

Wise takes aim at bringing a high school to CSL by 2013

By ISAAC OLSON

School commissioner Syd Wise is very familiar with the Giovanni Palatucci Facility as it was once home to Wagar High School, where he served as principal from 1988 to 1992. Now, representing Côte St. Luc on the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), he's playing a key role in, if all goes as planned, bringing the building back to its former glory.

"We're going to look at what can come into this school by 2013, become entrenched and start off as a fully fledged school," said Wise, noting the target initially is grade 7 with the possibility of grade 8. "It's a determined resolution and the task force will explore two or three possibilities."

In early January, Wise proposed and won a resolution that ensured Royal Vale School would stay untouched in NDG but also launch a task force that will carefully lay out plans for a new public, English-language high school while, at the same time, exploring that plan's viability. The task force, he said, will include CSL officials, citizens, school board officials and experts as they all work together to coordinate a plan that integrates well with an area rich in public infrastructure such as



School commissioner Syd Wise in the lobby of the Giovanni Palatucci Facility.

Photo: Isaac Olson

tennis courts, the nearby hockey arena and the new Aquatics and Community Centre (ACC) across the street.

Currently, Wise said, the task force is looking to design a plan that breaks the classic mold and goes beyond the private

or French school market in order to bring students eligible for English education back into the system. A way to do this, he suggested, would be to initiate a school that specializes in sports and has a heritage program that focuses on a certain subject like the history and language of Judaism or Italy.

Sports and heritage, he said, have been found to be of great interest for parents and students

from around the Montreal region. The idea of reopening the facility to a mainstream high school has long been an idea, but the recent closure discussions have brought forth a renewed drive on behalf of commissioners and CSL residents.

While some people question the idea of opening a school when others are being closed due to a dwindling student population and financial restraints, Wise said: "The fact that we are diminishing in population is very true, but we have to do something to counteract that. We have to develop programs which, hopefully, will appeal to kids who are presently not in our system."

With so much infrastructure within walking distance, Wise said the Palatucci facility provides the perfect location for a sports concentration program that would help the EMSB bring in more students. When asked why a new school would survive where Wagar and a recent attempt to revive the building didn't, Wise, who has a PhD in education, said the EMSB was not trying hard enough to outstrip the private and French-school sector with innovative programming that takes full advantage of the area's facilities.

"We believe that we can develop a program that certainly can compete with any program in the private sector," said Wise, noting meetings will be held with parents to help planners understand what they have in mind. "We want to create a program that generates considerable interest from parents and students."

CSL council considering expanding smoking ban

By ISAAC OLSON

Côte St. Luc's council may soon vote to amend a by-law that, going beyond the province's ban on smoking indoors, will prevent people from smoking near playgrounds or during city-sponsored events such as the upcoming winter carnival or Canada Day celebrations.

"As the parent of two young children, I go to the park and see adults or parents smoking right next to the children, so it is something I pushed for," said District 4 councillor Steven Erdelyi, noting current provincial laws otherwise allow adults to smoke in open-air areas like playgrounds. "We discussed trying to have a limit and we have decided on anywhere within 20 metres of the playground or play area like the swings, sports fields or play structures."

The city's current smoking by-law took effect "long before the provincial government passed any tobacco law. Basically, what this amendment does is say 'okay, we accept what the provincial government has done, but we're trying to take it one step further.'"

While it is possible that violators of the new by-law get fined, the expectation, said Erdelyi, is that people will more likely just respect the rule, which will be posted. If smokers refuse when asked, to comply with the by-law, then a public security officer or the police will be forced to intervene. It is a minimum of \$50 for a first offence and \$100 for a second offence, he said.

Erdelyi has been working on this resolution for "quite some time" behind the scene, he explained, and, while smoking in public areas bothers him on a personal level, it is also disturbing for him to see his four-year-old watching and asking questions about tobacco users. The council, during the January 23 meeting, voted to waive the reading of the by-law at the next meeting where they will then approve or nix the amendment.

"We want the residents to be healthy as well," said Erdelyi. "If they're going to choose to smoke in their own homes, that's one thing, but if they're smoking in a public area, that's something else. It's a nuisance for others and that's something we want to make sure doesn't happen."

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