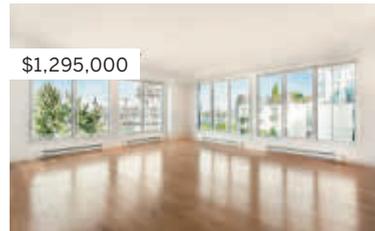
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Garden view, Ville-Marie
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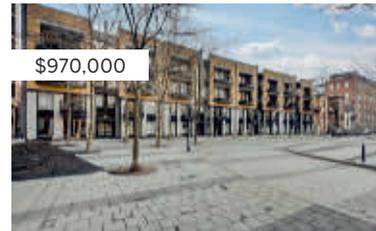
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Beautiful views, Ville-Marie
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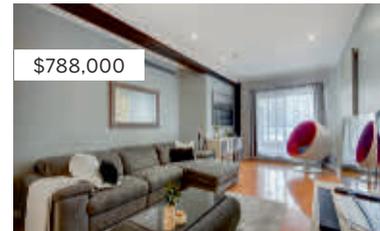
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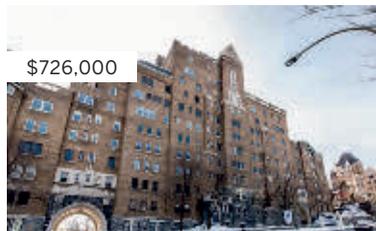
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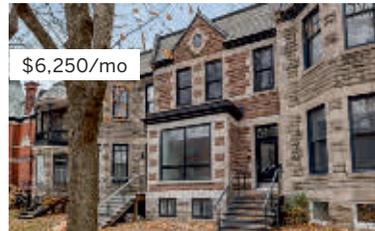
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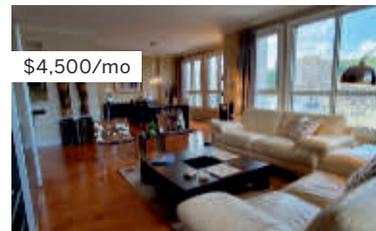
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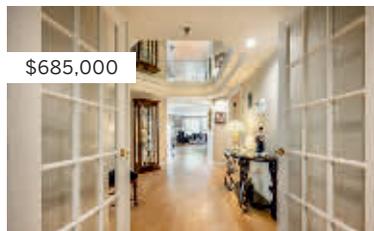
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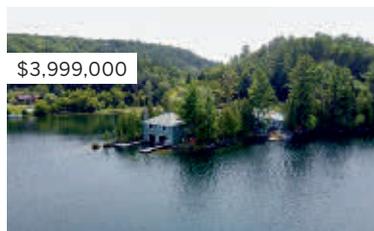
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Batshaw Children Needing Homes

Leah needs a long-term foster family

BY GARNETT FORBES, MSW

Eight-year-old Leah is presently in an emergency foster home and requires a long-term foster family, as her parents are not able to take care of her. Leah has a sunny disposition, she is articulate, has a good sense of humour and is said to be a kind girl.

She is caring, friendly and easy to engage. Leah is able to give and receive affection, being openly demonstrative with her mother during family visits.

The lack of structure and routine in her

family home has impacted her school performance, in that Leah has missed a significant amount of school, resulting in academic challenges. She struggles mainly in English and French.

In order for her to succeed in school, she needs structure, patience and consistent rules.

Thus far, Leah has integrated into the emergency foster home and has responded well to the structure and nurturing provided by her foster mother.

Leah has regular contact with her biological family, but needs a family that can

make the commitment to her for as long as she is in need of care. Because she needs consistency and clear structure to help her to focus, it appears that Leah will benefit from a two-parent family where her overall needs will be met.

The ideal foster family would be a black family that can make the commitment to her for as long as she requires care. The foster parents should be open to structured visits from her parents and sibling.

For more information about Leah, please call Batshaw Youth and Family Centres at 514.932.7161, local 1139.

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City clerk, cont'd from p. 1

Screen shot as Denis Ferland, bottom right, is welcomed by city council at its virtual meeting December 20.

the resignation of former city clerk Andrew Brownstein September 10, 2021, described Ferland's appointment as "a relief."

He thanked "the whole department" of legal services for making it possible for him to undertake the role only a month after he had arrived in Westmount himself to head the city's administration (see story August 10, p. 1).

Brownstein had left the city to return to private legal practice after working in the position for two years (see story September 14, p. 14). His departure on the approach of the municipal election November 7, left Westmount without a returning officer, for which the city contracted out the role. It also approved a bank of hours from the legal firm of Bélanger Sauv .

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Gazoo, with the adorable feet



9 Lives

LYSANNE FOWLER

noticing that he is polydactyl, which is even better.

Gazoo is so coordinated in his look, sleek black mask and hat, perfect black coat, white shirt, white booties – a true dandy. With his bright green eyes and pink nose, he is the poster cat of sweetness.

Gazoo is presently in foster care with the grassroots animal rescue Gerdy's Rescues & Adoptions, and is very appreciated by the family as he is very friendly, affectionate and playful. When he plays, he gets excited and sociable, quite enjoying inter-

I just can't stop myself. I have a soft spot for cats with fluffy mittens! As you can see with me right here, huggable Gazoo has the most perfect contrast of silky, short black fur and four perfect white booties,



action with people around the home even though he has not been around children. Gazoo is a very healthy eight-and-a-half-year-old, up to date with his inoculations, neutered and microchipped.

If you would like more information and adorable photographs of him, please do not hesitate to write to info@gerdysrescue.org to find out all about Gazoo and fill out the application for adoption form.

This is a New Year when we will still be spending so much time at home, certainly a perfect opportunity to fill your life with the joys of a loving friend.

Your neighbour,
Lysanne

Alaska (not the state)



Westmount
A-dog-tions

LYSANNE FOWLER

not used to small children and cats yet.

As she is a puppy still in many ways, boredom is to be avoided. A good routine with rules and consistency is so important, as all puppy people know! Sweet Alaska is very healthy, up to date with her vaccinations, spayed and microchipped. She is crate trained, house trained and can be on her own for a bit at home in her crate as a practice, even though a presence in the house or flexible hours are best for a growing young dog.

If you would like to find out more about her, please refer to the Gerdy's Rescues & Adoptions website at gerdysrescue.org and refer to her information page. If you would like to find out more, please write to the rescue at info@gerdysrescue.org for more information and an adoption questionnaire.

Alaska is a sweet beauty. She would fit in so well in our Westmount doggie central neighbourhood!

Your neighbour,
Lysanne

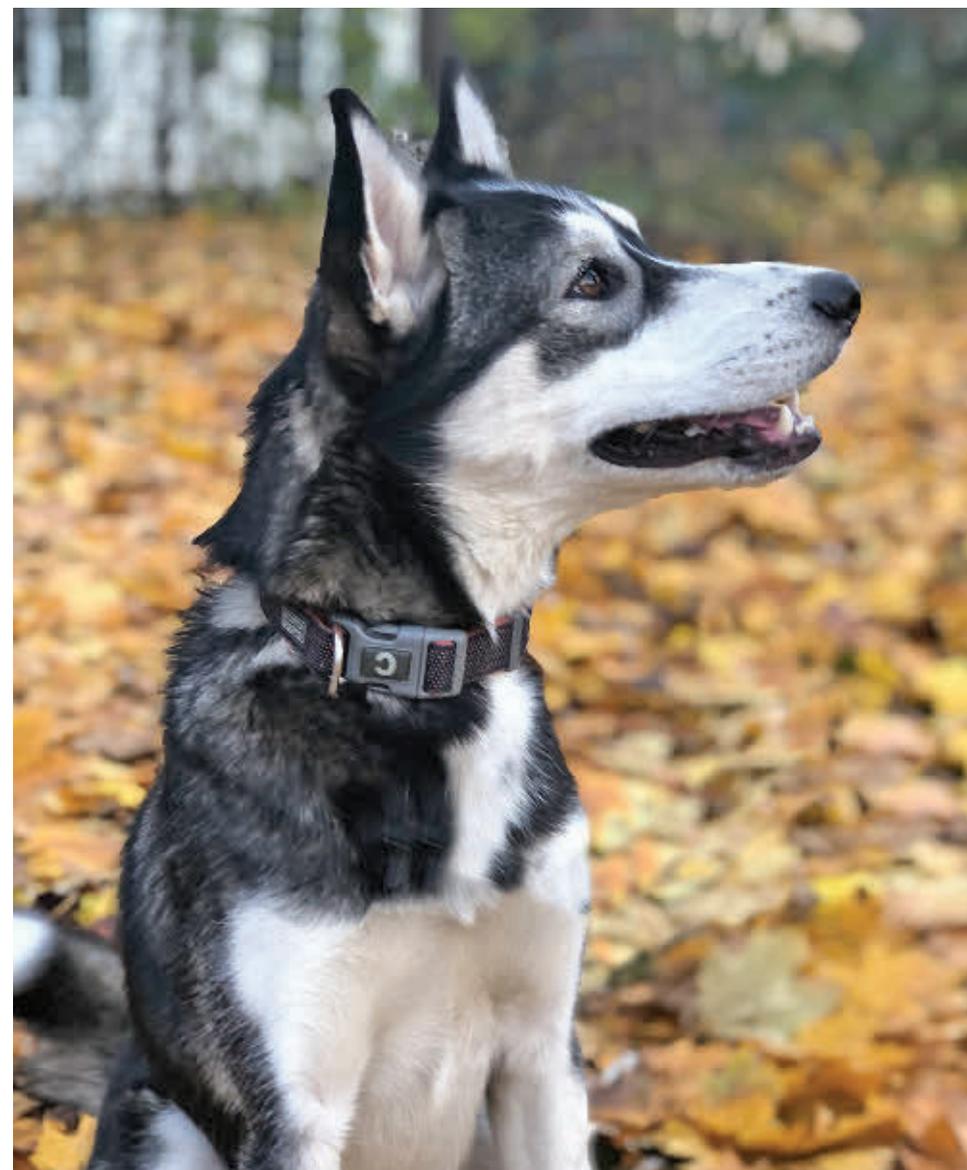
Yes, she is a delightful girlie, just perfect in so many more ways than just her profile, which is stunning.

A young one-year-old, Alaska is very friendly and affectionate with all. She is cutely puppy-playful still with other dogs, very bright and ready to bond. A good walk, a car ride, a snuggle – all are very appreciated.

She is true to her husky breed and is ready for physical activities and socializing dates with other dogs and new friends.

She is presently in foster care for the animal rescue volunteer organization Gerdy's Rescues & Adoptions, where she is enjoying a fenced backyard.

Alaska has had limited exposure and is



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Snowman, snow-dog, snow-cat

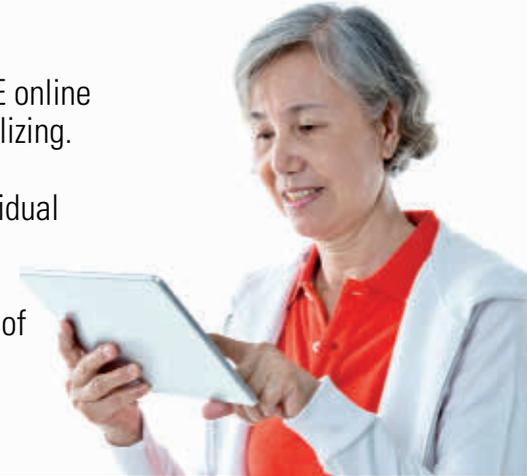


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In conversation

HEATHER BLACK

Lew Yung-Chien: Art and renewal



Lew Yung-Chien at his Westmount home on December 29.

Westmounter Lew Yung-Chien is well known for his stunning photography – both realistic and abstract. A photographer with a continually evolving style and subject matter, Yung offers timely advice on creativity – and life – as we enter the New Year.

Camera as brush

Elected to the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 2014, Yung's work features scenes of Westmount as well as his birthplace, China.

But his images – a black-and-white photograph of a tree against a waterfall or the red textures of peeling paint on a barn door – are universal and timeless.

When asked what guides his art, he answered, "In this era of the internet and information overload – simplicity!"

A co-founder of the well-known Montreal communications firm Hablutzel & Yung in 1975, Yung draws on his graphic-design skills.

Trained in the visual arts in Taiwan and France, his photographs of trees reflected in water or city dwellers under bright umbrellas celebrate colour, form and texture.

He explained that his images are not created or manipulated in software, but that he shoots what he sees.

Also a painter, Yung describes his approach: "I use the camera as a brush to capture the beauty of the moment, when inner feeling and reality collide in front of my eyes."

He explained that photography can be "as romantic as a watercolour painting, as intense as an oil painting, as precise as a realistic painting, and as suggestive as an abstract painting."

The variety in Yung's work reflects this

viewpoint.

Photo exploration

Known to many in Westmount Park as a tai-chi practitioner, Yung's first book of photographs *L'esprit du tai-chi* was published in 2009 by Les Éditions de l'Homme. Another, *Beauty comes from the heart*, was published in 2015 at the time of his solo exhibition in Taiwan. Images in this book include clouds reflected in windows and – on the cover – Westmount Park's weeping willow. "My work is a self-portrait," he said.

Beginning in January 2020 – with flights cancelled due to COVID – Yung spent the

year in Taiwan photographing and re-uniting with former classmates. "While others my age are presenting retrospectives of their work, I'm still experimenting," he said. Indeed, on his return in December, he began a new series where long exposure times reduced pedestrians to silhouettes against driving snow.

Yung calls his creative approach "swiftness" to convey an inner initial response rather than a post-production technique. At photographic workshops in California – now by Zoom – he encourages students to observe nature and the shifting patterns of light and form. He explained, "The moment is fleeting and will not return." His

latest series – abstracted details of nature in Westmount Park – reflect this philosophy.

"My work is now rooted in Quebec," he said.

Personal discovery

For Yung, photography is self-portraiture as well as a moment in time. But it is also about seizing the moment – to run outside with a camera when a spring snow settles on new buds.

A powerful reminder to find beauty – and opportunity – in our daily lives, his parting question was: "What will your portrait look like?"

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École St. Léon's student enrolment, island's population drop



BY MARTIN C. BARRY

With construction of a new extension at École St. Léon tentatively scheduled to be completed by next fall, administrators say they are alarmed by a steep drop in enrolment at the school over the past few

years, corresponding to a decline in Montreal's population during the COVID pandemic.

According to a report released last week by the Institut de la statistique du Québec, Quebec's rural regions benefitted from record gains in population growth last year, largely at the expense of the island of Montreal.

The study found that Quebec's urban centres underwent especially drastic drops, especially the island of Montreal. It reported a net loss of 48,300 residents, which is around 2.6 per cent.

Loss: 21 classes

According to Eric Dion, director of St. Léon, the school's peak enrolment of 830 students three years ago now stands at around 555, for a loss of 12 classes.

Because of the ongoing construction at the main campus, around 170 St. Léon students currently attend classes at the Charlevoix annex on de Courcelle St. in St. Henri.

Dion, who has been a teacher and a school administrator since the early 1990s, said that neither he nor assistant-director Pierre-Emmanuel Pednault had ever seen a comparable drop in enrolment. "It goes against trends seen in all the statistics," he

Seen here on January 13 from the south end of Kitchener Ave., work on the extension of École St. Léon is on track to being completed for the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year next August and September.

PHOTO: MARTIN C. BARRY

said in an interview with the *Westmount Independent*.

He suggested that if the decision to proceed with the extension project were being made under the current circumstances, the Centre de services scolaire de Montréal (CSSDM) would probably have decided not to go ahead.

Dion said the school should be able to accommodate an enrolment of 750 students after the renovations and construction are completed.

Extension's completion dates uncertain

However, factors like the COVID pandemic, which is causing labour shortages and supply chain issues that are disrupting access to construction materials, might lead the CSSDM to postpone the delivery date, he added.

"It is not entirely out of the question that in February or March, the CSSDM makes a decision," said Dion, pointing out that a decision can't be made later than that date, since moving from the annex back to the main campus could take months.

Pednault said that if construction of the extension can't be completed on time, a

plan is in place to deal with the consequences. In the meantime, "the students are doing quite well at the Charlevoix annex," he added.

Registration for new students is now under way at École St. Léon until January 25. The school will be holding an online open-house event for interested parents on January 19 at 6 pm on the Microsoft Teams platform.

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Sharing the faith – Part 1: Judaism

Westmount’s spiritual leaders speak up as we approach the 2-year mark of COVID-19

BY JENNIFER BALL

In this, the first installation of a series that will feature perspectives from Westmount’s spiritual leaders, the *Independent* conversed with Rabbi Ellen Greenspan of Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom, Rabbi Yossi Shanowitz of Chabad of Westmount and Rabba Rachel Finegold of Shaar Hashomayim to reflect on 23 months of the COVID pandemic.

When the Omicron variant mangled many New Year’s Eve sprees, it may have felt like *déjà-vu* for many. Nevertheless, the spectrum of Jewish denominations with Westmount sites has resulted in different spiritual benefactions at the start of 2022 – all while adhering strictly to the public health guidelines, after the province closed places of worship on December 31.

From the Shaar

“There is a Jewish teaching: ‘If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, who am I?’” Rabba Finegold – who has the distinction of being one of the first Orthodox women to be ordained and the first woman to be hired in Canada by an Orthodox congregation – said. “It is called Ethics of the Fathers and it is 2,000 years old.

“If I cannot go to synagogue or Rosh Hashana, then I am going to figure out how to make that meaningful for me and for my nuclear family,” she added. “Jewish life is not a lonely religion! It is communal. You literally cannot practise Judaism alone



Rabba Finegold on January 14.

on a mountain-top because a prayer quorum is required for certain rituals.”

As an Orthodox congregation, Shaar Hashomayim has certain limits on what it can do with technology, within Jewish law. Leaders have been unable to have prayer services via Zoom because shabbat – from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday – dictates that they cannot use any technology during those hours.

They have seen new connections building within their membership, though, after congregation volunteers contacted everybody over 70 – which is many hundreds of people – to check in on their health and also their spirits.

From the Temple

Rabbi Greenspan’s reform synagogue Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom made an attempt to go back to in-person services recently, when allowed, and they were attended by 20 to 30 people. When they zeroed in on the Zoom platform, attendance rose dramatically.

“Unlike some reform synagogues in North America, we have services every Friday evening and every Saturday morning all year round. We are routinely getting 40 Zoom screens, often with two people on each screen. So, we are getting huge numbers,” she said.

Judaism has an aspect that in every single prayer service there is an expression of gratitude and the synagogue has made that very much a part of its Zoom services.

“As much as it is a spiritual need, it is a



Rabbi Shanowitz on January 14.



Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom on January 14.

need for community. We are a social people. On Friday, we open the Zoom session early for people to chat with each other and also at the end of the services,” Rabbi Greenspan said.

From Chabad

While community can endure without a building and without an address, digital is supplemental only to the in-person connection in Judaism. Of this Rabbi Shanowitz was adamant. “What is not achieved via Zoom is taking out the Torah or saying the Kaddish. For a lot of people, that is so important,” he said.

The Jewish faith has thrived because of people’s ability to unite, as they did at Sinai, standing together as “one person with one heart.” Ever since then, they embody Torah in every loving, kind, compassionate deed.

“The way that I would see it is people who are grateful, who are thankful and who are faithful, they look at this situation and they see that there is a bigger plan,” Rabbi Shanowitz said. “I put my faith and

trust in my creator and we are all going to grow stronger from this. I firmly believe that.”

King Solomon, who established the first Jewish temple, wore a ring adorned with “gimmel,” “zayen” and “yud,” and these abbreviations of the words “Gam Zeh Yaavor” remind us – almost 3,000 years later – that “this too shall pass.”

If only it could before the next significant Jewish holiday of Purim on March 16!

- Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom @ www.templemontreal.ca/
- Congregation Shaar Hashomayim @ www.shaarhashomayim.org/
- Chabad of Westmount @ www.chabadwestmount.com

The Independent will be reaching out to congregations and religious leaders, but if you are a religious leader based in Westmount and you want to be interviewed, please write or call the editor. editor@westmountindependent.com or 514.935.4537.



City views

VERONICA REDGRAVE

Another choice on Victoria Ave.



Now that life is somewhat constricted – again! – why not take pleasure in weekly tasks? Shopping can be done differently while supporting local small businesses. Walk a new path.

Discover, or re-discover, L'Autre Choix, the charming grocer on Victoria, celebrating 12 successful years.

I know it from the summer months when I pass by to pick up salad makings, which at that time of year are artfully laid on the shop steps.

90-percent organic

Now, one enters of course. It feels like being in Europe. The store is brimming with products, “90 percent of which are organic,” explains owner Clara Kwan.

How refreshing not to see bits of plastic packing vegetables and salads. Only a few are so constrained. And how delightful to discover delicious brands and products ranging from Italian Rummo pastas; meats *et al* from Les Fermes Valens, Moroccan tea from Numi, and my favourite – Annie’s Bunny Graham Crackers. Just the

charming comfort I need. Also a fun pick-me-up for a driven-to-despair work-at-home person.

As more and more consumers are turning to alternative milks, L'Autre Choix fills the gap with almond, walnut, cashew, oat and pecan options. (And, yes, of course there is a “barista” edition!) Organic coffee from 49th Parallel shares shelf space with an enticing choice of teas, including Masala chai tea; a warming sip for grey daze. (No. Not a typo!)

Gluten-free too

Along the crammed-yet-organized shelves are Asian condiments, honeys and olives, as well as options for baking with gluten-free baking soda and powder. Like all grocers, L'Autre Choix was closed on Sundays when we visited, but “hopefully to be open 7 days a week again,” smiles Clara.

PS: you can also order online. Lautrechoix.ca

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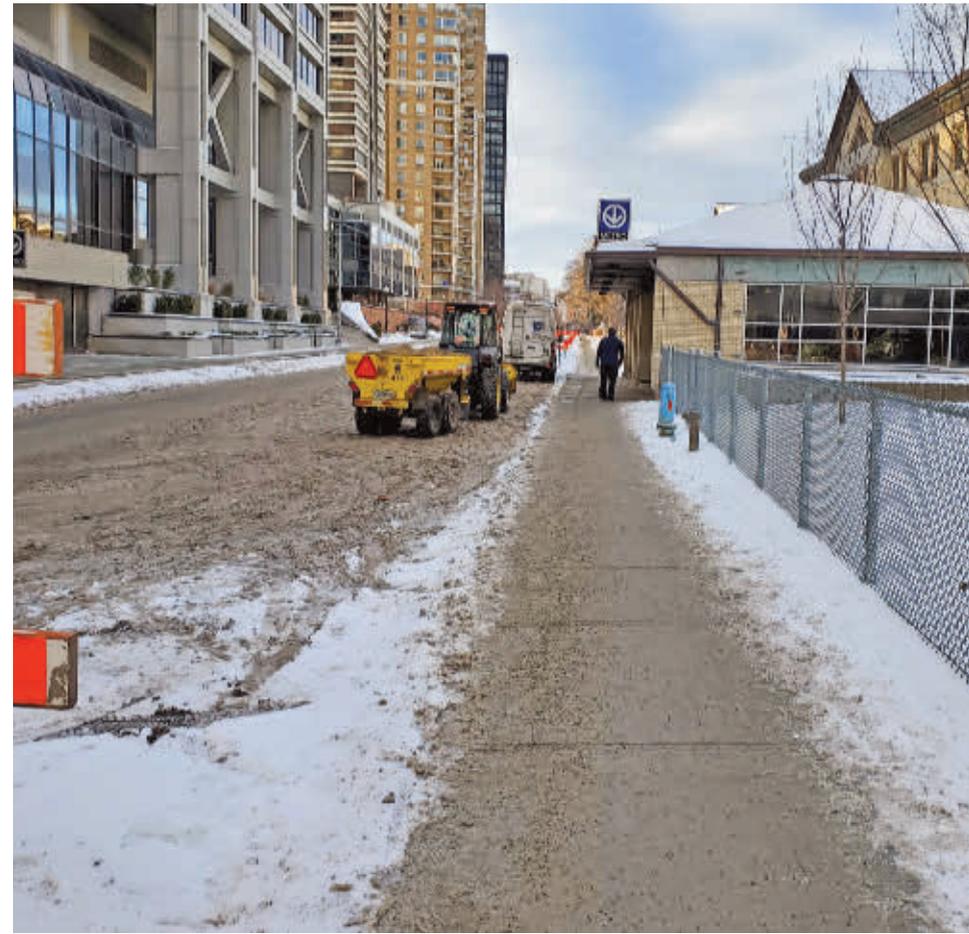
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When we last checked in on the portion of de Maisonneuve between Atwater and Wood (November 30, p. 16), it had been finished from the point of view of the Société de transport de Montréal (STM) for work on the Atwater Metro station roof, but it remained closed as Westmount talked to Montreal about how to reduce traffic. On January 14, it was open, although only to local traffic and one or two lanes are cordoned off. It is not obvious what "local traffic" means in this context or how/if that restriction will be enforced. The northern sidewalk is now also open. PHOTOS: INDEPENDENT.

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