

Work ahead 'overwhelming': Mayor Smith

City takes steps to borrow \$24 million for infrastructure

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

Taking concrete action to catch up on the amount of capital work the city has said it needs to undertake moving forward, city council at its meeting January 13 adopted and/or gave notice of motion to adopt loan by-laws totalling \$23,894,400.

This was broken down into three by-laws: One authorized an expenditure and loan of \$18,238,400 for various roadwork, watermain and sewer projects; another to

borrow \$3,009,000 was to repair public stairs while a third for \$2,647,190 was to refurbish public buildings.

The three were presented by Councillor Jeff Shamie and explained by Mayor Christina Smith, who said the decision was not taken lightly, but the work was needed and could not be delayed. In the case of the public stairs, for example, "some are closed and some are condemned."

Advance warning of the looming work and the need to borrow has been given since the 2025 capital work budget was presented and attributed to "years of underinvestment."

The city has long shied away from borrowing, choosing to use operating surpluses, which are no longer available (see story January 14, p. 1).

Long-vacant NDG restos, bar to be taken over by pharmacy



Four commercial spaces on Sherbrooke in NDG just over the Westmount border are being modified to allow the expansion of the Pharmaprix at Grey Ave., as seen January 25. From east to west, these units once housed the Taj Mahal restaurant, the Crossroads/Liquid Lounge bar, and the Maison de Seoul and Claremont restaurants. See story on p. 15.

PHOTO: RALPH THOMPSON.

**Dodge on
December real estate:
Market is falling See p. 14**

Foot pain?
Heel spur?
Bunions?



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City report required for Quebec

How accessible are city services, public buildings?

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

City goals realized for 2024 to improve accessibility to municipal services and buildings for persons with disabilities were adopted at the council meeting January 13. These highlighted completion of the ground-floor entrance to the library, accessible playground equipment and improvements in some park paths.

Some of the year's other goals listed as on-going in the city's annual Action Plan concerning the integration of persons with disabilities were various ramps and entrances plus three new elevators (one for Victoria Hall and two at connected public safety buildings at 15-21 Stanton).

But before the report was even presented for adoption, citizen "access" to the city's *continued on p. 16*

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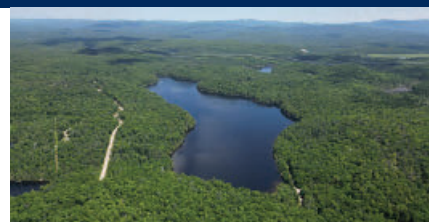
17 years later ...



The photo at left is from February 2008. The three storefronts shown on Victoria's west side, south of Somerville, were vacant, although the three shops further south (not shown) were open: Pure, Pay D'Oz and Déja Porté. Those three are gone now, and many others have come and gone: real estate, food retail, art, nail services. The whole strip – which has been renovated into four, larger units – is currently vacant. The photo at right is from January 16 of this year.

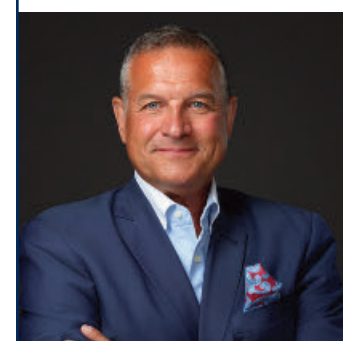
PHOTOS: INDEPENDENT.

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Période d'inscription annuelle
 DU 15 FÉVRIER AU 15 AVRIL

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La Galerie du Victoria Hall
 The Gallery at Victoria Hall



Octogenarian falls on Argyle, signs to refuse hospitalization

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

An 88-year-old Westmount resident slipped and fell on his back on Argyle Ave. January 19, Public Security officials said. He was spotted in the process of falling by a patroller who went to his aid at 6:45 pm.

A medical doctor who was close by also assisted but when the man appeared unstable on his feet, Urgences Santé was called despite the man initially refusing their assistance. After examination, the man signed to refuse transport to hospital.

He was described as being well dressed for the weather and the sidewalk was re-

ported to have been treated with abrasives and in good condition.

3 cars hit in chain reaction on Murray Ave.

A three-car collision January 17 on Murray Ave. was reported by Public Security officials to have occurred at 9:42 am involving two that had been parked. The chain reaction started when a car turning left from Montrose onto Murray ran into a parked Accord. This car slid downhill, hitting a parked Mazda 3 onto nearby property. Police were called to investigate.

Police Report

Homeless man's belongings stolen outside Resilience day shelter

BY MARTIN C. BARRY

Last week, Station 12 patrol officer Cst. Mike Yigit was trying to track down the perpetrator of a brazen theft that left a homeless person bereft of all his belongings, which had been left momentarily on the sidewalk outside the Resilience Mon-

treal day shelter on St. Catherine St.

On January 21 around noon, the 34-year-old victim had gone to get a lunchtime meal inside the shelter at the corner of Atwater Ave., leaving behind his belongings, which included a computer tablet as well as personal items.

"While he was waiting inside in line, another service user took his stuff," said Cst. Yigit, who is also the community relations officer for Station 12.

As many Westmounters are no doubt aware, the Atwater and St. Catherine area has become well known as an assembly place for many of Montreal's homeless.

Although the homeless gather mostly in Cabot Square on the east side of Atwater in the city of Montreal, they can also be seen outside the Resilience Montreal locale, as well as along St. Catherine St. near the edge of Westmount's city limits.

One of the many problems the homeless must contend with, according to Yigit who patrols the sector regularly, is that they are forc-

continued on p. 10

Police Report, p. 3

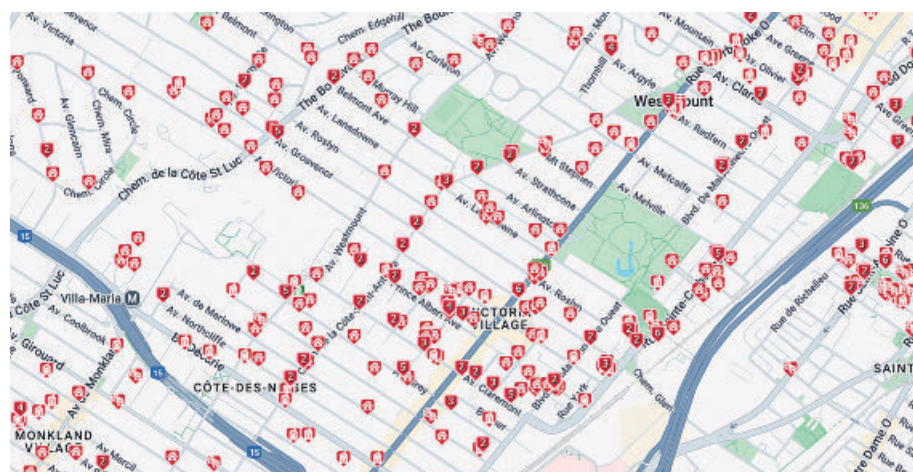
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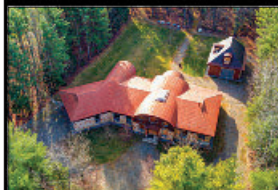
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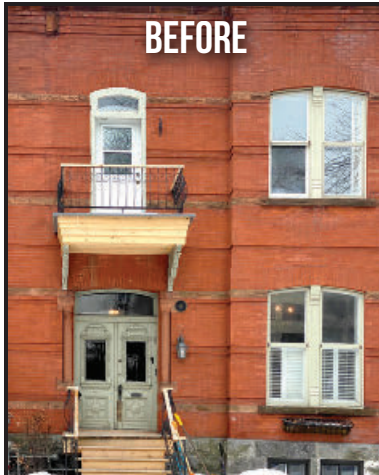


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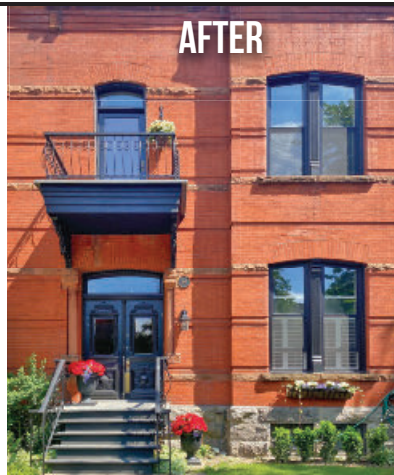
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WESTMOUNT SHOULD BE ARCHITECTURALLY SPECIAL, FAMILY ORIENTED – NOT A DOWNTOWN ENVIRONMENT

What is the driver of the current Westmount proposal for the southeast sector?

Is it densification? Is it to entice developers? Is it to blend with the downtown to the east?

Council has indicated that we must renew the commercial presence and densify the area surrounding the Metro station. We are told by council that these are not only laudable goals, but they are mandatory in order to conform to the new Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal (CMM) proposed plan (lloydalter.substack.com/p/how-tall-should-a-building-be-how).

Having read the plan, what struck me was that what is being proposed for Westmount goes far beyond the suggested requirements of the CMM TOD (transit-oriented design) in increased density and in height.

The CMM plan encourages much greater respect for an existing community – its heritage value and its primarily residential vocation – than the Lemay proposal. It is not correct to continue to suggest that the proposal follows mandatory requirements.

While I am sure most residents could get behind a proposal to densify and increase the mixed use of many of the buildings, the conversion of the southeast sector into a downtown environment defined by high-rise buildings does not respect either our uniqueness as a community, nor the importance of assuring that what will be built will not continue and exacerbate the rupture of the sector above Dorchester and St. Catherine from the part below it.

The proposal seeks to blend Westmount with the adjacent sector of Ville Marie (downtown). It will certainly do little to re-establish the links with the Clondeboye-Hallowell neighbourhood.

The mayor and Councillor Peart insisted at the last council meeting that increased height is necessary to entice developers to invest in the much-needed improvement of St. Catherine St. to the west of Atwater.

Is that truly the only way to do that? Without any discussion or surveying of developers, have they landed on a single formula without exploring others?

If so, just how high will we have to go? Has there been thought given to other enticements for builders? What about the city investing in improving the quality of that street? If we create the cachet of a Greene Ave. with repaired streets and sidewalks, new lighting and street furniture, might that be the enticement needed to

attract development?

The 5 Saisons building on Greene Ave., a six-storey building with both residential and commercial aspects, clearly attracted an investor and became home to many Westmounters.

Is another goal sustainability? If so, the proposal would require more than just high-rise construction that is not environmentally friendly. Some of the elements that make a community sustainable are also its livability, walkability, the involvement of residents in its activities and the presence of families. None of these is enhanced through high-rise living (see lloydalter.substack.com/p/how-tall-should-a-building-be-how).

As Dinu Bumbaru said about living in communities, “Do you want an elevator life or a street life?”

There were errors committed in the past when the houses north of Dorchester St. (as it once was) were demolished and some high-rises were built. Past councils took measures to return to the notion that when you crossed Atwater, you were coming into a special place – a unique community that values its architectural heritage and its livability. Let’s find a way to combine the somewhat increased density, the renewal of a local commercial sector with a respect for our family-oriented architecture, including apartment buildings, which has so well served our community.

KARIN MARKS, LANSDOWNE AVE.

Editor’s note: Karin Marks was the borough mayor of Westmount when the city was merged with Montreal (2002-2006) and then mayor of Westmount from 2006 to 2009. Previous to that, she had been a city councillor and Westmount’s commissioner of urban planning for 10 years (see story September 29, 2009, p. 4). – DP.

SOUTHEAST NEEDS CONTINUITY, NOT PIECEMEAL PLANNING

To plan, it is essential to know and understand the character and create the vision of a place. Montreal is unique as an island composed of *quartiers* and cities. Westmount is a city on the island and offers what no other place on the island does or can.

Westmount’s built environment with parks, green spaces and gracious residences become denser as it sweeps down the mountain to the Sherbrooke plateau. This continuity is essential to the character of lower Westmount, with its greater density and diversity of uses. The western institutional and administrative sector is characterized by very beautiful parks, gardens and heritage buildings. Further east, Westmount Square has made an incredible demonstration of seamless transition from the

residential to the commercial.

The coherence and vision of these examples is sorely needed in the mixed residential and commercial southeast sector, an area that has never quite found its purpose. The mutations and changes that have occurred here have been piecemeal, without a concept.

The proposed Lemay plan is again piecemeal, lacking concept and vision. It is based on locating individual proposals wherever they seem to fit. New high-rise condominiums are dotted about without considering the continuity of the green spaces of the mountain and without considering wind patterns or the use of spaces between buildings.

Neighbourhoods should be just that – places where neighbours meet in congenial surroundings. Yet a new town square is placed, not in the residential and commercial centre, but isolated along a city through-street at the southern edge of the plateau, as it begins to slope down to St. Antoine St. And, is it appropriate for a public swimming pool to be placed in the same environment?

The glorious city of Westmount cannot be dragged down by the lack of vision in this undigested proposal. I urge the mayor and council to start again. There is now very good planning experience concerned with living in the city – creating places of character, of the joy of *vivre en ville*. Westmount must continue to have its place on the island, offering what no other place does or can do.

PHYLLIS LAMBERT,

FOUNDING DIRECTOR EMERITUS,

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE

I THANK MAYOR SMITH FOR HER ACHIEVEMENTS, ESPECIALLY IN SOUTHEAST

Having reflected on recent articles, columns and comments by past Westmount mayors, I feel it necessary to respond even though this goes against what I would normally do.

The most recent “guest column” by Peter Trent (January 21, p. 4) was very biased!

I truly believe that when one decides to leave public office you should support the new council, and as Peter Trent often said “hold your powder.” Our personal beliefs, and desire to influence should cease when we leave office and are not privy to all the information required to make informed decisions.

Attending the recent public consultations (all of them) would have provided much needed information on the PPU process for the southeast and provided him the appropriate forum for comment. He is now just a citizen like the rest of us. A difficult transition it seems.

Public service is a thankless task for the most part and requires a strong back bone and thick skin. But, realizing a project, creating a new service, improving an existing service and improving community life are what make it worthwhile. All councils fail in some respect in the eyes of some. “You can’t please all the people all of the time!”

Often outside conditions have great influence on council achievements such as COVID, the ice storm and forced mergers... But every council (26 years) that I served on worked hard and tried hard to respect the wishes of the population and improve the city. I believe this of the current mayor and council too!

It serves no goal but one’s ego to get into a tit-for-tat contest over who did what and who didn’t! This council is not beholden to take or follow Peter Trent’s direction.

I was honoured to serve both on council with Christina Smith and under her as mayor. I thank her for her service and dedication to Westmount and for all that she has achieved! Including the conservatory, city hall restoration, innovative playgrounds, the studio at the Westmount library and most importantly the PPU process to develop a plan for the southeast sector of Westmount.

This area continued to decline and remain derelict during the mandates of both Karin Marks and Peter Trent. No one can argue that this area isn’t a disgrace and embarrassment! Thank you, Mayor Smith and council.

CYNTHIA LULHAM, ST. CATHERINE ST.

Editor’s note: Cynthia Lulham was a city councillor from 1995 to 2021.

TRENT’S REFUSAL TO BORROW LED US TO CURRENT ‘CAPITAL WORKS’ DEFICIT

Former mayor Trent’s opinion column (January 21, p. 4) is flawed in several respects.

Mr. Trent claims that as a result of the city’s 1913 “hands-off” model of governance, he inherited a run-down city with a crumbling greenhouse in 1991. He stated that during those early years, council had abdicated responsibility in gathering sufficient public support for various restorations.

But Mr. Trent neglects to inform readers that from 1991 until 2017 when he left office [including periods with a different borough mayor/mayor], the city’s infrastructure deficit endured. It was left to the new council [of 2017]. During his tenure, Mayor Trent hadn’t even fixed the greenhouse, which started falling apart in September 2015, while he was mayor.

He left Westmount with crumbling

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

roads and a massive infrastructure deficit, which Mayor Smith recently described as having reached “crisis levels” despite extensive work undertaken over the last eight years.

How did this happen? To keep taxes low, required capital works for decades were unacknowledged or just pushed out. This strategy could have worked for a while if the city had borrowed. But it refused to do so. Budget speeches were replete with “Council remains committed to ‘Pay as you go’ for funding capital works rather than by borrowing.” Consequently, the city now has no choice but to borrow massively.

Mr. Trent wrote about council’s decision in 2016 to plan an investment of \$5 million a year in constant dollars from 2017 to 2037 just on road reconstruction and maintenance. He claims that the current council is “honouring this plan.” This is incorrect. Council threw out this plan as being totally inadequate to handle the backlog in infrastructure. The 2025 budget for roads alone is \$18.6 million (far beyond the inflation rate in construction).

Mr. Trent expressed dissatisfaction with the proposed preliminary design for the southeast sector. Many highly respected members of Westmount’s architectural and urban planning community share that view. Here is a suggestion – a local design competition. Sharpen your pencils and provide the *Independent* with drawings of how you envision it. Let’s keep our city beautiful.

DENIS BIRO, 5000 DE MAISONNEUVE, NDG
Editor’s note: This is an old debate. Please see then city councillor Patrick Martin and then mayor Peter Trent duking it out on these issues nine years ago: February 2, 2016, p. 7 “Westmount’s infrastructure challenge” and February 9, 2016, p. 7 “Infrastructure work: Our problem is output, not funding.” It is one of the more erudite political debates between politicians that I am aware of, and I encourage everyone to go back and read. – DP.

BIG BLUE BLOT

The huge blue recycling bins having been distributed, who will now be enforcing the by-law that they must be removed from sight after the Wednesday recycling pick-up day? All throughout upper and mid-level Westmount, these bins are on display, 24/7, and are truly a blot on the landscape

Time was, we were not even allowed to put our garbage bins at the front of our homes on collection days; rather, they were fetched by the sanitation workers. All of that has, unfortunately changed, and now garbage bins are on full display everywhere all week long, making parts of Westmount

look more like a downtown eyesore, rather than one of the nicest, cleanest cities in Canada.

Let’s not let “ugly” take over our city!
ALLEN RUBIN, LEXINGTON AVE.

COUNCIL SHOULD PRIORITIZE WESTMOUNT CITIZENS

I have been a citizen of Westmount for 48 years. I feel that the city council has done very little to help its citizens, even just to protect our lifestyle. We are not even asking them to improve it. It seems that special interest groups, including from outside Westmount, are given more attention and support from our city council than the Westmount residents affected. The Westmount city council does NOT prioritize its citizens’ lifestyle nor our environmental issues, but serves and bows to all the surrounding municipalities.

In regards to a possible bike path up Sunnyside to the Summit Woods, the cyclists presume the route through the woods to Summit Rd. and Belvedere is a thoroughfare to Côte de Neiges and Mount Royal.

Do these bike riders stop at all the stop signs on their way? Do we have a bike speed restriction? Do the riders understand that the walking paths are a priority for pedestrians on the roads and in the woods?

Even now with our signs for no bikes and no bike path, the bikers still use the path, disobeying our restrictions, at the peril of the walkers.

The circle through the woods is a popular walking path for walkers and leashed dogs, who will be imperiled by all these bike riders, who often come in herds of 20-plus riders, speeding, disobeying traffic signs, not giving priority to pedestrians and generally adding an extra hazard to the residents of that part of Westmount. The majority of these riders are NOT Westmount residents. The proposed bike path would only increase the number of riders to our residential areas.

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To enforce safety regulations, will we need to hire more security to monitor the riders?

ENOUGH!!!

City council, you should worry about the people you purportedly represent, your Westmount citizenry. We have an election in less than a year.

Should we be preparing a report card on each of you, presently only Mayor Smith and Councillor D’Amico have passing grades.

JOSEPH YERMUS, OAKLAND AVE.

RETURN THE WEEKLY GARBAGE PICK-UP, PLEASE

I would like to add my voice to the discourse of the newly installed every-other-week garbage pick-up. From my vantage point, what I observe is a schedule that not only increases the mess, but also simply doubles the garbage on the day of pick-up. As such, our garbage is not reduced. We just store it all until pick-up.

I wonder where we are supposed to store our garbage in between pick-ups. I guess some have found the park (see photo).

In a previous letter (November 5, p. 8), R. D. refers to figures showing that reducing garbage pick-up from weekly to bi-weekly will save a tremendous amount of trash being sent to landfills. Is this true?

More studies are likely to be conducted. More money to be spent to evaluate a situation that seemed to work well until it was altered.

I see this as perhaps a heavy-handed attempt to encourage people to compost. Or is this an attempt to save funds?

I then wonder about funds that are allocated to projects that result in surveys (aka presentations) and projects that get assembled and then dismantled (e.g. the Claremont triangle).

One has to wonder what is going on in our city. What is the benefit of these proposed projects and wasted monies, some of which seem to be about projects that are



already decided upon?

I do thank some of our trusted city workers who respond graciously to suggestions and carry out the work efficiently. I believe we citizens care deeply about our environment and can work together to maintain it.

In closing, a city such as ours deserves better – and to return to weekly, sanitary garbage pick-up.

Thank you for the opportunity to give my two cents.

D. BACKMAN, WINDSOR AVE.

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EDITORIAL

Unsolicited advice for municipal voters: Know what you're voting for

We will have a municipal election in November. Some of the incumbents have announced their intentions (see January 20, p. 1). Who else will run? Who will win? Dunno.

But I do think I can add some value after sitting here for 18 years watching Westmount municipal politics. And I do think I can explain some of the disconnect that has existed between many members of the public and the current council.

How? Put simply, I think that the main division in Westmount municipal politics at the moment is not right-left, but environmental versus managerial.

Past fights

If you look at many of the bitter debates of the past four and eight years (e.g. weekly garbage collection, fireplaces, large wheeled recycling bins, pedestrian-focused and cycling-focused street design and even, to a degree, zoning), the current council seems intensely, even primarily, motivated by environmental concerns.

We have a mayor who “walked with Greta” Thunberg (see October 8, 2019, p. 5) and a municipal commissioner for “*climate and sustainability*, for economic development and for citizen engagement” (emphasis added).

We have letter writers and in-person council questioners who bring up environmental/climate issues with near-perfect predictability. They want an even greater

environmental focus!

The mood is green, in places.

The others

On the other hand, there is a large group of people – most of whom are far from the levers of municipal power – who tune in to municipal policy announcements when they are finalized and announced, and are appalled by the changes to long-standing practices and standards in the routine, taken-for-granted work of municipal government – things like picking up households' garbage, paving streets that were laid out a century ago and enforcing aesthetic by-laws (e.g. no refuse on street curbs).

No one thought these things would ever change much.

Without saying so, I can see many of these residents thinking: Why is our municipal government so concerned with environmental issues, and not with quality municipal services?

Is our municipal government the right tool to focus, as its primary mission, on the environment? How important is 20,000-person Westmount in the global picture? Are we exaggerating our own importance? Virtue signalling? Are we feeling good, or doing good?

And is the municipal government a target due to its environmental footprint, or the ease with which residents can access it? Put another way, how important is the municipal-government aspect of each

Westmounter's carbon footprint anyway?

These people want quality services, not environmental slogans and verbiage.

Relatedly, do these new policies actually deliver the intended changes, e.g. in greenhouse gas or landfill garbage or whatever?

Are we pushing and pulling?

An even more irreverent commentator might point out that the average Westmounter must surely have a materially-above-average carbon footprint (versus, say, other residents of the country and province, not to mention the world), so why should municipal politicians torture policy to lower our footprints when individual Westmounters are flying around (literally and figuratively) raising them?

(Similar comments could be made about the municipal government of Westmount's role in helping solve the pan-Canadian “housing crisis.”)

Politicians who espouse the first philosophy might be called greenist; the second, managerialist.

There are, of course, all sorts of blends possible. A managerialist could always ask about environmental concerns as *one factor* (or be forced to by provincial legislation) while not being consumed by them.

A greenist could be quite adept at delivering quality services.

Regardless, you might want to know as much as possible about the candidates' views before you vote this time.

The recent seasons of discontent might in part be explained by having to actually make choices after the long, unchallenged tenure of our previous mayor, Peter Trent, who straddled both camps so successfully that he never had an opponent for the big chair.

He is a man with a strong business background and is actually interested in the nuts-and-bolts of government, but is also an environmentalist (or “greenist”). Did his tenure spoil us?

Regardless, in the absence of polling (which is not a usual feature of Westmount politics), we don't know which side is larger. The greenists have been in charge, but much of their agenda was not discussed last election and it does not seem popular. It would be nice to know the relative numbers of each group in a clear election.

Where do I stand? I am more moved by the managerialist viewpoint, but beer tastes just as good under the greenists. I am usually a lot less agitated than our keen political participants (and I mean both sides).

For instance, I notice that there are envi-

ronmental costs to recycling and composting, plus any net monies could have been (and could be) used for other environmental purposes. Lead, PCBs, mercury and asbestos anyone?

As a result, I am skeptical whether 35-odd years of recycling in Westmount have been worth it (e.g. what percentage went to landfill? how much incremental gasoline was used to power those trucks?), or the next 35 will be. Let's go item by item in our assessment. Was the glass worth it? Will it be? The metal? And let's not forget the effect of things that shouldn't have been in the blue bin at all. Were it even possible, who knows where this analysis would land? Nevertheless, I am perfectly willing to play along and go through the motions once a week by recycling and composting. Even if it was not worth all the costs, it has likely had some good effects.

Similarly, I dislike seeing older Westmounters with long driveways, and ones with large families and small houses, tormented by infrequent garbage pick-ups and newfangled, gargantuan, unsightly bins.

Nevertheless, my small household and currently able body can store refuse and throw containers around quite easily. The lawfully constituted municipal government had the right to make the changes and we aren't talking about affronts to natural justice, so we will live with the new garbage rules until the contract runs out.

Most important point

Most importantly, I am more interested in the future than in opining on the past and most interested in presenting the options to the *Independent's* readers, so they can better:

- Ask candidates questions, about specific issues and overall viewpoint,
- Know what to expect from certain candidates if they win or are acclaimed,
- Frame their letters to the editor and other communications.

If Westmounters want a greenist council and get one, great. If they want something else, they should speak up and turn up. Let's have fewer surprises than in recent years.

As the press, we will work to do our job, but there are many encounters where residents take centre stage (e.g. door-to-door campaigning, candidates' meetings).

If you're interested, ask questions. If you care, vote. If you really care, run.

David Price is the editor of the Independent.

WESTMOUNT INDEPENDENT

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Mayor's Column

CHRISTINA SMITH

Setting record straight on capital works – Addressing almost abandoned southeast

ling the strike with our employees to measures we initiated during the pandemic and updating services to meet today's needs.

Perhaps, however, our most significant break from the past has been in the funding of our infrastructure. When I was elected mayor eight years ago, city hall was in disrepair, the greenhouse had collapsed, and the Public Works buildings decaying. This abbreviated list does not include our roads, sewer systems, parks and Hydro Westmount.

Pay-as-you-go unsustainable

Previous administrations had frozen taxes or limited increases, and adopted a pay-as-you-go approach to funding infrastructure improvements. This strategy was well supported at the time, but was unsustainable because our surplus disappeared while our needs and costs increased significantly.

Our approach has been to establish a comprehensive asset management plan that serves as a critical building block for our operating and capital works budgets. The plan to invest \$15 million per year

adopted in 2015 was insufficient. We know that, and residents know that.

So, without fanfare and without pointing fingers, we rolled up our sleeves, did the work and increased our infrastructure investment.

Leadership involves meeting the challenges of the day, not dwelling on what could have been done differently.

Tackling the southeast

Another well-established priority of this council is the revitalization of the southeast corner of our city (St. Catherine to Dorchester and Atwater to Greene Ave). A decade ago, the city limited buildings to seven stories along St. Catherine St. The former mayor seems to be arguing for the status quo, even though the area is almost abandoned, and no owner or investor has successfully brought forward a conforming project since the zoning change. Allowing for some density in keeping with the neighbourhood will strengthen our city's finances and, most importantly, bring new life to a critical entry point to Westmount. This is in keeping with views expressed by many at the public consultations that have

taken place, and in the feedback I have had from many residents.

As part of the PPU process, council directed the administration to embark on a public tendering process in accordance with Quebec law. This resulted in the awarding of a contract to Lemay, a large firm with much relevant experience. We are currently consulting with the community on the vision – the parameters that will guide an eventual project - not on a specific proposal.

Mayor Trent has not attended any of these public consultations or the others we have held on various subjects. I respect that he has differing points of view, and all points of view will be considered. In the end, however, the decision on zoning changes rests with council.

But there is one area where Peter and I do agree. Serving on council is a rewarding challenge, and we need talented and committed people at the table as we continue to grapple with our deteriorating infrastructure, housing, services for our aging population and climate change.

In the interim, council and I will, as we have always done, focus on the job at hand.

On January 17, I announced that I am not running for re-election in November. As I focus on the work to be done in the final year of this mandate, I have no intention of getting into a letter-writing debate in this paper. I am also aware that when I am no longer mayor, it will not be my role to criticize from the sidelines.

As evident from his guest column last week (p. 4), this is just one example of where Peter Trent and I disagree.

Setting the record straight

While I refuse to spend my last months in office in a war of words with my predecessor, I am compelled to set the record straight. As the city's longest-serving mayor, he bears some responsibility for how our infrastructure was managed and its current state.

While I work collaboratively with public servants, it is very apparent that I am a hands-on mayor, as is this council. We set the strategic direction for the city and are accountable for our decisions, from sett-

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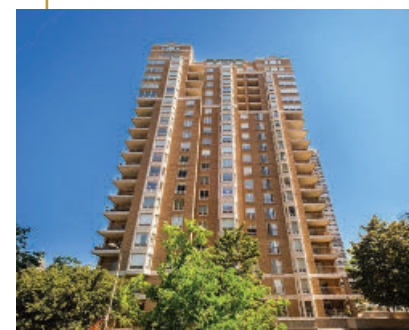
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\$12,900,000
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Rotary report: NDG's provincial rep Zooms in

Provincial Liberal McGraw drawn into conversation on federal namesakes

BY JENNIFER BALL

“What is going on in Ottawa right now?” was a question put to provincial Liberal politician Désirée McGraw when she spoke to the Rotary Club of Westmount on December 18 over Zoom.

McGraw, who was elected to the Quebec provincial assembly in 2022 representing NDG, spoke to Rotarians the same week that saw former deputy prime minister Chrystia Freeland resign and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on the verge of doing

the same: prompting the club to entice McGraw into explaining the disquiet.

(Trudeau announced his resignation about a month after McGraw's appearance.)

McGraw was a senior policy advisor to Prime Minister Paul Martin before serving for eight years as executive director of the Jeanne Sauvé Foundation. The official opposition critic for social economy since January 2024, McGraw was willing to give her own personal view, with the caveat that “I am not speaking on behalf of the Liberal

Party of Quebec.”

She recalled when former prime minister Martin, in her words “... ‘got quit’ in June 2002, left, and then ran again for the leadership...”

“Different reasons [then] but this is not entirely unprecedented.”

However, “stepping down on the day that you are supposed to be giving an economic update [however] is unprecedented.”

What the world is asking

McGraw told Rotarians that she had recently returned from a meeting of the Council of American States in Canada (CASC).

CASC is an association of member states and trade offices committed to promoting direct investment into the United States and finding trade opportunities between American and Canadian companies. They debriefed about the election of Donald Trump in the US, and CASC wanted to know Canada's reaction to him winning a second term.

She told them “We need strong federal leadership [in response to Trump] and so it is unfortunate that, right now, it is chaos at the federal level.”

McGraw raised the issue that Canada does not impose term limits on its political leaders, which some political analysts say results in leaders hanging on to power to the detriment of the country.

McGraw said that in 2015 the federal Liberals removed their ability to conduct a leadership review of the party's leader. “There is a reason why there are checks

and balances in governments, in parliaments, in caucuses, and in parties, and removing those – no matter how good things [felt] in 2015 – was a mistake...”

“... This is a serious situation unfolding. I look to my federal friends, and I hope there are some honest conversations happening now because the stakes are too high for our country.”

Back to provincial politics

On the provincial scene, to the best of her knowledge, McGraw believes that – at 19 seats – the Quebec Liberals make up the smallest official opposition in the history of Quebec.

McGraw's files, she said are “Community action, social solidarity and social economy but in the past, I've been the critic for environment, climate change, parks and wildlife, as well as the English relations with the English-speaking community and Canada.”

McGraw cofounded Al Gore's climate reality project in Canada that is based here in Montreal. As a teenager, she became active in nuclear disarmament and environmental issues.

After completing her studies in economics and international relations overseas, she began her career working as a reporter covering global environmental negotiations, which also became the focus of the seminars she taught at McGill University.

Jennifer Ball, the reporter who authored this story, is a member of the Rotary Club of Westmount.

Scouts raise money for camp



On January 11, members of the 2nd Westmount Scouting group offered calendars depicting scenes of Scouting activities to Metro Westmount customers. Accompanied by adult volunteers, the three Cubs and one Scout practised knots, put away shopping carts and assisted customers in loading groceries. Generous patrons gave donations that go towards subsidizing Scout camps.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VIRGINIA ELLIOTT.



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Police report, cont'd from p. 3

ed to carry their belongings wherever they go because there is nowhere to store them safely, even on a temporary basis.

“Oftentimes with the homeless people, if you notice, they always have a lot of stuff with them,” he said.

“What most people don't always understand is that's why they walk into stores and malls with everything. They can't really leave it anywhere because they're afraid of it being stolen. This is why they always carry bags around: that's all their possessions. And, if it's taken, it's all they have.”

Car window broken to steal bag

An overnight break-in and theft from a car parked on Lansdowne Ave. between Sherbrooke and de Maisonneuve on January 16-17 illustrated why it's never a good idea to leave unconcealed bags or packages inside a vehicle – regardless of whether they contain valuables.

The owner had parked during the evening, while leaving a large green Dollarama bag containing a judo practice uniform in the back seat. By the next morning, a rear passenger-side window had been smashed and the bag was stolen.

“It doesn't matter what the value is,” said Yigit. “When someone sees a backpack or even a bag in the back seat, you know what's inside, but they don't. And so sometimes they'll take that chance.”

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BEHIND THE NUMBERS: 2024 VS. 2023 REAL ESTATE TRENDS

The real estate market saw exceptional growth this past year, with new listings surging by up to 138% and sales climbing by an impressive 126% in the condo market. While detached homes sold faster, semi-detached homes and condos took slightly longer to move, signaling a potential shift in buyer preferences.

Price-wise, the \$1M-\$2M range remained robust, with sales holding steady year-over-year. Inventory trends suggest a subtle divergence as condos leaned toward a buyer’s market while single-family homes remain balanced.

These numbers tell a powerful story of evolving market dynamics. Whether you’re considering buying, selling, or investing, understanding the trends is crucial to making informed decisions.

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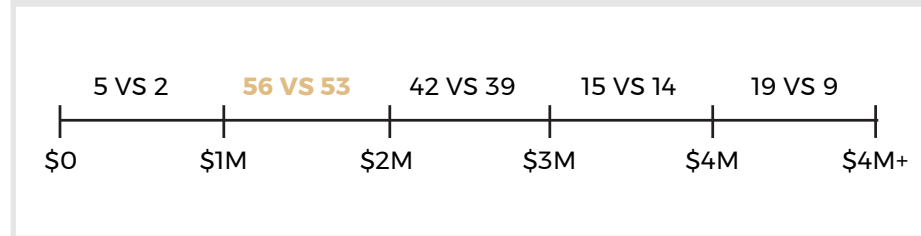
NUMBER OF SALES

DETACHED	SEMI / ROW HOUSES	CONDOS
40	97	70
+ 100%	+ 98%	+ 126%

OF DAYS ON THE MARKET

DETACHED	SEMI / ROW HOUSES	CONDOS
92	73	92
- 15%	+ 12%	+ 80%

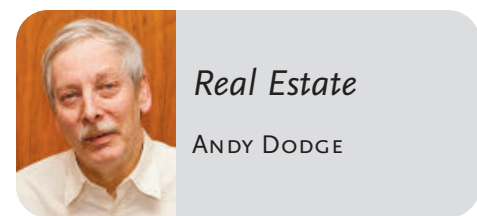
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Real Estate

ANDY DODGE

December Sales: Pulling back

Real estate agents have posted only five Westmount sales for the month of December, all of which had prices lower than their municipal evaluations, and all of which were for prices less than \$3 million.

Tardy agents added another six sales to the November list, but once the extreme sales are removed and the values adjusted, it appears the market has been moving steadily downward since September.

Sales under valuation becoming common

Despite the fact there were two sales over \$10 million in November, exactly half of the 16 sales that month were for less than valuation, a factor that has been growing more and more common as 2024 drew to a close.

The tally of five single-family homes in December is an indication of the market winding down during the holidays, but the fact there are still – in early January – 95 houses on the market shows that buyer interest may be waning somewhat, the same number as January 2019, but otherwise more than any start-of-year volume since 2016.

Two more houses were rented in December, bringing the total house rentals for the year to 46, the most since we began keeping records of rentals in 2016. This year's rents range from \$2,495 to \$25,000 per month; the 18 still on the market are asking anywhere from \$4,500 to \$20,000 per month.

Outside Westmount

In adjacent-Westmount districts, only two houses sold, one on Roslyn Ave. north of the city limits, one on Jean Girard Ave., just east of 9 Delavigne Rd.

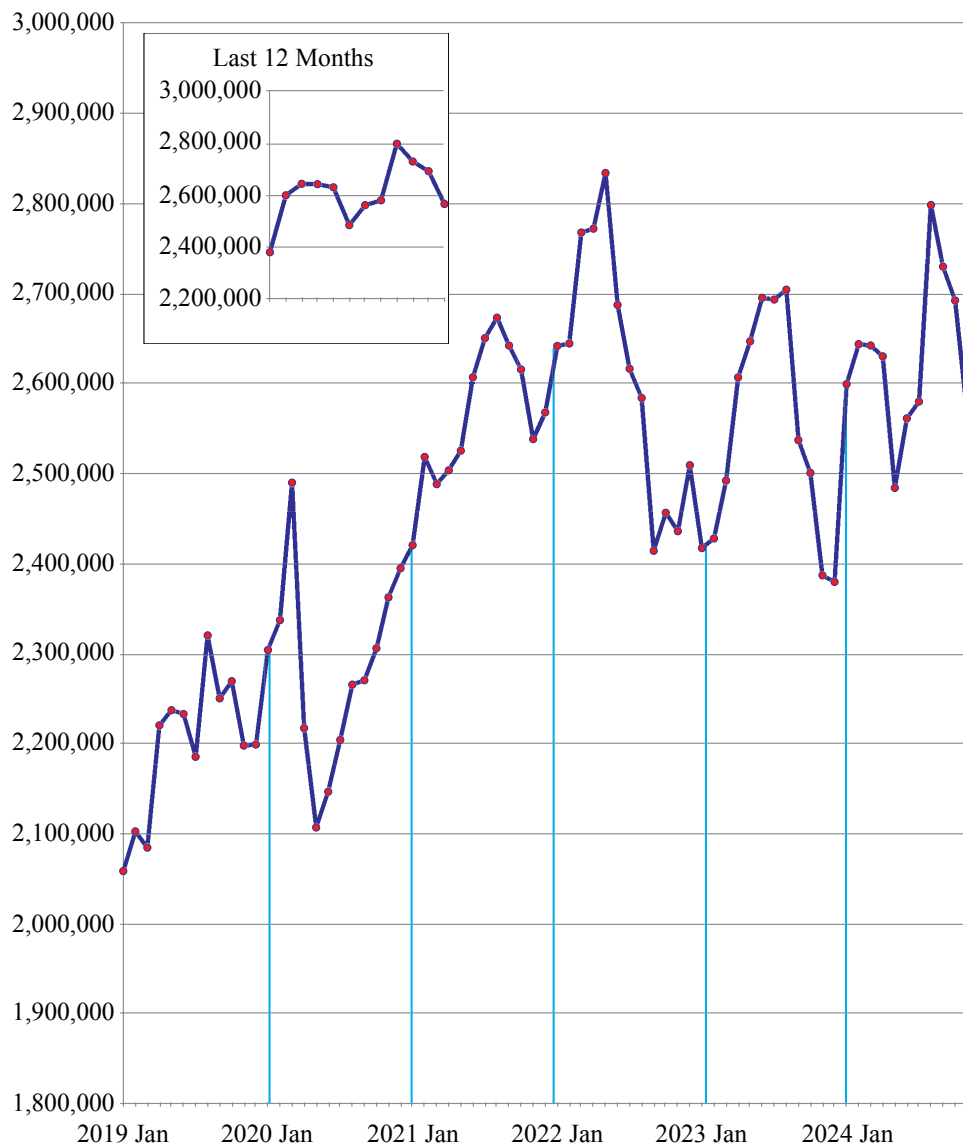
One co-op apartment at the Gleneagles Apartments, 3940 Côte des Neiges Rd., was sold in December, as did one condominium apartment next door at the Trafalgar Apartments, 3980 Côte des Neiges Rd. We

have tallied four sales at the Gleneagles in 2024, and three sales at the Trafalgar.

May 2025 bring a successful – and fair

– Westmount real estate market. Happy New Year to all!

Average adjusted price for 'typical' Westmount house, by month, January 2019 to December 2024, based on accepted offer dates



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Spokeswoman targets late 2025 opening – Existing store staying open during renos

Sherbrooke/Grey Ave. Pharmaprix to expand by 7,000 sq. ft.

BY JENNIFER BALL

The Pharmaprix to the west of Westmount's border with NDG is working to expand its footprint by 7,000 square feet this year.

The large store at 5038 Sherbrooke (corner Grey Ave.) will take over commercial space to the east. The goal is to offer greater selection in beauty and grocery products as well as more private consultation rooms to aid in clients' primary care.

5024-38 Sherbrooke is one lot of three buildings owned by 9079-1401 Quebec Inc. It is the first property one encounters on the south side of Sherbrooke after one has left Westmount and is in NDG.

In the first building, 5024 is an address whose object is not obvious from the street. It may refer to the upper floor. 5026 and 5028 used to house the "Taj Mahal" Indian restaurant, and the Crossroads and Liquid Lounge bars.

In the second building, 5030 and 5032 once housed the "La Maison de Seoul" Korean and the "Claremont" restaurants.

5034 opens onto a staircase that appears to lead to the space above the Pharmaprix, at 5038, which is contained in the third building.

Neither the Pharmaprix franchise owner, pharmacist Mayssaa Hanna, nor the building's owner responded to the *Independent's* request for information by press time, so details could not be confirmed with on-the-ground participants.

Nevertheless, the borough of Côte des Neiges-NDG did say that permits exist for 5024 to 5038 and that, regarding 5030, 5032, 5034 and 5038 Sherbrooke (the second and third buildings), the permit is to "transform two buildings into one by merging the building with the adjoining building to the east (5024 to 5028)" (the first building).

Pharmaprix headquarters 'thrilled'

The Shoppers Drug Mart Corporation is a wholly owned subsidiary of Loblaw Companies Limited, and is the licensor of retail drug stores operating under the names "Shoppers Drug Mart" and, in Quebec, "Pharmaprix."

On January 17, Geneviève Poirier, senior manager in the communications department at Loblaws, and Denis Roy, VP of operations at Pharmaprix, provided statements to the *Independent* after being reached by phone.

"We are thrilled to be expanding our

Westmount [adjacent] location by 7,000 square feet, significantly enhancing the shopping experience," Roy said.

Poirier's statement read, "The renovations are expected to be completed by the end of 2025, with the official opening of the expanded store taking place shortly thereafter. The new space will feature a broader selection of products, including an expanded grocery section and the latest in beauty with our most recent Galerie Beauté concept.."

"We will also be introducing a dedicated pharmacist care clinic with three private consultation rooms, offering patients fast, convenient access to a wide range of quality primary care. The store will remain open throughout the renovation process."

Poirier was asked if their expansion project required taking over 5030 Sherbrooke, to which she replied, "Yes, that's correct."

When asked to clarify if the expanded Pharmaprix necessitated also taking over the in-between 5032 and 5034 Sherbrooke addresses, Poirier said "Pharmaprix is the tenant, so for any questions related to the construction work, it would be best to contact the property owner."

See photo on p. 1.



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Saffron is very healthy, up to date on his kitten inoculation program, neutered and



Westmount A-dog-tions
LYSANNE FOWLER

How stunningly handsome can Chucky get? He is such a distinguished young German shepherd-type with unique brindled bronze-and-black colouring and is quite memorable! Chucky is now at the Montreal SPCA kennel, ready to take his place in a caring family that will give him the affection and activity that all young dogs crave to socialize and develop.

A very healthy two-year-old, Chucky is up to date with his inoculations, neutered and microchipped.

He is affectionate and loyal, such great traits in order to build up his confidence and catch up on the training and activities

Accessibility, cont'd from p. 1
website was raised during the question period by a resident of Victoria Ave., who stated he had challenges navigating it including just finding city hall's phone number.

"It is getting a massive upgrade, probably in the spring," replied Mayor Christina Smith.

Plan includes local directory
The city's Action Plan is required annually by Quebec of all municipalities having a population of at least 15,000. In addition to work done and anticipated, the Westmount plan, however, includes an updated directory of many non-government buildings that are open to the public such as banks and restaurants that originated many years ago from the city's Healthy City Project.

The Action Plan also includes some of the city's existing programs such as Public

Saffron is precious

microchipped. Please refer to the Montreal SPCA website at www.sPCA.com, and search for adorable Saffron's information page from his identification number, 2000239628. You can then plan your visit to the shelter as it is open every day, from Monday to Friday from 3 pm to 8 pm and on Saturday and Sunday from 11 am to 6 pm. The SPCA is located at 5215 Jean Talon St. West, Côte des Neiges, Montreal H4P 1X4. You could bring your cat carrier if you have one or choose a model from the selection that they have on offer at their onsite boutique.

Adoption coordinators will be pleased to tell you more about young Saffron and have you visit with him in order to discuss



adoption and your family's interest in bringing him home to loving arms.
Your neighbour, Lysanne

Be lucky for Chucky

that are part of the development of a large, young dog.

Please look up the Montreal SPCA website at www.sPCA.com, refer to Chucky's information page from his identification number, 2000238718, and plan your visit to the adoption coordinators at the shelter.

The SPCA is open every day, Monday to Friday from 3 pm to 8 pm and Saturday and Sunday from 11 am to 6 pm. It is located at 5215 Jean Talon St. West, Côte des Neiges, Montreal H4P 1X4. Once there, the coordinators will tell you more about Chucky and you will be able to meet him.

Please do not hesitate to visit for adoption, Chucky is a sensitive soul who will find his place happily in your home and family.

Your neighbour,
Lysanne



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Security's "Security in Aging" and the library's acquisition of large-print books and other assistance tools.

Many of the initiatives stemmed from needs emanating from the city's previous Advisory Committee on Accessibility chaired by then Councillor Marina Brzeski (2017-2021). These monthly meetings heard many concerns. For the *Independent's* reporting on its final report, see October 20, 2020, p. 7.

'Room for improvement'

In the recent report's introduction, Mayor Smith said she was proud of the initiatives and policies the city had implemented on accessibility over the years but "there is always room for improvement and innovative ideas for advancing universal accessibility."

The "Action Plan" is expected to be posted on the city's website under Community Life/Accessibility.



Social Notes

VERONICA REDGRAVE

Cedars pays tribute to CanSupport founder Nacos



Lucie Opatrny, Gwen Nacos and Melina Nacos.

The Cedars Cancer Foundation recently celebrated its 35th anniversary of Cedars CanSupport. Held to help secure the future of supportive care for cancer patients and their families at the MUHC, the glamorous eve paid tribute to CanSupport founder **Gwen Andrews Nacos**.

“The Cedars community has been proudly supporting Cedars CanSupport and working alongside Gwen for 35 years,” said **Jeff Shamie**, CEO Cedars Cancer Foundation, who is also a Westmount city councillor.

Cedars CanSupport is funded by the Cedars Cancer Foundation and run by the MUHC as part of its supportive and palliative care division. In collaboration with the healthcare team, it provides complementary support to improve the quality of life of cancer patients and families, from the moment of diagnosis right through to the end of treatment.

“We offer free emotional support, educational services, complementary therapies, practical resources, and humanitar-

ian assistance,” explained Cedars CanSupport co-director, **Virginia Lee**.

Lucie Opatrny, executive director MUHC, added: “Gwen Nacos’ unwavering commitment to improving the quality of life of cancer patients over the past 35 years is remarkable.”

Gwen’s children **Melina**, **Christopher** and **Christina Nacos** joined the sold-out room in applause. A French country chateau with a modern twist was the evening’s motif.

Noted amidst the stylish guests were Westmount mayor **Christina Smith** and **Joshua Cundill**, **Jennifer Maccarone**, provincial legislator for Westmount–St. Louis; **Claire and Peter Kruyt**, **Daphne and Jeff Shamie**, **Ariel Dayan** and **Dan Medalsy**, and doctors **Marcia Gillman** (with **Michael Flinker**), **David Fleiszer** and **Ruth Russell** (and their daughter **Andrea Fleiszer**), **Prosanto Chaudhury** (with **Deborah Stock**) and **Anthony Zeitouni** (with **Lisa Chamy**).

Also noted were **Alice and Jonathan Goldbloom**, **Catherine Melling** and **Adam Turner**, **Catherine Cook**, **Melanie Cosgrove** and **Andrew Lutfy**, **Andrew’s sister Donna Lutfy** and her daughter **Jessica Lutfy**, there with **Bram Paperman**, and real estate agents *continued on p. 18*



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David Fleiszer and Ruth Russell.



Peter and Claire Kruyt, Glen Légère and Christine Bouchard.



Dan Medalsy and Ariel Dayan.



Prosanto Chaudhury and Deborah Stock.

Social notes, cont'd from p. 17

Christina Miller, Rochelle Cantor, Carl Rémillard-Fontaine and Jonathan Martinet.

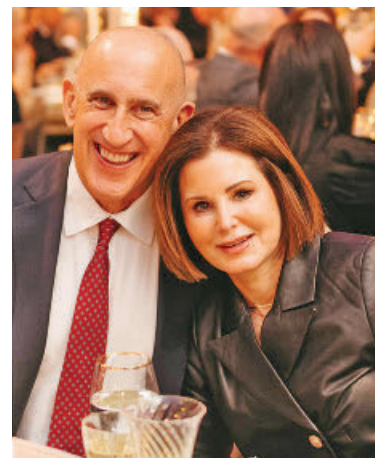
The evening's goal was to establish an endowment fund dedicated to sustaining Cedars CanSupport in perpetuity.

Cedars extended a special thank-you to The Rossy Foundation, The Tom and Gwen Nacos family, Michael Flinker and Dr. Marcia Gillman, the Shadeed and Assi families, the Albert and Florence Aziz Family Foundation, the Mi Corazon Foundation, Andrew Lutfy and family, and

Frank and Mary Rana.

The Cedars Cancer Foundation is a charitable organization that is the funding arm of the MUHC's fight against cancer. Cedars is also a founding partner of the Rossy Cancer Network, which brings together McGill University and its teaching hospitals to improve the quality of patient experience and care outcome.

Cedars CanSupport is funded by the Cedars Cancer Foundation and run by the MUHC, as part of its supportive and palliative care division.



Mike Flinker and Marcia Gillman.



Jonathan and Alice Goldbloom, and Jennifer Maccarone.

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Aberdeen How: Player of the Month for December

Goalie cited for ‘perseverance, focus, grace & mindset

BY LAUREN SWEENEY

Aberdeen How of the Westmount M11A girls’ hockey team has been named Player of the Month for December by the Westmount Minor Hockey Association.

At age 10, and in “just her second year of organized hockey,” the citation states, Aberdeen has been named for embracing the challenging role of goaltender. This means “staying focussed and composed, even when things aren’t going your way – no easy task, as any goalie knows.”

Persistence!

Aberdeen is a true example of persistence, according to her coach Caroline Parent Harvey. “She stays calm under pressure and approaches challenges with grace, putting in the effort to improve her skills. This mindset has been key to her development.”

Aberdeen’s commitment was evident from the start by stepping into the goalie position, Harvey continues. “She saved the team from rotating players in net. She is reported to attend practices regularly, often participating in extra ice times and goalie clinics to improve her skills. Her dedica-

tion has made her an important player and role model for the team.”

Incredible resistance

Alyssa Sherrard, the new president of Westmount Minor Hockey, explains that “finding goaltenders has become increasingly challenging, but Aberdeen has shown incredible resilience this season. She has become a key player and continues to push herself every day. I hope her efforts inspire other young girls to give goaltending a try.”

The association is “incredibly proud of Aberdeen’s progress” and looks forward to her continued growth throughout the season.

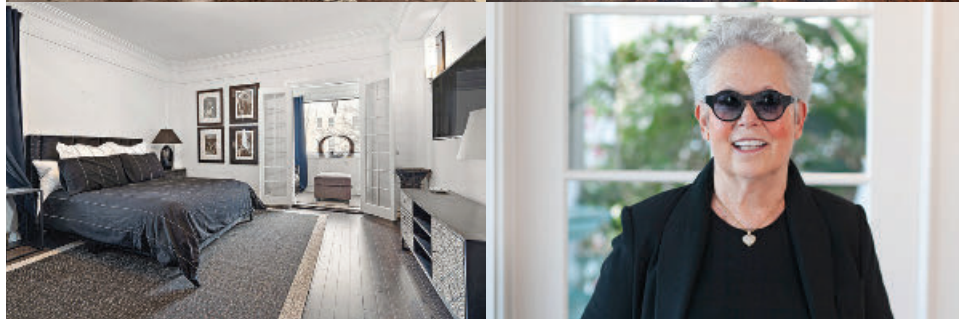
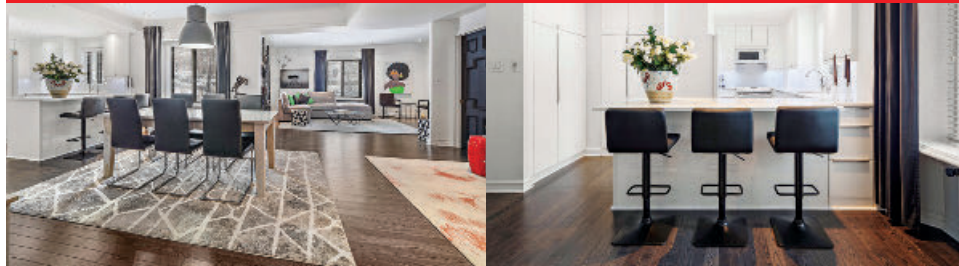
History of program

The city’s Player of the Month program was initiated in 2020 to highlight player contributions and acknowledge the opportunities and skills that minor hockey, and sports as a whole, can offer young people in developing sportsmanship, teamwork and discipline – skills which can be transferred into other areas such as academics and community service.



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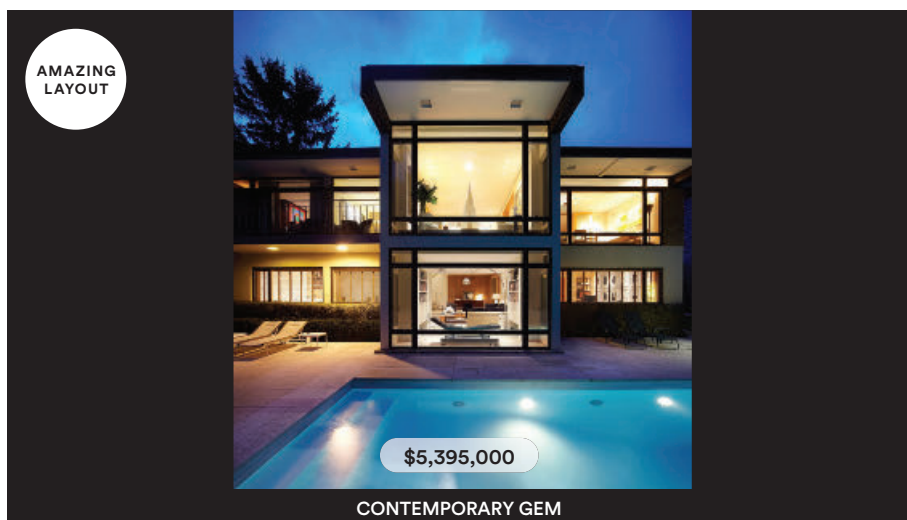
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