

## **CORRIGAN'S CORNER**

### **“New Westmount library site in prime location”**

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by Ed Corrigan Councillor Ward 7

On April 2, 2001, City Council voted 12 to 7 in favor of building a new Westmount Library on Wonderland Road in front of the Wonderland Mall. Both Ward 7 Councillors supported the proposed site, as did Controller Gord Hume, Chair of the Library Board, and Mayor Anne Marie DeCicco.

This issue has been contentious for many years. Until now it has been impossible to get agreement on a suitable location. The lease for the temporary library at the Church had expired and notice given that no more extensions would be granted. The City had to vacate the premises by the end of April. The Library Board had to come with a new location or potentially lose library services in Westmount

More than 30 potential sites were examined. Unfortunately when the Westmount subdivision was designed no land was allocated for a library. There were extensive discussions over putting the library in front of John Vanier School but due to local concerns over traffic and loss of green space the Catholic School Board rejected the proposal.

Westmount Library currently has over 153,300 visitors per year. Surveys' indicate that about 90 per cent of visitors drive there. It is inappropriate to impose three or four hundred thousand car visits on a residential area. This traffic would have had a detrimental impact on the residents who had no expectation that their neighborhood would become the site of an expanded 15,000 sq. ft library.

Another concern was over the loss of valuable green space. If the City were to use the parkland to build a new library there would have been a cost to the community. Soccer fields are also in short supply. Green space needs to be protected and a bad precedent avoided.

At the new library site sidewalks will be installed and a bike path built. The City has had discussions with the London Transit about extending bus service to the new location. The Library Board is prepared to run a shuttle service in the interim, if needed. Full bus service will be extended to the site as this area undergoes commercial and residential development. Bradley Avenue will also be extended and connected to Wonderland just south of the new library. The new Library will be at one of the prime access locations in the City and usage will increase. This has been the experience of the libraries which are near Masonville and White Oaks Malls.

The Mall owner at the new site has graciously agreed to allow the library to relocate in the Mall, rent free, until the new library is built. It would have been very expensive to obtain short term lease space while we were looking for another location. This new site is not perfect, but given the alternatives was the preferred option. Delaying the decision again was not in the interest of Westmount residents. Once the area develops this location is best for both the present and future needs of the growing Westmount community.