

Hampstead

Hampstead is Moving Forward

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Forward

Two years after the rebirth of our town, we are starting to see significant changes. I would like to review some of the more exciting steps that we have taken as we continue to recover from the forced merger and move towards a brighter future.

Finances are better than ever

We have reduced overall tax increases from 13.5% to 4.5% to this year's 3.2% in spite of the fact that the Agglomeration portion has been increasing, as Montreal unfairly takes more and more from the demerged suburbs. This year the Agglomeration tax increase of 4.6% was more than double our local tax increase of 2.1%. Also this year we have put the entire local tax increase into the water tax and left local property taxes virtually unchanged so that residents will be encouraged to reduce water consumption and thus their tax burden.

We were the only town on the island to take the Quebec government's \$4.4 million interest-free loan and we will save \$3.2 million over the life of the loan. This has allowed us to accelerate infrastructure repairs.

Thanks to careful management, our surplus, which was mostly lost to a borough deficit, has now climbed back to almost \$1,000,000. Another measure of our financial success is the value of our homes. We have passed the Town of Mount Royal and now have the second most expensive homes after Westmount. Many of you have seen the value of your home double in the last 7 years.

Repairing our Infrastructure

It was hard not to notice the construction around town in 2007. We have resurfaced or totally rebuilt all or parts of Dufferin, Finchley, Merton, Thurlow, Stratford, Heath, Hampstead road, Cressy, Haverstock, Fleet, and Wexford. We have done sidewalk work on many of the above streets, as well as, Holly, Aldred and Belsize. This spring you can expect resurfacing on parts of Holly, Belsize, Aldred and Netherwood. There will be more work done in other areas of the town but the plans are not finalized, yet.

Almost all our sewers have been properly cleaned to reduce the chances of flooding. Work on our water mains has begun and will continue in 2008. We have also replaced many of our ancient vehicles with new ones and this program will continue.

Safety, Security and Traffic Control

Crime remains low and serious traffic accidents are rare but we must remain vigilant. I was not satisfied with the police presence in the town in 2007 and I have had several meetings with Commander Bissonette on the subject. On the positive side, I and Mayors Housefather and Stuart put enough pressure on the police department to get them to rescind their plan to close our local station 9. This was a major victory.

Our Traffic Committee has proposed several traffic calming measures and the first, the closing of the fork at Merton Crescent and Finchley, has resulted in a 12% drop in speed and traffic

volumes. A No Left turn sign (afternoon rush hours only) at Queen Mary and Ellerdale has reduced traffic by 300 cars daily. An extra right turn lane was added to Queen Mary at the Fleet intersection which has successfully reduced traffic congestion. New speed humps with a lower profile have been installed on Dufferin, Finchley, Gayton and Ferncroft. Hampstead's first raised crosswalks have been placed on Ellerdale, Queen Mary and Hampstead road, and on Cleve. The crosswalk pattern will be painted this Spring. Finally, the Finchley Circle was redesigned to increase safety. This administration considers the safety of our residents (especially children and senior citizens) to be of paramount importance.

Preserving our Architectural Heritage

We have made changes to our zoning by-laws to protect the character of the town and we are currently studying additional changes which we expect to implement within two years. Contrary to the fears of opponents of the first zoning by-law changes, housing values have not dropped but have continued to climb.

Our Recreational Facilities are Getting Better

Hampstead's new dog run in Langhorne Park is one of the finest on the island. The rest of Langhorne Park will be getting new playground equipment in 2008. Our tennis courts got new lights and a viewing patio and our pool has more shades. Other improvements are coming. We have also reduced our family season pass fees for the pool and the Combo (pool and tennis) for 2008. We have introduced day passes for tennis for Hampstead residents only (certain restrictions apply).

Community Services

Several new programs for both adults and kids were introduced. Overall enrollment was up in most of our programs and, based on user feedback, satisfaction was very high. We had a banner year in our day camp. Most of our special events saw improvements and higher attendance. In 2008, we are looking into more exciting ideas and we expect to build on past successes.

Communications

The newsletter that you are reading, our web site and eHampstead (our e-mail newsflashes) have proven to be very popular. We will be producing our newsletter quarterly this year and it will include the seasonal Recreation and Community Services brochure. I am sure you will want to stay abreast of everything happening in the town, so go to our web site and register for eHampstead. We have had and will continue to have surveys so you can have input into our thinking and decisions. Finally, I and all members of the council, welcome your phone calls and e-mails. As always, you will get a prompt response.

Sincerely,

Dr. Bill Steinberg
Mayor, Town of Hampstead