

Grass not greener at park – but it's real

Westmount decides against artificial turf

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THE GAZETTE

The city of Westmount has decided it will not install artificial turf on its soccer fields in Westmount Park.

Instead, it will spend \$1 million to reconstruct the two soccer fields in its showcase Sherbrooke St. park.

"It may prove to be right or it may prove to be wrong," Westmount Mayor Karin Marks said of the city council's decision Tuesday to forgo artificial turf.

Marks said, however, that after public consultations, months of contentious debate and online petitions against synthetic turf, "any decision that brings people together is a good one."

Some Westmount residents saw artificial turf as incongruous in the heritage park, opened in 1899 and modelled after Frederick Law Olmsted's Mount Royal Park. Others were concerned that fake turf, some forms of which are made from recycled tires, may pose risks to players' health and the environment.

Still others just wanted more playing time, Marks noted.

Come summer, more than 1,000 children and adults play soccer in Westmount Park and artificial turf has been proven to stand up better than grass.

"We had a real challenge," Marks said about balancing the competing interests. Westmount Park School and an adjacent day-care also use the fields.

Montreal, LaSalle, Kirkland, Dollard des Ormeaux and other Montreal Island municipalities have put artificial turf in their parks, at a cost of \$1 million to \$1.5 million per playing field.

Pointe Claire, Dorval and Beaconsfield are looking at fake turf as a way to meet the growing demand in their municipalities for soccer, football and rugby playing fields.

Natural grass fields cost more to maintain, and weather cuts short their season on both ends.

For those reasons, Dollard des Ormeaux Mayor Ed Janiszewski said, his municipality decided to install a second artificial turf field last summer. Though expensive at the onset, he said, it pays for itself over 15 years through reduced maintenance costs and prolonged playing seasons.