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Editorial

Plan 9 not likely to change

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The Côte St. Luc politicians did and said all the right things at their monthly council meeting last week when it came to the proposed merger of police stations 9 and 11, but in the end, don't expect the police hierarchy to change their mind.

There are four stations serving the West End, two in Snowdon and Côte des Neiges, and one each in NDG (11) and Côte St. Luc, Hampstead and Montreal West (9). The police have decided they have too many neighbourhood stations, so they want to merge those four into two.

Now, think about how things have been going for those in Côte St. Luc since the demerger. They have been dumped on by the Agglomeration Council, where democracy is about as popular as George Bush on the streets of Baghdad. Now, the CSL politicians and the residents they represent are being told they will probably lose their local police station.

When the merger takes place, which is supposed to be sometime next year, one can be pretty sure the station's new locale will be in NDG. It won't be at the present site of Station 11, because that station is too small. And it won't be in the Cavendish Mall, which was the fervent wish of many Côte St. Lucers.

About 10 years ago, the police decided to follow the model that was very popular in many parts of the United States — smaller community stations. This decentralization plan was supposed to bring the police closer to the community and offer better services.

Now, we are being told that by merging stations, we will have more police on the streets providing better services. It's a good thing these guys carry guns if they're going to make these kinds of arguments.

Ruth Kovac, a well-respected city councillor representing District 8, was both passionate and persuasive last week when making the case for Station 9 staying put. She talked about the important relationships that local police officers have forged with residents. She pointed out that speeding on the major artery, Cavendish, has decreased because of the police presence, that seniors have a greater sense of security and that with the diverse ethnic population, particularly the Jewish population, that it's important to have a strong police deterrent to those who would inflict their racist hatred on others. And that cultural exposure offers excellent diversity training to many of these officers, who tend to be young Francophones.

But it is probably top cop Yvan Delorme's own words which make the best argument for keeping Station 9 in Côte St. Luc: "The citizen is at the heart of the neighborhoods policing model. Getting closer to our citizens is crucial for the development of our organization and the accomplishment of our mission. We know we have to do everything we can to develop this closer relationship."

Kovac said the community has done such a good of helping the police — with programs like EMS and Vcop —

that they have significantly reduced crime. Perhaps the move is, in some way, punishment for them doing such a fine job.

Next year, despite the resolution and the protestations, expect the merger of Station 9 and Station 11 to take place. And expect the new station, which perhaps they should aptly call Station 9-1-1, to be located somewhere in NDG.

While Kovac and her fellow councillors have all the good arguments, unfortunately in this case, they aren't as well armed as their opponents.

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Keep cops in place

Ten years ago, the Montreal police department had a great idea; increase the presence of the police in the community by adding more stations into neighbourhoods, and crime would go down.

Not surprisingly, in most areas, it seemed to work. However, in some sectors, other crimes, such as sexual assault and traffic accidents causing injury or deaths, went up. Street gangs are also a growing problem.

It's hard to imagine the reasoning, then, behind reducing police presence in neighbourhoods, where many of these problems begin.

Haven't we all learned that forced mergers just don't work; that smaller is better?

It's true, community stations need officers to work behind the counter responding to citizens' complaints.

That's the whole point of a user-friendly, preventative system. If the result was fewer cops on the street, then the solution is not to merge stations, but to hire more police officers.

Part of the re-organization proposal suggests merging Stations 9 with 11, which collectively cover Côte St. Luc, Hampstead, Montreal West and N.D.G., and Stations 25 with 26, which covers Côte des Neiges.

Last month, residents of N.D.G. and C.D.N. went to their borough council meeting to complain about the proposed changes, stating their security was being compromised. They are not wrong.

C.D.N./N.D.G. is the largest borough on the island, with an estimated 170,000 residents. It is one of the most culturally and economically diverse boroughs with at least four metro stations that are known trouble spots. (Snowdon, Villa Maria, Plamondon and Côte Ste. Catherine.)

As well, at the current Station 11 location on Somerled and Kensington, there are at least two high schools and a half-dozen elementary schools in the area, not to mention numerous group homes.

A police presence in the form of vehicles on the street is one thing, but a physical location in the heart of the neighbourhood offers a place to go when in danger.

A child being followed home from school, a teen being harassed or an elderly person in fear can enter Station 11, instead of either becoming a victim or being lucky enough to find a phone to call 911 for help. Once that station disappears, so does that safety factor.

It is not just citizens who are upset at the proposed changes. Last month, Côte St. Luc and Hampstead councils passed resolutions to keep Station 9, saying community stations have improved police presence since Montreal police took over from local police departments in the early 1970s.

If the city begs off and insists on the mergers by saying there's not enough money to hire more officers, perhaps Mayor Gerald Tremblay should shelve one of his mega-Montreal spending ideas and funnel some of the city's \$140 million surplus into bulking up the police force, paying special attention to including more employees who reflect the city's cultural diversity. Adding more awareness, educational and crime prevention initiatives couldn't hurt either.

With society moving in the unfortunate direction of an increase in intolerance and violence, public security with an educated, aware police force should be at the top of the city's agenda.

Thursday, the public is invited to a consultation on the proposed police station mergers. We urge everyone to support your councillors and local mayors. Attend the meeting and voice your concerns.

Get there 30 minutes early to register if you want to ask questions or make a comment, but make sure to grab a friend and show up. Last fall the public voice reversed the decision to change the name of Park Avenue, and it can work now if you want to save your community police station.

The public consultation meeting is Thursday, May 3, 7 p.m., 275 Notre Dame St. E.

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By **The Suburban.com**

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