

Law 22 provides major benefits for Hampstead

When I ran for Mayor, one of my promises was to fight for a fairer Agglomeration Council. To achieve this, I was the first of the suburban Mayors, along with Mayor Tutino of Baie D'Urfe, to start a boycott of the Agglomeration Council which all the Mayors joined and, as a result, the Quebec government began to pay attention. Since then it has taken 18 months of tough negotiations but we have succeeded in getting an excellent deal in Law 22 which was passed by the National Assembly June 21, 2008.

Arterial Roads

Law 22 removes responsibility for arterial roads from the Agglomeration and returns it to the municipalities. Now Hampstead taxpayers will no longer pay for maintaining all the Agglomeration roads on the island. We will only pay for our one arterial road, the south side of Cote St. Luc Road, and we will eventually be able to bring it up to Hampstead standards.

Agglomeration Responsibilities

Several things (various museums, Jarry Park, etc.) that were the responsibility of the Agglomeration have been removed and a few have been added. Since the net effect of these changes will be about a \$30,000,000 reduction in the Agglomeration budget, this will reduce Agglomeration taxes for us.

One Tax Bill

Starting in 2009, you will get one tax bill from Hampstead rather than two: one from Hampstead and one from Montreal. The single tax bill will have separate lines for local and Agglomeration taxes.

You may wonder what difference it makes if there are two bills or one since we will still pay our share of the Agglomeration budget. The answer is that under the former system, Montreal played with the split between residential and non-residential tax rates in such a way that the suburbs (especially the mostly residential ones like Hampstead) ended up paying a bigger part of the Agglomeration budget while Montrealers paid less. Montreal will no longer be able to do this.

Access to Information

Law 22 creates a Secretariat whose function will be to provide information to the suburbs on Agglomeration spending. Currently we get very little information and that makes it hard for us to challenge unfair decisions by Montreal on what is or is not an Agglomeration expense. This new body will help.

Audit Committee

There will also be a new Audit Committee to which an Auditor General will report. The suburbs will have two members on this committee. The Auditor General will have the mandate to check all Agglomeration expenses and to make sure that they are, in fact, Agglomeration expenses rather than Montreal expenses.

Issues still on the table

One reason that the suburbs were able to sign on to the deal between us and Montreal is that all the issues not covered will be addressed in the future by a working group. These issues are:

- **Downtown** –The suburbs feel that Montreal interprets downtown Montreal too broadly both geographically and in terms of services that they deem to be regional. For example, we question how downtown snow removal can be considered a regional service.
- **Water Taxation** – This is of particular concern to several West Island suburbs where they are double taxed for water. This is obviously unfair.
- **Debt service on Agglomeration Assets** – There are some Agglomeration assets where the suburbs are paying the debt service even though the assets belong to the Agglomeration. For example, Hampstead is paying the debt service on an \$800,000 fire department ladder truck that had been removed from Hampstead following the demerger. This, too, is clearly unfair.
- **Governance Issues** – Currently, the Mayor of Montreal and the Executive Committee totally control the Agglomeration Council. This is not democratic and we would like to see another structure with perhaps all the borough Mayors and all the suburban Mayors on the Agglomeration Council.

Conclusion – A good first step

Law 22 does not resolve all the problems that we have had with the Agglomeration Council but it does address many of the major issues that we have had and it provides a mechanism for solving the remaining irritants. Credit must be given to the Quebec Liberal government, Minister of Municipal Affairs, Nathalie Normandeau, and her senior staff for brokering this deal. I am cautiously optimistic that the Minister and her department will keep working with us until the remaining issues are resolved in a fair and satisfactory manner.

Sincerely,



Dr. Bill Steinberg