



## TURF WAR

### PARKS

**A** remnant of a time when green spaces were being established across North America in the wake of industrialization, Westmount Park (ABOVE), just west of downtown Montréal, has been a hub since 1899. But a proposal by Westmount City Council to lay artificial turf on two playing fields has some concerned the park will fall victim to our synthetic society.

"I know how precious green space is," says Patrick Barnard, a transplanted New Yorker and member of Save The Park! a group formed after council announced its

\$1.7 million plan last October. "No one understands how you can plasticize this space." (About three percent of Montréal is protected green space. The international norm for cities is eight percent.)

Save The Park! believes artificial turf poses health risks to the residents, sports teams and students at nearby Westmount Park School who use the park year-round.

"Artificial turf is made of recycled rubber pellets, which contain heavy metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs)," says Mavis Young, a health researcher and Save The Park! member. "Over time, PAHs can leach out into freshwater environments. Since much

of Westmount Park is over an old river, this is a big concern."

Studies have shown artificial turf can also generate significantly more heat than grass. But Mayor Karin Marks says the city needs something durable. "We have 1,000 kids in our soccer program and 500 kids in the school," says Marks. "You can't sustain a natural surface with this much use. An artificial surface is the best way to reach the goals we have: to maintain the fields and accommodate the children."

Since the early 1990s, parks across Canada have been installing synthetic fields, and in 2000, other municipalities in the Montréal area began following suit.

Many believe larger issues are at play. "In the end, it comes down to the fact that we are living through the threat of incredible global warming," says Alanna Dow, a Westmount Park teacher, "and we should be keeping every oxygen-producing patch of grass we have."

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