

Westhaven sector / NDG /Montreal

The Westhaven sector is one of the four identified vulnerable sectors in Notre-Dame de Grace. Saint-Jacques and Sherbrooke Street on the East and West and West Broadway and Connaught on the North and South side bind this neighbourhood. The NDG Community Council approached various stakeholders and key actors within the community including residents, volunteers, employees and private storeowners in order to voice their concerns and visions for Westhaven.

Portrait of territory

Westhaven is home to 2,490 residents according to the 2011 Census survey conducted by Statistics Canada. The neighbourhood is one of the most vulnerable sectors in NDG. To address local concerns, the Westhaven Neighbourhood Committee has started working in collaboration with residents, community organizations and businesses to improve the quality of life in the neighbourhood. The main challenges in Westhaven can be divided into three groups:

The first group of challenges is related to the physical layout of the neighbourhood. On the one hand, there is a major physical barrier, the train tracks of the metropolitan transport agency AMT pass through the area and split the neighbourhood into two parts. On the other, there is a large traffic volume on the local streets. St-Jacques is a major road and main corridor for the trucks that enter and leave Parmalat, a large dairy products manufacturer that has located its Ingredients & Export facilities in Westhaven. The train tracks further aggravate the traffic in the neighbourhood. They are a major barrier, and also, due to the train station (Montreal-West) located in Westhaven, cause traffic problems. Near the train station, at the crossing point of Elmhurst Street and Coffee Park (Figure 1), there is a traffic barrier, which assists the safe crossing of the train tracks for both pedestrians and cars. Right next to the barrier, though, there are also traffic lights (at Elmhurst and Sherbrooke streets) and this part of the neighbourhood is often congested especially during peak hours, which raises serious safety concerns.

The intersection of Elmhurst Street and the train tracks is the main entry point in the neighbourhood from Sherbrooke and one of two routes, also the closest one, which residents can use to cross the train tracks (regardless of their mode of transportation). Many pedestrians use this route to take buses on Sherbrooke Street. Residents of Westhaven use public transit more than the average resident of the Island or of the rest of NDG: 25.3 percent of the residents of Westhaven use the STM buses versus 15 percent of the residents of NDG and 12.4 percent for the Island. In terms of train use, 4.8 percent of the residents of Westhaven use the train versus 0.3 percent for NDG and 0.6 percent for the Island of Montreal.

Another safety concern arises from the number of people residing around Coffee Park and crossing the train tracks on a daily basis: 828 people or one-third of the total population of Westhaven live in the Coffee Park residential area, just west of the train tracks. Students going to or coming from school also cross the Elmhurst Street-train tracks area. In addition, many young children play in Coffee Park. The Coffee Park residential area has a larger ratio of children than the average for Westhaven (14.5 percent for Coffee Park versus 12.9 percent for all of Westhaven), especially 5-9 year olds (7.2 percent for Coffee Park versus 5.0 percent for all of Westhaven), who tend to play more independently than younger children and may cross the streets on their own, thus raising concerns for their safety.

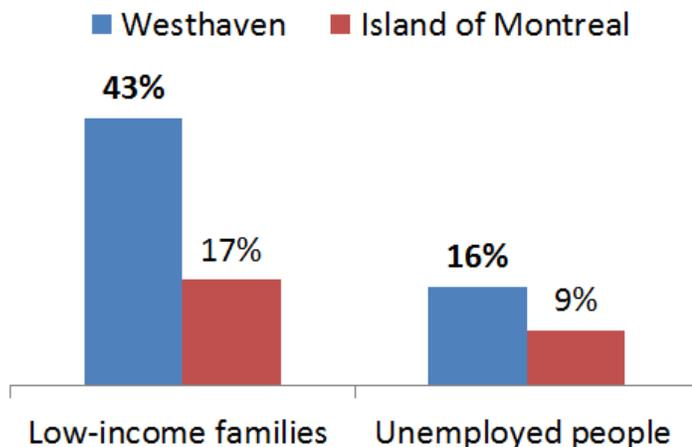
Figure 1. The Westhaven neighbourhood.

Source: Google Earth. Accessed and adapted by the author on March 7th, 2014.



The second group of challenges relates to the socio-economic profile of the residents. According to the 2006 census, the neighborhood has a significantly higher percentage of low-income and unemployed people than the average for Montreal. In Westhaven the share of low-income families is 2.5 times higher than the average for the Island of Montreal (43.0 percent versus 16.6 percent). Their concentration is even higher in the Coffee Park area – 46 percent. The share of unemployed people in Westhaven is 1.8 times higher than the average for the Island of Montreal (16.1 percent versus 8.8 percent). When it comes to family distribution, the results indicate a significantly higher share of single parents, especially female single parents, than the entire Island (24.6 percent versus 16.9 percent respectively).

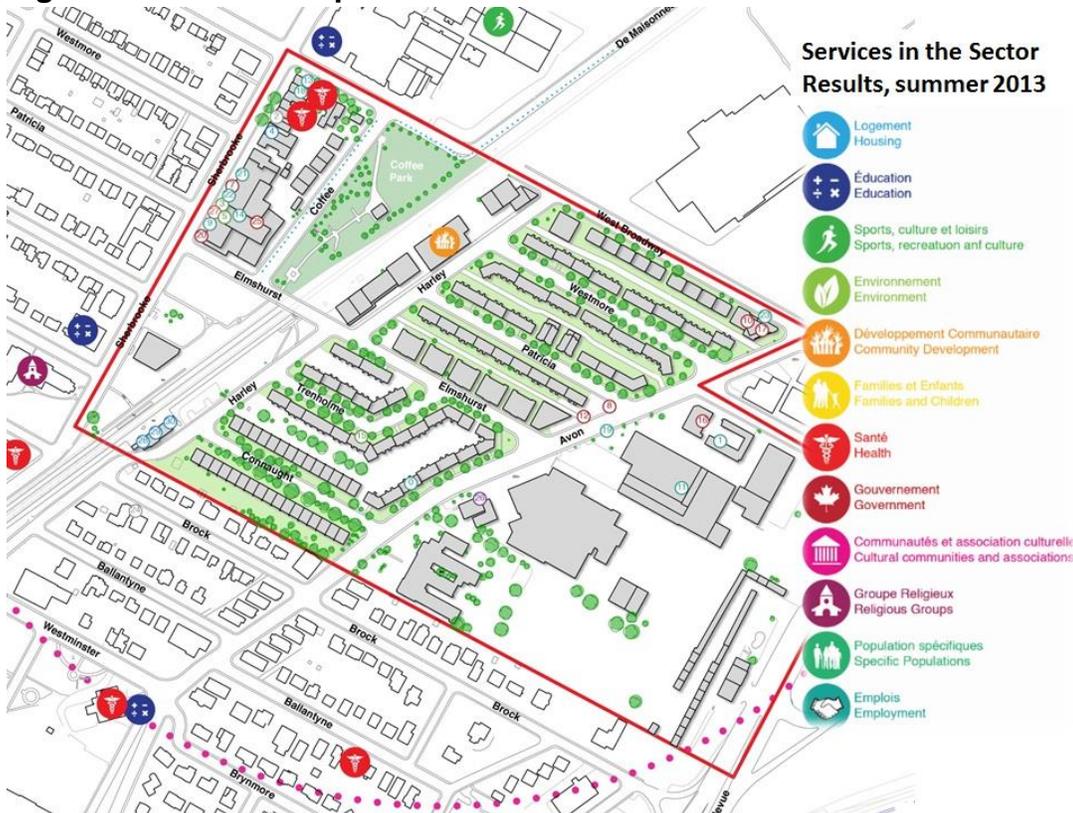
A lack of community engagement is also observed among the residents. This may be an outcome of a high number of temporary residents, such as students (due to the proximity to Concordia University Loyola campus) and immigrants. In 2006 immigrants composed 50.3 percent of the population in Westhaven which is significantly higher than the average for NDG – 38.6 percent.



The third group of challenges relates to the provision of essential services (public, social, and commercial), housing (in terms of quality, type, maintenance and rental rates), and access to parks

and recreational facilities. Figure 2 below shows a deficiency of social services for adults and seniors as well as a lack of access to grocery stores in the area. In terms of housing, the majority of the residents in Westhaven are renters (96.5 percent); only 3.5 percent of the dwellings are owner-occupied. The tenure of the rental apartment buildings is split between two main owners (one owns most of the buildings in the sector around Patricia Street and the other owns most of the buildings in the sector around Trenholme Street). The fact that there are only two rental property owners in the area allows the owners to monopolize the lease conditions and neglect building maintenance (problems declared by local residents). In Westhaven there is only one public park – Coffee Park – and only one gym – the Westhaven community centre gym – and both of them are mainly targeted to children and teenagers. There are no options available for adults and seniors when it comes to recreation and sports within the neighbourhood boundaries.

Figure 2. Services map



To sum up, Westhaven is a neighbourhood that faces several major challenges related to its physical and socio-demographic profile as well as to the services provided in the area. Community organizations are engaged with local issues, willing to work on site in collaboration with other parties (the borough, the businesses, and the residents), which seems to be a step towards the neighbourhood's improvement. The neighbourhood has its own strengths, such as proximity to downtown and public transportation, low rent rates, and a good mix of people (including young people). All of these factors present a good base on which the interested parties could build to enhance the future development of Westhaven.

Portrait Resource:

Lora Milusheva, 2014. *Collaborative Community Planning: Incorporating Community's Needs into an Action Plan. A Case Study in Westhaven, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Montreal. Supervised Research Project, McGill University, May 2014.*