

WESTMOUNT INDEPENDENT

Weekly. Vol. 17 No. 2c

We are Westmount

February 21, 2023

Gesser in top 10 at world photo competition



Ron Gesser of Claremont Ave. is seen here on February 4 with the photo that won him a World Photographic Cup top 10 nomination. See p. 14 for story.

PHOTO: MARTIN C. BARRY.

Williams speaks to Rotary on basketball, philanthropy



Trevor Williams at the Trevor Williams Kids Foundation office at 4444 St. Catherine St., corner Metcalfe, on February 10. See p. 16 for story.

PHOTO: RALPH THOMPSON.

Resident challenges fee to contest valuation

Seniors reminded of 'little known' provincial income tax grant

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

Westmount seniors who own their own homes and meet a number of conditions were reminded at the city council meeting February 6 of a grant from Revenue Quebec to offset a municipal tax increase.

"This is a little-known tax credit to help seniors," said Councillor Antonio D'Amico, a chartered professional accountant (CPA)

and the city's commissioner of finance, at the start of the council meeting. This is available to Quebec residents aged 65 and over who have owned their property for 15 consecutive years and have a family income less than some \$58,200, he explained.

Details can be found on the municipal tax bill, he said. The city's two installments are due

continued on p. 7

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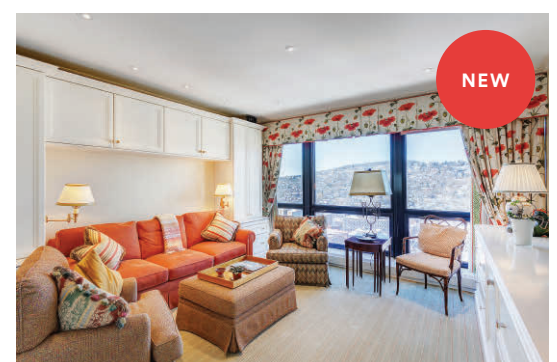
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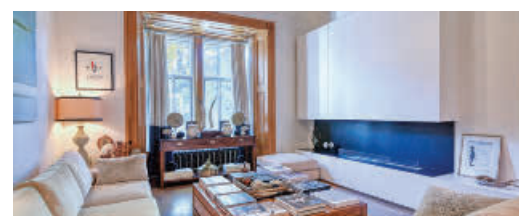
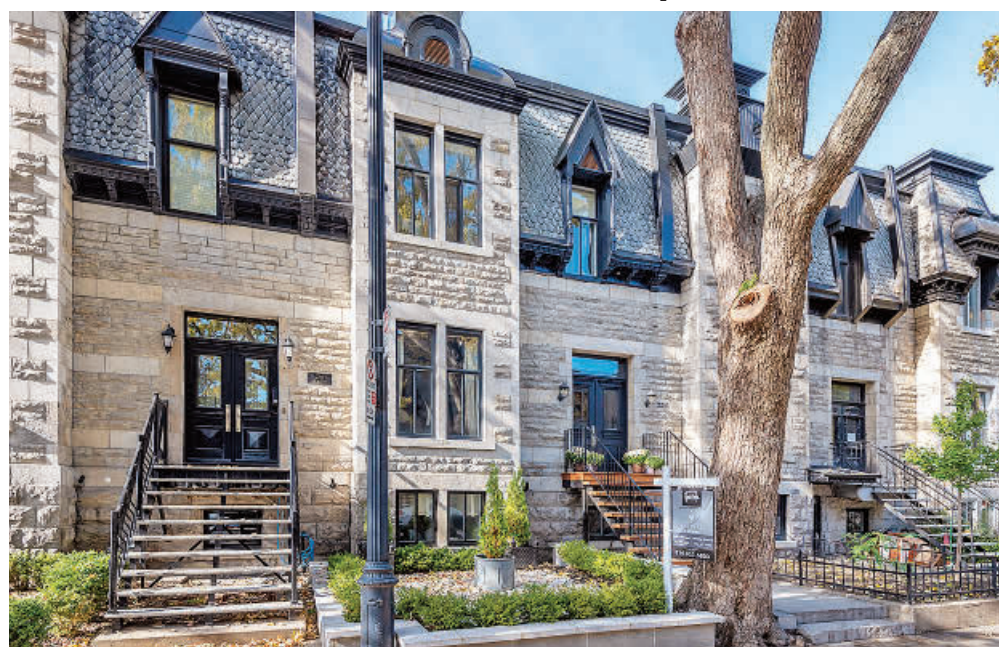


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Breslaw voices 3 concerns

Council asked about hydro, greenhouse noise, RMR

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

Why is noise emanating from the re-stored greenhouse so loud? Why is Hydro Westmount's profit "deflating" and is the Royal Montreal Regiment interested in buying its armoury and city land on its site or renewing its 99-year-lease expiring April 18, 2024?

These were questions city council was asked February 6 by long-time meeting attendee Jon Breslaw, of Grosvenor.

He had monitored noise from the greenhouse at 70 dbL, which, he claimed,

was "unacceptable" and made it impossible to sit there and read in the Gallery at Victoria Hall.

To this, he was told that the sound was coming from a temporary heating installation that would be there for a couple of weeks. This is understood to be due to the work on the boiler room at Victoria Hall (see story November 8, 2022, p. 7).

Armoury's future

As for the RMR armoury, Mayor Christina Smith replied that "we are discussing the issue with the armoury." In fact, this lease and the future of the armoury are under negotiation between the city and the department of National Defence as reported last month by the *Independent* (see story January 31, p. 1).

These were reiterated at the council meeting by Denis Ferland, the city's director of legal services.

"Will citizens get to have an input" in the potential use of this land if the lease is not renewed?, Breslaw asked, saying the city should "never sell it."

Hydro revenue

Regarding Hydro Westmount, Breslaw said that the utility had been a source of revenue at one time and this had been "devolving to the point where the trend was quite clear."

Councillor Jeff Shamie, who chairs the city's governance committee looking into Hydro's future as commissioner of finance and administration and Hydro Westmount, replied that studies were under way and that he had "put together" some information on the need to upgrade and invest in the utility's aging underground network.

The governance board was created to examine the utility's future in light of future environmental demands for electrical use.

The committee's mandate was to submit a report in two years (see story June 22, 2021, p.1).

As explained over the years, Hydro Westmount has a double role. This is to redistribute the power it buys from Hydro Quebec at wholesale prices and to maintain the municipality's local needs such as street lighting and traffic signaling, and related maintenance and infrastructure.

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A look into Hydro Westmount's finances

In a reply to Jon Breslaw of Grosvenor Ave. promised at the February 6 city council meeting and requested by the *Independent*, Councillor Jeff Shamie explained that Hydro Westmount's net contribution to the city's budget has been negative since 2015.

"Before addressing this trend," he wrote, "I would like to point out that if we consider the revenues generated by Hydro Westmount and only the operating costs, the organization has been profitable for many years. This [leads to] the legitimate question of why, since 2015, Hydro Westmount has cost the city more money than it brings in.

"The main answer is: Westmount Hydro is investing, and these capital investments are not only necessary, but they are also essential" for the 118-year-old utility.

Further coverage of Hydro Westmount by the *Independent* is planned for next week.

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Staenberg gives \$50k to library – it accepts

By LAUREEN SWEENEY

City council February 6 approved a donation of \$50,000 to the Westmount Public Library from longtime library member Jill Staenberg. The amount is subject to the condition that it be appropriated to the exclusive use of the library.

“By allocating surpluses to specific projects or elements, these amounts cannot be used for purposes other than those approved by council,” according to the resolution moved by Councillor Élisabeth Roux, commissioner of the library and community events.

The use of this donation has not been decided, library director Anne-Marie Lacombe explained last week. “There are options, including infrastructure.” The library is hoping to add a new, additional entrance leading from the east façade directly to the teen department. It also is planning to celebrate its 125th anniversary next year.

At the time of a \$50,000 bequest from the estate of the late Trina Vineberg last year it was explained that a committee was being set up to plan celebration activities for which this bequest might be used (see story September 20, 2022, p. 22).

Won’t cause serious harm to neighbours: Cllr. Peart
Minor exemption given for new garage at 339 Olivier

By LAUREEN SWEENEY

A minor exemption was granted by city council February 6 to allow the rear wall of a proposed new garage to be established beyond the maximum permitted distance of 11.48 feet (3.5 meters) from the rear wall of the house at 339 Olivier.

According to the resolution presented by Councillor Conrad Peart, whose commissionership includes urban planning, this would provide “better architectural integration with the rest of the main building to meet the objectives and criteria of By-law 1305 on site planning and architec-

tural integration programs.”

In reading a number of “whereas” clauses, he explained that the exemption was considered as “minor” and the impact on the neighbourhood of such construction is “negligible.”

A minor exemption can only be granted if it does not hinder the owners of neighbouring properties in their right of ownership, exacerbate safety or public health risks or affect the quality of the environment or general well-being. On the other hand, to not grant it “would cause serious prejudice to the person requesting it.”

In this case, the proposed garage is considered an addition to the main building.



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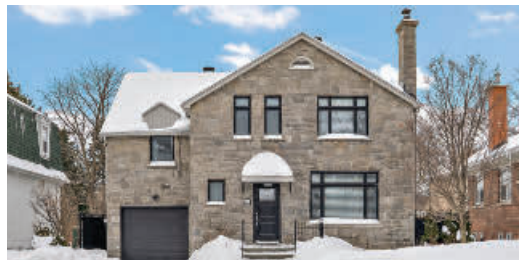
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'Important' building applications expected this year

City issues 1,223 building permits in '22 worth \$91.5M

BY LAUREEN SWEENEY

Only time will tell whether a downturn in the real estate market and upswing in interest rates will be reflected in the numbers and declared values of building permits to be reported by the city's Urban Planning department for 2023.

For now, "Important permit applications from 2022 should be emitted this year," Urban Planning director Frédéric Neault said last week.

Year to date

To February 16 this year, a total of 115 permits had been issued in January and February compared with 135 at the same time in 2022, though the issuance of permits can take many months after significant projects actually receive council approval.

The release last week of annual figures from 2022 showed a total of 1,223 permits had been issued at a declared value of \$91.5 million.

These included building the addition to École St. Léon and the transformation of 3555 St. Antoine (Selby 1) to a multi-family building.

These figures were down from those in 2021 totalling 1,382 (\$133.6 million), a year that might be called a "catch-up" year after many worksite and office pandemic closures starting March 13, 2020.

Pandemic impact

A survey of permits issued for 35 weeks either side of the March 13 date showed that the number of indoor renovations declined from 931 to 748 while those related to swimming pools rose from 21 to 34.

"We had suspected that the count of pool applications had increased, and the data appears to support this," explained Councillor Conrad Peart, urban planning

commissioner.

At the time, he stated that the pool activity underlined the need/desire to stay at home during COVID restrictions. "It

remains to be determined if this is a spike or a durable trend," Peart added last week.

Five-year figures from Urban Planning showed a record high had been reached in

Declared values of Urban Planning permits issued 2019-2022

Month	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
January	1,582,053	8,492,291	8,451,433	4,482,233	4,648,663
February	4,661,808	13,746,418	3,847,741	7,001,273	4,275,460
March	4,673,292	4,439,069	40,773,859	6,520,129	0
April	19,690,218	2,272,342	11,065,534	7,955,854	0
May	10,184,537	3,948,482	6,982,815	9,395,674	0
June	8,744,478	5,572,335	7,290,483	11,927,851	0
July	6,562,360	8,700,096	6,435,255	6,185,432	0
August	15,903,695	6,425,172	4,967,626	7,675,031	0
September	15,371,605	9,634,295	5,781,120	13,808,408	0
October	5,663,970	4,583,752	25,556,520	9,628,734	0
November	*107,285,813	5,236,008	5,931,994	3,714,945	0
December	4,408,429	4,116,383	6,540,149	3,223,737	0
TOTAL	204,732,258	77,166,643	133,624,529	91,519,301	8,924,123

*Nov. 2019: 97M\$ for 1111 Atwater

Three-year number of permits issued (2020-2023)

Month	2020	2021	2022	2023
January	82	65	56	77
February	86	83	79	38
March	45	125	85	0
April	25	183	136	0
May	97	162	143	0
June	162	153	136	0
July	120	112	85	0
August	117	90	147	0
September	156	108	114	0
October	127	169	101	0
November	152	86	76	0
December	61	46	65	0
TOTAL	1,230	1,382	1,223	115

the value of permits in 2019 at \$204.7 million for 1,615 permits.

This was a year in which permits had been issued for the start of 1111 Atwater in the Westmount portion of the former Montreal Children's Hospital site and the Société de transport de Montréal (STM) work on Atwater Metro station (see story April 7, 2020, p. 1.) At the time of that report, it was noted that some 600 to 800 work sites were dormant mainly from the provincial restriction on construction activity.

Tax grant, cont'd from p. 1

February 24 and May 26.

During question period, one property owner referred to the municipal tax issue and that the process to contest one's property valuation now requires a fee, which he described as abusive.

"It dissuades people from challenging a valuation increase."

D'Amico said the reason was to deal with a lot of abuse from people "jamming up court time" by just wanting to protest without solid reasons.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UPPER MURRAY HILL
PARK RUINED FOR CROSS-
COUNTRY SKIING

I read your newspaper each week and appreciate your coverage of our beautiful city.

I was excited when I read the city of Westmount Twitter feed announcing that they groomed upper Murray Hill Park for cross-country skiing. When I got to the field, instead of seeing the expected four neat and small grooves in the snow, I saw mountains of snow and ice and what looks like a race car track.

I guess it was for the horse-drawn sleigh that was used exactly two days [during Winter Carnival]. I am completely perplexed on how anyone can ski on this.

Given the extent of the excavation, the entire area is ruined for the rest of the XC season.

Generally, the city does a stellar job. Can someone please explain to me what happened?

PAUL KRUSZEWSKI, PARKMAN PLACE

HILLSIDE PROJECT DOES NOT
FIT NEIGHBOURHOOD

In the February 14 edition of the *Independent* (p. 6), there is a letter from Patrick Martin supporting the 1-3 Hillside project with the argument that building 32 condos in this zone means welcoming young families.

I should remind readers that there is an extremely huge and ugly building project being built next door to Westmount (I mean the Atwater project on the former site of the Montreal Children's Hospital) that will add more than 1,000 families to this area. Westmount is not a separate island and Atwater is not far from us. The impact of this huge construction on Westmounters' lives in less than two years will be enormous.

Here in Westmount, a six-floor building would not fit in an area with an average building of three floors.

In the same edition, there is a column written by the mayor (p. 7) supporting this project with these arguments:

1. "This project is supported by the large part of the community" ... Is there any survey or study supporting this information?

2. "If the project is abandoned, another project could take advantage of the zoning by right to build without going through a public consultation process." I'm not sure I understand. In this case, why is the current owner going through this process? If there is such an option, I think it would be the city's responsibility to prevent and stop such a situation.*

3. "This project will insert a green area and increase the pedestrian space." If the mayor cares about green space, is it not better to put energy towards saving the green area that we have already and to avoid losing a significant number of

beautiful trees in Westmount every year, and regarding pedestrian space, there is no set-back on Hillside Lane (the long side of the proposed building) and it will remain as narrow as it is now.

4. The mayor mentions our building (11 Hillside) and its history, implying that the city gave us the opportunity to live in Westmount, but we are opposed to give the same opportunity to others. Am I supposed to feel guilty about a project that was very beneficial for the city and the builder years ago? I remind you that our building is three floors high and not a pain for neighbours. Also, we are not responsible for what happened many years ago.

This is my last word: I choose to live in Canada and to have the right to speak out in a democratic society when I see there is something wrong, and to have the right not to blindly accept any idea that someone is dictating to me without convincing arguments.

FARIBA ABOLKHANI, HILLSIDE AVE.

***Editor's note:** I think what the mayor means is that some projects are possible within current zoning and so would not need any special/SCAOPi permission and would not be stoppable by the province's petition/registry/referendum process. In her view, I think, some/many/all of these "regulatorily easier" projects could be less pleasing to nearby residents than the current proposal. – DP.

TRAIN STATION SHOULD BE
ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS CENTRE

It is certainly enlightening to read that the Westmount Historical Association (WHA) is actively involved in bringing awareness to the re-purposing of our unique, unused Westmount train station [at the foot of Victoria Ave.].

David B. Hanna's presentation of a concept for its re-use on April 12 will be a major step forward and it could inspire the citizens of Westmount to propose other suitable functions for the building and its park-like surroundings.

Having spent over five decades working as a heritage activist I feel that, as we confront the irreversible crisis of climate change, the themes of protecting our built environment and respecting our natural environment meld together. For this reason, I propose that the former Westmount train station and its surrounding green space be re-purposed as an ecological awareness centre.

The recent COP15 conference worked with multiple sources of ecological information regarding our undeniable relationship with nature. To present to the public such key lifestyle information –

including the history and teachings of our indigenous communities – would serve to educate us and our children about how to alter our behaviour to better respect this planet.

BRIAN MERRETT, DE MAISONNEUVE BLVD

Editor's note: The train station seems to come up every four to six years. A sampling of our past coverage is listed below. – DP.

- "[City's] call for repurposing train station coming down the track," February 16, 2016, p. 1.
- "WHA focuses on train station's past, present, future," December 1, 2015, p. 22.
- "Historical group [WHA] is not suggesting train station should be theirs" (letter), November 13, 2012, p. 6.
- "Let's train ourselves to avoid boon-doggles" (editorial), November 6, 2012, p. 6.

LEXINGTON – A SPECTACULAR,
DANGEROUS EXPENSE

The object of the re-construction on Lexington Ave., in addition to upgrading the infrastructure, was, to paraphrase the city website, to make Lexington more beautiful and safer. In the words of Councillor Conrad Peart before the \$6.5-million construction in 2022, it was going to be "spectacular."

Many are not so sure. In the over 20 years that those whom I have spoken to (including a relative) have lived on Lexington, no one can recall when, if ever, there has been a traffic accident. Yet by narrowing the street substantially, the risk for accidents, particularly in winter, will be far greater. At the intersections of Edgheill, Sunnyside and Shorncliffe, the road has been narrowed to the point where there is clearly not enough room for two cars to safely pass, and more so in winter. And where will the snowplows pile up the snow?

To compound the problems, several of the homeowners on the east side now have to have their driveways extended so that their cars can move over the 10-foot-wide strip of concrete and earth that houses the street lights. These strips are completely unnecessary and only contribute to the narrowing.

Residents of Lexington and surrounding streets were very vocal in their opposition and sent many letters to the Westmount Independent, but the city nevertheless plowed ahead with the re-construction.

More beautiful? That remains to be seen. Safer? Hardly. "Spectacular"? Absolutely – in its potential for danger and its expense. *continued on p. 10*

WESTMOUNT INDEPENDENT

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HYDRO WESTMOUNT CONTINUES TO BE DRAIN ON CITY

The 2023 Westmount budget requires another \$2.718-million capital infusion for Hydro Westmount. That brings the drain on Westmount's general revenues to \$12.7 million [from 2017 to budgetted 2023] under the Smith administration and \$18.7 million since 2014¹. We continually hear that resources are stretched. They are not stretched; they are mismanaged.

age and navigate this conflict.

The new city director general – Julie Mandeville, who was to start February 20 [at press time] – is supposed to be responsible for Hydro Westmount as well. It appears that this situation will absorb a fair bit of her time, leaving little for the issues that matter to Westmount residents.

And it should be noted that Julie Mandeville was director of finance and treasurer overseeing the profligate spending at both the \$6.3-million room/greenhouse and the \$12.7 million Hydro Westmount losses. Not very reassuring.³

That no one in successive administrations has dealt with Hydro Westmount is both shocking and fiscally irresponsible. It would appear then that many of Westmount's infrastructure-deficit issues are not due to a lack of money or resources, but lie at the feet of Hydro Westmount. \$2.718 million means each household is paying an additional \$312.95 in 2023 so we don't "have to call Hydro Quebec." What is the super-sized Hydro Westmount governance council doing to stem the bleeding? Hydro Westmount is basically bankrupt and if it didn't have access to the general tax revenues, it would have shut down a long time ago.

The 2023 budget provides for an 8.3-percent increase in the payroll,⁴ but Westmount has zero household and population growth, and there has certainly been no improvement or increase in services. How much is salary increases and how much is additional personnel?

For information purposes, the federal government is offering 2.4-percent salary increases and the unions have asked for 4.5 percent.

However, Westmount did have a lot of people on leave with pay. M. Hurtubise, the [August 2017 to June 2021] director general, was promoted from the money-losing⁵ Hydro Westmount to DG for Westmount, and then an interim DG was hired, so we paid for two DGs. [A department head] was on leave and then Mr. Hakim [the August 2021 to October 2022 DG] was on leave.

Reasons for some of those on leave are unknown. Costs, however, are onerous and who was minding the store?

Mayor Smith says she likes to engage with residents, so perhaps she can use the “Mayor’s Column” to explain the continued support for Hydro Westmount, the toxic human relations, the turnover of senior management etc.

It appears the wheels have come off the wagon at city hall. There is no leadership and no vision, simply chaos.

JANIS KRAUT, THE BOULEVARD

Editor's notes: ¹These numbers contradict your letter of November 29, 2022 (p. 6): "In total from 2014 to 2022, Westmount has used \$12.785 million of taxpayers' money to support Hydro Westmount." Even if we add the 2023 budgetted number to this amount, we only get to \$15.503 million, not \$18.7 million.

²The current labour dispute concerns all of Westmount's blue-collar workers — not just those at Hydro Westmount.

³The spending on the greenhouse was approved by city council.

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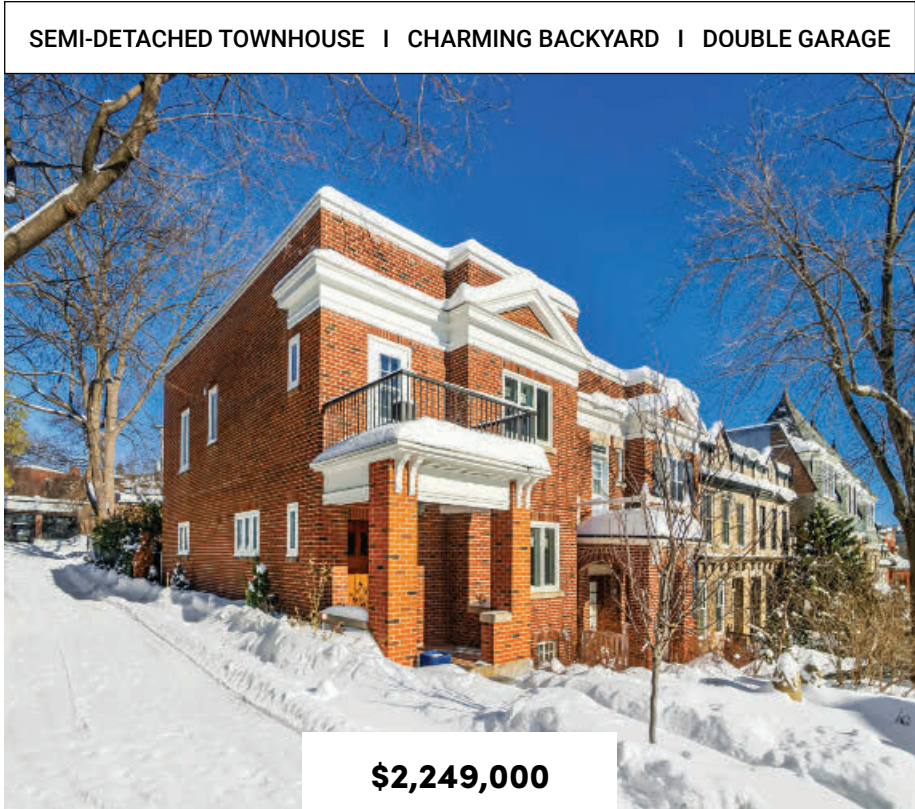
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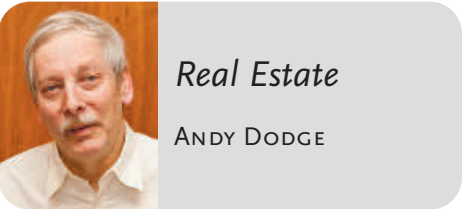
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January sales: A slow start



Real Estate
ANDY DODGE

Note: The following article relates to offers to purchase Westmount residential dwellings that were reported by local real estate agents as having been accepted in January 2023. Because they are not final registered sales, the addresses cannot be made public, but give a good idea of current trends in local real estate activity. The graph at right offers a picture of these trends over time.

Real estate sales got off to a slow start in Westmount this year, with only four one- or two-family dwellings sold in January, compared to 11 or 12 in January of the previous four years. A slow start is not uncommon – there have been four Januaries since 2000 that have been as slow as this – but certainly the fervour that was fuelled by the pandemic has waned.

Prices ranged from \$1,960,000 for a small semi-detached house on Upper Belmont Ave. to \$3,305,000 on Sydenham Ave., and two of the four sold for less than their new 2023 valuations. The average mark-up over these valuations was -2.7 per cent, of course combined with a 31-percent increase in the average valuation, so the end result is a slight reduction in the overall average price, in line with the reported slump in the central Montreal area.

Westmount’s average adjusted price has

been staggering between \$2.4 million and \$2.5 million for the past five months; as spring approaches there no doubt will be upward pressure in the market, though higher interest rates will provide a check on that upward factor.

Condos

And if the residential market were not slow, there was only one apartment unit sold, a co-op unit at 300 Lansdowne Ave., and the condominium market was stagnant. Some late-arriving condo sales brought statistics for the last quarter of 2022 to 10 sales averaging \$893,850, prices ranging from a very low \$280,000 to \$1,800,000, with three sales surpassing \$1 million.

The average adjusted price for condos – measured by quarter – dipped 3 percent since it peaked in the second quarter of 2022 at almost \$1,325,000, but it appears to be somewhat less volatile than the house market...as long as there is still a market for condos!

As we move to the 2023 spring market, the number of listings is increasing. As of mid-February, Westmount listings are up from 83 to 89, with 16 listed for asking prices between \$5,000,000 and \$10,000,000, an increase of four in that category. There is still one Westmount house listed below \$1 million, as there was a month earlier, and four asking over \$10,000,000, including two asking \$25,000,000.

Already this year there have been five house rentals compared to only one in the first month last year, in a range between \$4,250 to \$12,000 per month. The number

Average adjusted price for ‘typical’ Westmount house, by month, January 2017 to January 2023, based on accepted offer dates



of available house rentals has increased from 27 to 29. Two houses – one in the Square Mile downtown and one on North-

cliffe Ave. in NDG – were posted by agents as having been sold in January, for \$1,200,000 and \$1,300,000, respectively.

Villa Sainte-Marcelline strikes committee to save school

BY JENNIFER BALL

The board of directors of the Villa Sainte-Marcelline school informed parents February 7 that it has created “a committee to save the Villa.” This news about the Upper Belmont institution comes in the

wake of the rejection by the owners of its building – the Congrégation des Soeurs de la Villa Sainte-Marcelline – of an offer from a hitherto anonymous family with a student at the school to buy the building for the school’s benefit. At least some parents now know the name of this family.

The board includes representatives of the Congrégation, of educators at the school and of the school’s foundation. Also on the board are Stéphanie Léonard, the former director of leasing (Quebec) at BTB Real Estate Investment Trust, and John Marcovecchio, the CEO of Magil Construction.

A member of the bidding family told the Independent: “We are very disappointed that this transaction did not go through. We were really looking forward to embarking on this project. Like any major real estate transaction, things fall through and it just fell through.”

The letter from the board states in French: “the committee’s mandate includes, but is not limited to, the purchase of the current buildings by a third party and the necessary measures to ensure the continuity of the school, or the re-location to another location... This committee will be composed of several parents, alumni and others according to their fields of

expertise (real estate, taxation, financial arrangements, etc....), as well as the presidents of the parents’ associations (APVSM), the alumni (AAVSM) and the VSM Foundation...”

“Members of the board of directors and the Rescue Committee have asked the Congrégation this week to provide some of the elements necessary for the committee to fulfill its mandate...”

“The committee cannot at this time provide the guarantees of results that many parents would like to see, however, the committee members are not giving up and will do everything they can in this last chance initiative.”

A parent told the Independent: “There’s a lot of drama going on behind the scenes and we are not given any information. We find out from others.”

She also speculated about the reason for the refusal of the family’s offer and the motives of the Congrégation’s nuns.

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Princess Mallory with 'The Pirate Look'



9 Lives

LYSANNE FOWLER

SPCA in a temporary foster home, actually with three other cats that she is enjoying and with whom she is quite social. Losing her sight did not stop her, she has proven her moxie by doing just fine thank you.

Her fun-loving nature with the other cats and the foster family members has shown that she will integrate well into a forever home.

Mallory is three years old, very healthy

There was an accident and young Mallory lost her sight, so she is now embracing



the unique beauty that shows her courage under adversity.

Such a pixie face, a stunning white coat with paint brushes of grey on her little head.

Mallory is presently at the Montreal

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Stunning Mei-Chan

as soon as possible. She is very healthy, up to date with her inoculations, spayed and microchipped.

For more information on her, do not hesitate to go to the Montreal SPCA website at www.sPCA.com, then choose her information page from her identification number, 52052593, to "Book a visit" through their link to the adoption counselors at the shelter.



She is very elegant and charming. Companionable and intelligent, she enjoys walks and playtime, then lots of affection and interaction with the family.

Mei-Chan is presently at the Montreal SPCA kennel, in need of a forever home

You will simply add in your contact information and schedule a visit with a counsellor to come by and discuss adopting Mei-Chan into your family.

Your neighbour,
Lysanne

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Police Report

Claremont muggers rob 60+ man of laptop, wallet and phone

By MARTIN C. BARRY

A man in his early 60s making his way along Claremont Ave. between Windsor and Chesterfield around 8 pm on February 13 was robbed of a bag containing several valuable items.

The victim was walking alone when two suspects approached him and began to demand that he turn over his cell phone.

When he refused, at least one of the suspects shoved him, causing the man to fall, after which they forcefully seized the bag and ran off along Sherbrooke St.

The victim told police afterwards that in addition to the cell phone, the bag contained a laptop computer and a wallet with credit and personal identification cards.

Burglary at Rosemount & Sherbrooke

A home near the corner of Sherbrooke St. and Rosemount Ave. was broken into and robbed of household and personal valuables sometime between February 6 and 13 while the owners were away.

According to an inventory of property stolen during the incident submitted by the owners, jewellery, including several watches, was taken, as well as an undisclosed amount of cash.

As the jewelry items were kept stored and locked in a protective case, investigators who visited the crime scene were able to find the suspects' fingerprints, which are now under analysis at a Montreal police dept. crime lab.

According to Station 12 community relations officer Cst. Adalbert Pimentel, the suspects disabled a pair of exterior lights

on the outside of the house, after which they climbed to an upper-storey balcony from which they managed to gain entry to the house.

"On the second floor, they forced the window," said Pimentel. "They searched through several rooms, the bedrooms, the living room, until they found the jewelry box."

He said they left the same way as they came in. Although the house was equipped with a burglar alarm system, it wasn't triggered by the presence of the intruders, he added.

Chevy, tools taken

On the morning of February 8, a Chevrolet cargo truck was stolen from a street parking space on Church Hill.

According to the incident report, the owner, a tradesman working in the area, had gone to Station 12 on Stanton St. around 10:30 am that day to file a complaint about some tools being stolen.

When he returned to where he had parked the truck a block west on Church Hill, he saw that it too was now missing. Although he suspected at first it might

have been towed, the police confirmed this was not the case and listed the truck as stolen.

Cars stolen

According to recent incident reports from Station 12, several vehicles thefts were committed in Westmount during the last few days of January, although the police were able to recover at least one of the cars.

Sometime between 9 pm on January 31 and 7 am on February 1, a car was stolen from a parking spot near the corner of Westmount and Roslyn avenues.

A few hours later, the vehicle was located in the municipality of Terrebonne north of Montreal. There was no mention in the incident report as to whether a tracking device had been useful in recovering the stolen car.

On January 30, a car was also stolen from a spot near the corner of Rosemount Cresc. and Mountain Ave. Although the vehicle was equipped with a tracking device, indicating it was in motion, the police were ultimately unable to locate it.

Gesser nominated for World Photographic Cup

By MARTIN C. BARRY

An amateur photographer from Claremont Ave. is one of two Canadians chosen as finalists in an international photography competition.

Ron Gesser's striking portrait of an elderly woman from the Kutia Kondh ethnic group in central India was among the top 10 images in eight categories from 32 nations chosen as finalists in the World Photographic Cup awards taking place in Singapore on March 17.

The image, which was taken by Gesser when he was travelling in India, shows an aging woman whose facial expression suggests she has had a challenging existence. He noted that her ethnic group's current way of living is at risk, as is the way of life of many other indigenous peoples around the world.

An investment advisor by profession, Gesser has taken pictures informally since age 11. However, it was only around 15 years ago that he decided to get serious about his preferred genre – "street" photography.

A trip to Peru with his wife, Sharleen, marked the beginning of what are now annual treks to various destinations around the globe – including Cambodia, Vietnam and Ethiopia – where he indulges his love of photography.

"We just got back from a trip to West Africa – from Benin," he said. When he's on a trip, he takes along two cameras and

five lenses.

Gesser belongs to the Montreal Camera Club, the Canadian Association of Photographic Art and the Photographic Society of America. Although the nomination from the WPC isn't his first award citation, he says it's "probably the largest and the biggest I've ever received."

His mirrorless digital camera brand of choice is Fuji. He shoots entirely in manual mode, hand-selecting the aperture and exposure, leaving only the autofocus engaged. He says he appreciates the camera's traditional design, with control dials on the camera body as they were in the days of analog film photography.

"I find that I'm more connected to the camera, that it's more fun and it's more inspiring than taking something when it's more computerized – even though you can do it that way too."

While on photo shoots, he will often be accompanied by a guide who might help to establish a rapport with the people Gesser decides he wants to photograph in cities, towns and villages. He usually pays his subjects for the few moments it takes to snap their picture.

"In certain places like Benin, Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa, they know their photo is being taken and you have to pay everyone for their photos. Sometimes you take their photo and you pay them, or else you pay them and then take their photo. It depends."

See p. 1 for photo.

No love for this post



This permanent bollard was photographed on the south side of Sherbrooke at Prince Albert on February 14, St. Valentine's Day.

PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.

Kits for the cold



Public safety officer Sarah Scanlon puts together more of the “heart-warming” kits she has been assembling for homeless men and women with whom Public Security patrollers interacted during the recent spell of winter cold. This was an idea she came up with to help them over the extreme temperatures in February and to have on hand now as needed. Proceeds are being used from a “Dunk a PSO” event at the city’s Family Day last summer to fund the kits.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WESTMOUNT PUBLIC SECURITY.



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Rotary Club hosts basketballer, philanthropist Williams

By RALPH THOMPSON

The Rotary Club of Westmount hosted Trevor Williams, a highly accomplished basketball player and founder of the Westmount-headquartered Trevor Williams Kids Foundation, for a virtual presentation February 8.

Williams started life in Little Burgundy, and he credits a number of people for his successes and believes that his interactions with a neighbour and member of the Little Burgundy sports association, Mr. Butt, inspired him to work and train hard in hockey, baseball and basketball.

“I tip my hat to Mr. Butt and his family for providing a safe haven for the young men and young women within that community.”

Basketball career

Williams went on to play basketball alongside Avery Johnson in Louisiana and gained a scholarship to St. Peter’s College in New Jersey. He returned to Montreal in 1989 to play for the Concordia University Stingers.

He was picked up by Canada’s national basketball team and played against the original American “Dream Team” in the

1992 Tournament of the Americas.

But his heart was in his hometown and seeing the lack of sports facilities, he started the Trevor Williams Basketball Academy in 1993. The academy started with 11 kids and has grown to 700 participants today. It subsidizes 50 percent of the kids who attend and employs 60 to 70 students every summer.

Williams described how sports teach how to persevere, communicate, get along with people, win and lose, and pass all this along to the next generation.

Foundation for troubled kids

In 2002, Williams was noticing that some of the kids were not returning to the summer camps. He learned that they had got themselves into trouble. That’s when he instituted the Trevor Williams Kids Foundation to help troubled inner-city youth in the city of Montreal.

Using sports, education and mentoring, the foundation helps youth gain confidence in themselves so that they can make better life choices in the future. “The foundation is an academic tool for personal enhancement, to teach life skills and to become a leader. It goes hand in hand with the basketball camp,” said Williams.

Williams is no stranger to Westmounters. He coaches basketball at Dawson College and has instructed at Miss Edgar’s and Miss Cramp’s School (ECS) and Westmount High School. The foundation is headquartered here.

The principal source of fundraising for his foundation is an annual gala at Bâton Rouge on Mountain St. downtown but donations can be made in numerous ways at twkf.com.

See p. 1 for photo.

Binary is everywhere!



This licence plate was photographed on de Maisonneuve at Kitchener on February 7.
PHOTO: INDEPENDENT.

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Retail Review

VERONICA REDGRAVE

In a world bombarded by “TMI” (“too much information”) inciting us to keep up, look better and have more, it was wonderful to find respite in a birch log.

A microcosm of forest-bathing, the beautiful branch evoking a sense of Calder-like calm hangs in Wei Li’s Westmount office.

Li is an acupuncturist and her training is extensive. Not only did she study medicine (she was an MD in China), she has her bachelor-masters in Chinese medicine from Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, and she has a PhD in physiology and endocrinology from Laval University.

Today she treats issues ranging from sleep challenges, allergies, menstruation, infertility, PMS and sports injuries. (She worked for athletes who went to the Beijing and Pyeonchang, South Korea Olympics.)

Many of her clients come for “wellness.” She explained that “acupuncture is the insertion of very thin needles (disposable) through your skin at strategic points of the body. A way of balancing the flow of

Li works against stress, for calm

energy, it is based on the belief that the life force (*qi/chi*) circulates within the body in lines called the meridians.”

How does Li begin? Believe it or not, you put out your tongue!

From its appearance, she can discern whether to help the body via liver, lung or spleen *chi*. She also feels your wrist pulse to get a global view of how the body works. And, yes, her method also helps manage stress, the overarching noun of 2023.

Because of her wide range of training, the Order of Acupuncturists of Quebec has authorized Li to offer herbal supplements, which not all acupuncturists can do. The ingredients are based on the 2,000-year-old herb bible *Shang Han Lun* and are quality controlled.

Li’s clients have to leave the outside world behind: she insists smart phones are turned off. “They drain our energy.” Leaving the murmurations of daily life and your selfie self at the door, how soothing it is to listen to the sound of silence while experiencing a healing method created many centuries ago.

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The art of the purchase

By JENNIFER BALL

Within every crisis there is opportunity, and COVID has been a catalyst for many changes around the art world, both positive and negative.

Two local galleries, S16 and Galerie Blanche, both on Greene Ave., are working to position themselves strategically with offerings for the first-time buyer as well as for the sophisticated collector.

The owners of S16 are Adam Vieira and Antonio De Luca, and they have three components to their business: art galleries, Station 16 editions and S16 “NFTs,” short for “non-fungible tokens.”

The art galleries sell paintings and sculptures by emerging artists and art market darlings like Shepard Fairey, Kevin Ledo, Stikki Peaches, Becky Rosa and Banksy.

Station 16 editions sells prints and art toys, while S16 NFTs has up to 4,000 unique items launched on Ethereum blockchain.

Their marquee event in 2022 was to welcome Shepard Fairey to showcase a new collection and to double as interior decorator by painting a mural in the front of the gallery.

S16 is located in the defunct Bistro on the Avenue restaurant and the owners kept the bar *in situ* to honour those who habitually met there for after work cocktails, they said.

Vieira is of the opinion that his customer base sways more towards purchasing for personal contentment with the art or the artist, rather than purely for investment, he said.

“I always tell people, even when they’re purchasing for investment: you’re going to

have to live with this for a little while. So, if it’s a piece you absolutely hate to look at, it’s going to be very, very tiresome for you to sit on that piece and earn your investment. It’s a lot easier when you love living with the piece of art that you’ve purchased for investment.”

Galerie Blanche

Galerie Blanche opened its doors on January 4 in its new location at 1329 Greene Ave. Sharon Galbraith is the gallery director. Galbraith said Galerie Blanche profited by the fact that due to COVID and because of the work conditions, people were working from home and realizing that without travel and with extra disposable cash, they wanted to spruce up their environment, since they were home 24-7.

Thierry Quenette, Dominick Sokolowski, Wendy Westlake and Bruno

Capolongo are some of the artists Galbraith displays in the 3,000 square feet of gallery space. They specialize in abstract art, landscapes, photographs and sculptures.

For those who valued the Jean-Michel Basquiat show at the museum of fine art but may lack the multimillions in liquidity that his works command on the primary art market – Jazzu’s mixed media on canvas works are a nod to the Haitian-American artist and are hugely more affordable.

The Independent reached out for perspectives from Galerie de Bellefeuille, Han Contemporary and Red Oak fine art. The only response was from Helen and Jacques Bellefeuille, whose schedule conflicted with requested interview dates.



Left, Adam Vieira looking at Banksy work entitled “Dream Boat, 2015” on January 18. Right, Fantomatique by Jazzu, as seen January 20.

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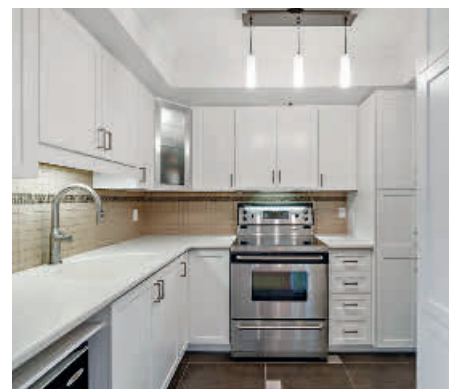
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Looking for the best renovation opportunity in Westmount? This is it! Only needing aesthetic upgrades, this 3-bedroom, detached home with double garage and private garden is waiting for you!

BEST BUY IN OLD MONTREAL!



1 MCGILL #420 | NOW ASKING \$749,000 | MLS 21929912

Located in one of the best buildings in Old Montreal, this 2 bedroom, 2 bath unit with balcony and garage is just waiting for your special touch. Already priced 10% below the sale of the same unit on 3rd floor, this is VALUE!

I'm here to help. If this period of uncertainty has you thinking about your next chapter. Call me.

Let's write your next chapter TOGETHER...

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