



Have your say: Rumbblings
in Lower Westmount

Description

Earthquakes and Train Quakes, Westmount 2040 and Pandemic 2020

April 4, 2020

Being optimistic about the future during the stressful lockdown to slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic is indeed a difficult endeavour. Daring to be optimistic in the face of a daily diet of news regarding the pandemic may make one appear to be fiddling while Rome burns. However, not to be indelicate, it is a truism that most of the infected will recover, kids will be back at school and the battered economy will grow again. It is not outrageous to imagine that many are using the downtime to think of volunteering, being health conscious, improving skills and education, but also issues such as road conditions, zoning, urban planning, community events and things left undone, be they of concern to individuals, family or community.

On Sunday, March 29 at 3:22 am, many Westmounters experienced the third earthquake of 2020. The first one happened in January with an epicentre near the US border. The second earthquake happened earlier this month at around 3:20 am and today's earthquake also happened at around 3:20 am. Excitement rang out on all social media platforms because, unlike other places with active fault lines, they are rarely felt here unless one happens to live below St Catherine Street in Westmount.

The ground shakes under the Victorian homes, daycares, condominiums, social housing complexes and long-term elderly care facilities that are situated along Hillside Avenue as Exo commuter trains rush by. Those of us who live below St Catherine Street cannot share the excitement of a 3.6 on the Richter scale tremor as such earth movements happen nearly 100 times per day, six days a week from 6:30 am until 11 pm. The frequency of trains has increased since autumn 2019 and the train-made tremors are annoying, especially felt now that we are working from home to comply with authorities trying to stop the spread of COVID-19.

I'd like to remind our elected officials at all levels that the problems of the commuter trains have been harming Westmounters for decades. It is almost beyond belief that despite the years of the phone calls, complaints, government surveys, sound and vibration measurements, Bon-Voisinage meetings, powerless and zero budget



volunteer groups and expertise from elected officials, the problems of the trains rather than getting better have become worse. The noxious diesel exhaust, the 3.6 on the Richter scale tremors and 92.5 dB sound levels 100 times a day are deleterious to a healthy quality of life.

For decades there have been several excuses, each more preposterous than the other, as to why there has been no physical work done to reduce the noise and vibration from the commuter trains. Cycling North on Rue de Courcelle near the entrance to Home Depot, one can stop and admire a well-designed glass sound barrier that prevents the car noise from spilling over onto the parking lot of Home Depot and homes in other parts of newly finished Highway 136. Lower Westmount would certainly benefit from a similar well-maintained barrier.

The existing poorly maintained sound barrier prototype on Abbot Avenue reduces train noise by 10 dB. Though graffiti-ridden it does reduce some of the train noise and diesel exhaust. Some people have suggested that there is a lack of funding to create a quieter lower Westmount. Such excuses only invite cynicism among some of the electorate, which is bad for democracy. That Westmount collects nearly half a billion dollars in property taxes per electoral cycle and is a community that remits hundreds of millions of dollars in provincial as well as federal income taxes annually has officials claiming there isn't enough funding is insulting even to a child's intelligence.

The technical expertise to solve the problems preventing the commuter trains from being good neighbours with the citizens of lower Westmount exists. A full implementation of a good plan will be financially beneficial for the citizens of Westmount 2040. Those of us today owe it to future generations to have a cleaner, greener and sustainable city from Edgehill down to St Catherine Street, from Claremont to Atwater and Dorchester.

Because of the COVID-19 virus, public consultations on the future of Westmount 2040 were put on hold. When we are allowed to return to shop, commute to work and go to school, I hope that there will be an enthusiastic attempt to solve the train issue. Let us not inflict on the residents and workers of Westmount in 2040, the disgusting train noise, vibration and noxious fumes characteristic of Westmount 2020. Stay safe everyone, stay kind to your neighbours. This pandemic will pass.

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Date Created

April 2020