CSL seeks parking alternatives

By Joel Goldenberg, The Suburban 2007-02-21

Côte St. Luc is trying to find its residents less expensive alternatives to parking overnight on the street.

A recently instituted $35 monthly overnight parking fee has the city eyeing lots at city-owned buildings or other properties, said Mayor Anthony Housefather.

"We're asking [city public works director] David Tordjman to make a map of the lots and see where we could do it without affecting snow-clearing operations," Housefather told The Suburban after last week's public council meeting. "I'm hoping, by the next public meeting [in March], we'll be able to announce something."

Housefather said that for residents of David Lewis, an area separate from most of the rest of Côte St. Luc known as north of Hampstead, Decarie Square's lot is a possible option.

"The other option is to see whether council can find some other solution for that one area where the driveways are sloped much differently [than other areas of Côte St. Luc], and there's a lack of spaces between houses."

Councillor Dida Berku, who voted against the fee hike, said, "the only reasonable solution is to reduce the rates. We'll have to find some kind of solution."

Some 15 residents, led by Stephen Matlin, came to last week's meeting to complain about the overnight parking fee that was increased to $35 from $10, passed by a 6-2 majority of council late last year. Before the 2002 municipal mergers, the monthly parking fee was $50 a month. When the fee was reduced to $10, the number of permits issued for Côte St. Luc increased to 280 from 30.

Côte St. Luc makes exceptions for residents to park overnight on the street, which is normally prohibited, if they show they do not have sufficient space in their driveway and garage. The driveways for residents of David Lewis, Bernard Mergler and Tommy Douglas are not considered available space because they are steeper than most of those in the rest of Côte St. Luc.

The residents complained they either could not afford the fee, or their children who are still living at home cannot. Some said the increase was to boost city revenues, but Housefather said it was to discourage overnight parking on the street.

A ruckus arose after Matlin asked how often Côte St. Luc residents complained about parking on the street when the cost was $10.

"Never," said Berku.

"It was the reverse complaint," said Housefather. "I am here to defend the majority of council, and it's my job as mayor — whether I agree with them or not — to defend that decision. In this case, when we were campaigning — when I was campaigning myself— people would come up and complain about the fact that their neighbours were parking in front of their houses at night. It was a very common refrain at doors."

When members of the audience began yelling, Housefather threatened to have people removed from council if they continued.

"If you're going to yell out at the meeting, please leave, thank you very much," he said.

"These are your citizens!" Matlin said as opponents left the meeting.

Council regulars Avrom Shtern and Alex Davis supported the parking fee increase.

"We need cars, and the car culture is very much ingrained in the psyche of many Côte St. Lucers today, but I think four or five cars per household is insane," said Shtern. "It's doing a lot of damage to our environment. Just because some people come out with a knee-jerk reaction... there are other people here who have other opinions."

"I would prefer no parking [on the street] whatsoever," Davis said. "Our city is safer and nicer at night."