

NEWS & VIEWS

CSL council notes

By Joel Goldenberg
The Suburban

Côte St. Luc councillor Steven Erdelyi, in charge of the public works and engineering portfolios on council, told the November council meeting the city is continuing its six-year trend of reducing the amount of garbage that goes to landfills.

Taking account of the period from January to September 2013 and the same time in 2012, Erdelyi said there was a 0.2 percent decrease in the tonnage going to landfills, and the recycling amount went up 0.02 percent.

The councillor added that public works' main priority has been preparing city vehicles for the winter.

"The plows and salt spreaders are ready," he said.

Erdelyi also said 15 ash trees have been removed because of damage caused by the Emerald Ash Borer beetle.

"In other cases, we're using medication for the trees, but we don't know if it will work."

Erdelyi reported there were no water main breaks this past October, for the third month in a row.

"From January to October 2013, there was a total of 12 water main breaks, and if we compare this to the average of the previous seven years, there were 19, so it's a huge decrease, and this is due in large part to the amount of work we've done with water sleeving over the last few years," he said.

Councillor Glenn Nashen, in charge of the public safety portfolio, said the early November windstorm "really

put our public safety division to the test," in terms of "the work that was done by our public security officers in terms of responding to downed wires and downed trees, and public safety situations; our Emergency Medical Services crews that responded to back to back calls — one call came in for a cardiac arrest in an elevator that was trapped between floors on Macdonald Avenue that turned out not to be a cardiac arrest.

"There was a number of life threatening and potentially life threatening emergencies, and our volunteers did an absolutely tremendous job at responding. Our dispatch centre was completely flooded with phone calls by concerned citizens. And our volunteer Citizens on Patrol went out in full force — we did an emergency callout, and had four simultaneous crews working to help back up public security.

"As we head towards 2014, where the council has decided to prioritize emergency preparedness and helping to educate the public, [the windstorm] was quite an unexpected, but excellent, test for our volunteers and professionals to be out there, protecting our public," Nashen added.

Councillor Ruth Kovac credited city staff with putting together the monthly reports council members read each month.

"As good as we are in decision making, the staff really does the lion's share of the work in providing us with the information, and I do want to say thank you. Their dedication is to be applauded."

CSL, Hampstead residents seek Hydro outage solutions

By Joel Goldenberg
The Suburban

The recent massive power outages caused by very high winds earlier this month prompted residents in Côte St. Luc and Hampstead to ask their councils to seek solutions to long-term blackouts.

In Côte St. Luc, council regular Bernard Tonchin said residents are living in "very difficult times" regarding Hydro.

"We don't have many power failures, but we have longer power failures," he said. "The last one we had, people around me were without power for two and a half to three days.

"I understand it's an expensive proposition, but we have to realize we are one of the oldest communities in the city," he added. "Can we change our bylaws so that generators should be mandatory in all high-rise seniors residences?"

"We have to do something, and I don't know if we have to dig in our pockets to subsidize, because that's

not the answer either. What can you people do for us with Hydro?"

Mayor Anthony Housefather said Hydro is trying to alleviate power failures by placing lines underground, but that older lines can still be affected by falling branches.

"It's hugely expensive for them to replace all older lines that are above ground with lower ground lines. And there are provincial requirements related to seniors homes that exist with respect to generators and other requirements that apply to all seniors homes in Quebec.

"The same is true with the Régie du Bâtiment and buildings over eight stores. Some of these things would be beyond our competency to legislate on, and others wouldn't apply to existing buildings. They could only apply to new buildings in terms of requirements. But we'll certainly look into your comments and see if there's anything we should be doing."

In Hampstead, Briardale resident Michael Martin told the town council that he also suffered a power failure

from wires on the Côte St. Luc grid — longer than his neighbours on the Hampstead grid — and asked why the lines are not underground "like a lot of other places in Hampstead."

Mayor William Steinberg said the town approached Hydro about placing lines underground eight years ago.

"The cost is in the multimillions of dollars, and the town simply can't afford that," the mayor said. "I tried the arguments, 'you'll have less power failures, less sending men out to repair things in the middle of the night and overtime,' but Hydro knows perfectly well they would rather absorb those costs than the enormous costs of putting the wires underground. So it's not doable."

Martin said some wires are low and hang over his swimming pool. Steinberg suggested the resident speak with Hydro to send a representative to make sure the wires are safe.

Steinberg also said there is nothing the town can do about which residents are on which Hydro grid. ■

MoWest to start monthly newsletter

By Joel Goldenberg
The Suburban

Montreal West will be starting a monthly newsletter to improve communications between residents and council, Councillor Elizabeth Ulin announced at the November public meeting.

The newsletter will be in the form of an insert or some other type of addition to the local publication The Informer.

"We'll each be giving you a little bit more information about what we're up to, and hopefully that will fill in not just people who come to the meetings, but people who can't make the meetings but want to keep informed," the councillor added.

The issue came up again during the meeting when council regular and former candidate Julien

Feldman asked about issues of transparency.

"A lot of people feel they don't really know what's going on in the town, not so much about events but what's going on behind the scenes at council," he said. "Most other demerged towns have their minutes available on the website. What we get at meetings are decisions that are already made. The town residents never get to understand any of the discussion or the different perspectives on the issues between the different councillors. We see a complete decision.

"For instance, there's a notice of motion for a budget, but there's no public hearing for a budget to discuss that, for example, 'wouldn't it be great to restrict increases to the cost of living.' A lot of people, I found going door to door, want to have

that kind of discussion."

Ulin responded that those running for council considered transparency to be an important issue.

"Part of this idea of having a newsletter that comes out once a month is not only to talk about what we've done, but also the kinds of things we'd like to do or are thinking about doing, so people have an opportunity at that point to weigh in on issues we're considering."

Mayor Beny Masella announced a related initiative called Coffee with the Mayor, as reported in The Suburban, to enable residents to meet with him to discuss issues, if they cannot attend the monthly council meetings at night. The first session takes place Monday, Dec. 9 from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. in the town hall's Music Room, 50 Westminster South. ■

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