

CSL votes 4-2 to sell land for new B'nai Brith residence

Dissenting councillors worried about proximity to rail line

By Joel Goldenberg
The Suburban

Côte St. Luc council voted 4-2 at Monday night's council meeting to accept an offer to purchase a piece of city-owned land near the Côte St. Luc Shopping Centre for a planned new B'nai Brith House seniors residence.

Another such residence is further west, at the corner of Côte St. Luc Road and Westminster.

Councillor Mitchell Brownstein pointed out that three non-profit organizations with ties to the community were asked to submit proposals to buy the land for development. Residence B'nai Brith's offer was accepted, for \$1,079,817.84 plus taxes, for a non-profit, affordable, more than 100-unit residence for autonomous seniors.

"The sale purchase is conditional upon, among other things, the acceptance by the city council of the architectural plans

proposed by the purchaser and on the successful rezoning of the property to accommodate the project," the councillor added.

Brownstein said the council "strongly believes in helping those in need in providing subsidized housing. It is being built in 2014 standards, the highest standards possible to ensure safety and security. Its proximity to the railway is acceptable according to all norms that exist today. We have many other institutions that house many more people that are closer to the railway yards, and not up to the standards for which this building will be built."

Councilor Dida Berku and Steven Erdelyi voted against. Berku cited the 2013 Lac Mégantic rail disaster and an increase in transport of oil by rail, and said new Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Railway Association of Canada

guidelines, though not law, are being adopted in other communities, and call for a safe distance setback [from building to property line] of 30 metres, with a berm (a mound or wall).

"It was determined through analysis [in a report] that 30 metres with a berm was a minimum safe distance for derailment," she added. "We should not be proceeding with this in this regard. They will be building a state of the art berm and noise

wall, vibration-proof windows, but it's still not 30 metres from the property line."

Erdelyi said he wanted to err on the side of caution.

"I'm a firm supporter of B'nai Brith House, but I have to look at the safety and security of residents as a whole," he added.

Councilor Glenn Nashen said Residence B'nai Brith has provided very good cooperation to add environmental risk mitigation factors the city has requested.

"I would say the majority of Côte St. Luc is probably relatively close to rail lines," he added. "Are we going to move residents, students and patients? I don't think so. What we're going to do is continue to do what we've done for decades, to invest in emergency preparedness... We have to balance this with the great benefit for our seniors who are vacating their homes, who may not have the funds to go into an expensive condominium.... If people are concerned and don't want to live in that area, no one is forcing them to do that, but it does offers an opportunity which may not otherwise exist."

Resident Bryan Wolofsky and council regular Irving Itman raised questions. Mayor Anthony Housefather told Itman that the setback from the proposed

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building to the property line is 17-18 metres with a berm, and 30 metres from the rail line.

"The 30-metre setback in the FCM guideline guideline is not an absolute, but it could be less if mitigation measures are taken, amongst them berms and walls, and we have required in our contract with B'nai Brith that they respect and comply with guidelines related to railroads. They

have spoken with the railroads, and they do agree with B'nai Brith's proposal. [We will] continue to work with them on mitigation measures.

"B'nai Brith advised us they have a waiting list of almost 1,000 people waiting for units, and if we couldn't find this location for them, which they already received funding for from different levels of government, they would have to put it in the eastern part of Montreal, far away from these people's children and grandchildren." ■