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Local News

Rumour that a school will be built on parkland angers T.M.R. residents

The debate over where to build a new French elementary school has been a sore point in the town for years.

Katherine Wilton • Montreal Gazette
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T.M.R. residents began circulating a petition after hearing rumours a French elementary school might be built in Ernest B. Julien Park, a popular green space used by families who live in four high-rise apartment buildings beside the Metropolitan Expressway. PHOTO BY PIERRE OBENDRAUF /Montreal Gazette

After a long, arduous search, the Town of Mount Royal says it has found a suitable location for a much-needed French elementary school.

The location of the school is a closely guarded secret, pending final confirmation from the Centre de service scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys, the former school board that operates French schools in T.M.R.

But with Mayor Peter Malouf remaining tight-lipped until a formal announcement is made, rumours abound.

Residents who live in northern T.M.R. began circulating a petition after hearing rumours that the school may be built in Ernest B. Julien Park, a popular green space used by families who live in four highrise apartment buildings beside the Metropolitan Expressway.

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Residents who oppose the proposal are also circulating a flyer, lamenting the potential loss of green space and deploring the lack of public consultation.

Jana Stewart says she walks through the park on her daily strolls and often stops to smell the roses and honeysuckles.

Stewart said she was stunned last week when a neighbour told her the park might be replaced by a new school.

“It’s the only park in our district with a playground,” Stewart said. “Kids play there all the time; there are grandparents with strollers and people reading on benches. It’s an active park.”

Other residents say it’s ironic that the town is considering digging up the park, which was named after a longtime resident who founded the town’s horticultural society.

The debate over where to build a new French elementary school has been a sore point in the town for years.

Two years ago, Pierre Arcand, the local Member of the National Assembly, caused an uproar when he suggested the school could be built on a soccer field adjacent to Dunrae Gardens, one of two English elementary schools in the community.



Académie Saint-Clément was built for 350 students, but had 600 last year. Many students are in mobile classrooms that take away schoolyard space. PHOTO BY PIERRE OBENDRAUF /Montreal Gazette

The Quebec government has put aside \$25 million for a new French primary school in T.M.R.

When talks were first held in 2018, the former Marguerite-Bourgeoys school board (now called a service centre) said its choice was to build a school on part of Dunrae’s soccer field, former T.M.R. mayor Philippe Roy told the Gazette in 2020.

But that plan was put on ice after English parents complained and the English Montreal School Board balked at handing over the land.

Francophone parents have been waiting for years for a new school to ease overcrowding at their three elementary schools.

Académie Saint-Clément was built for 350 students, but had 600 last year. Many students are in mobile classrooms.

Some residents say it makes no sense to build a school 100 metres from Highway 40, close to the future REM commuter train line and below the flight path for Trudeau airport.

“That’s one of the most polluted areas of the town,” a resident said.

Maryiam Kamali Nezhad, the neighbourhood’s local councillor, had a letter published in a community newspaper last

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In an interview with the Montreal Gazette, Malouf said he couldn't reveal the location of the new school because the service centre's lawyers hadn't signed off on the plan.

After he was elected mayor last November, Malouf put together a committee of experts who came up with a short list of suitable sites.

The locations on the short list were shared with officials from the CSSMB, who decided which location would best fit the needs of the students.

"Many of the children in the francophone elementary school system have been put into trailers. It's not great for them or the teachers and they lose schoolyard (space)," Malouf said.

"The CSSMB came up with their own conclusion based on the short list and now they're dealing with their legal experts to make sure the final choice works. We will be in a position, once they get the blessing from their internal counsel, to make a joint announcement."

Malouf refused to say whether Dunrae Garden's soccer field was included on the short list.

A spokesperson for the EMSB said the board hasn't been informed about any agreement between T.M.R. and the CSSMB.

"We would be pleased to learn if the Centre de service scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys and the town have in fact come to an agreement to find land elsewhere than Dunrae Gardens," the board said in a statement.

To speed up the process of building schools, Quebec has given school service centres the power to demand that municipalities cede public property for the "purposes of construction or expansion of a school."

Education Minister Jean-François Roberge justified the move, saying it was taking too long for schools to be built.

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