

[westmountmag.ca](https://www.westmountmag.ca)

Has the Westmount Municipal Association lost its way? - Westmount Magazine

By **Patricia Dumais**

Over twenty years ago, on June 6, 1996, former Westmount mayor Peter Trent contributed an interesting article entitled [Whence and whither the WMA?](#) to the now defunct Westmount Examiner. In it, he briefly examined the history and workings of the WMA and its mandate. Lately one passage from that article stands out in my mind, “most evolution occurred in the '70s and '80s: prior to that, it (the WMA) was kind of an extension of Council”.

I now wonder if the WMA has come around full circle, returning to its prior mandate.

The WMA held its annual general meeting on May 23 in Victoria Hall with the smallest attendance in recent history. All told, only 40 or so persons attended the meeting. If you subtract from that count the WMA board, the guest speakers, some former board members (including myself), the Derek Walker Volunteer of the Year awardee and her guests, the Mayor and a few councillors, you are left with a sprinkling of citizen-members.

The WMA held its annual general meeting on May 23 in Victoria Hall with the smallest attendance in recent history.

Where were the other WMA members?

It is unfortunate because the meeting was worth attending if mainly for Derek Walker Volunteer of the Year recipient Angela Murphy, long-time McEntyre Writing Competition chief judge, who gave an eloquent speech about volunteering, as well as a fine panel of speakers discussing *Making Westmount an Accessible Community*.

As a former Board member (2001-2017) and Secretary to the WMA (2005-2017), I have witnessed a sea change in the Association in the past decade.

In the middle part of the first decade of this century, the Association had a strong committed Board and a supportive paid membership of around 450 members. Attendance at AGMs neighbored in the 80 to 100-person range. At this year's AGM, there was no traditional membership report but if one takes membership dues for 2017 into consideration (\$354), dividing those by cost of membership (family memberships are \$15; individual at \$10) we are left with, at very most, 35 paid members!

What could be responsible for such a decline and lack of interest?

In my early years with the WMA, I recall its directors being very concerned about upholding impartiality when it came to municipal issues. So much so that when Westmount was faced with merger with Montreal and then de-merger, a unanimous Board vote sanctioned the WMA's exceptional involvement. The Association would go on to play a very important role in assisting the city to

inform and involve citizens on these issues.

‘In my early years with the WMA, I recall its directors being very concerned about upholding impartiality when it came to municipal issues.’

Unfortunately I have witnessed some of that impartiality gradually go by the wayside. Is it that some directors do not understand the true mandate of the WMA or do they have particular objectives that they wish to pursue?

And what is the true mandate of the WMA?

If you consult the WMA’s promotional flyer (printed in 2013), it states, “the Westmount Municipal Association (WMA) is a community-based organization *independent of the municipal administration*. The WMA is run by volunteers and acts as a *non-partisan* community link between citizens and City Hall”.

Also according to the flyer, one of the roles of the WMA is to “take a stand on public issues by examining all sides and advocating a course of action”.

If you look into the current Second Pool Project, the WMA has been very vocal in supporting the City. It organized a meeting, not to gather their member’s opinions about whether a second pool made sense, but rather to invite pool supporters to dream up their wish list, as if the pool was a fait accompli. This meeting only served citizens in favour of the pool and alienated everyone else. It is not the job of the WMA to take sides and divide people. And it is not the WMA’s job to be a cheerleader for city projects.

Furthermore, a needs analysis for a second pool has yet to be done. How could the WMA be so irresponsible in pre-emptively supporting a project that may not serve the best interests of the population?

‘No matter what the citizen concern... it should always be addressed... All issues should be treated in an objective, fair manner and followed up upon.’

Another role of the WMA, once again according to the flyer, is to “Assist citizens and groups who wish to bring issues to public attention”.

In the later years of my tenure, I have witnessed groups calling on the WMA for assistance only to be eventually ignored, with no follow-up to their concerns. No matter what the citizen concern, and some are more valid or serious than others, it should always be addressed, either by steering citizens to resources or, if need be, by addressing council with the concern. All issues should be treated in an objective, fair manner and followed up upon.

If it elects to serve only certain interest groups and ignore others, or worse, serve as a thinly disguised propaganda machine for City Hall, then it certainly cannot claim to be a non-partisan community link between citizens and City Hall.

In the end, whom does the WMA serve?

Sign-up to our newsletter
and get email notification
of our most recent articles

Sign up

Feature image: Andrew Burlone

Read also: [Westmount: The question of a second swimming pool](#)



Patricia Dumais is a 28-year resident of Westmount who has served on a number of community committees, including the WMA, the Association of Pedestrians and Cyclists of Westmount (APCW), the Westmount Healthy City Project and Centre Greene.
