

Alex Kowaluk was an MCM founder

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ADVERTISEMENT

For the past month, Alex Kowaluk spent almost every night at the bedside of his childhood friend and political crony, longtime city councillor Abe Limonchik, who's battling cancer in the Jewish General Hospital.

He took Wednesday night off, the night he was hit by a bus and killed. He was 68.

Mr. Kowaluk had been visiting a friend on Nuns' Island. One family friend said it appeared that Mr. Kowaluk ran to catch a bus, lost his sandal then his footing and slipped under the rear wheels.

In his day job, Mr. Kowaluk had worked for the city of Montreal from the 1960s until his retirement a few years ago.

He was involved in the preservation of Old Montreal during its revitalization in the 1960s, and near the end of his career held the dossier on Chinatown.

On his own time, he had a passion for conservation and heritage and worked behind the scenes with community groups in the Snowdon and N.D.G. neighbourhoods, on projects that included planning the impact of new métro stations in the west end.

In 1974, he was a founding member of the Montreal Citizens' Movement party dedicated to bringing more open and democratic government to a city hall run with a tight grip by then mayor Jean Drapeau.

The potential conflict between his paid work and extracurricular interests caused some tension.

"He basically operated in a constant state of paranoia and terror in the Drapeau years," said friend and former MCM councillor Arnold Bennett. "He kept thinking they would find out and retaliate."

They never did. Instead, Mr. Kowaluk was jokingly dubbed "Deep Throat" by his friends in the MCM, occasionally acting as whistle-blower when he found out about cost overruns or other problems in the administration.

"Alex was involved in progressive causes all his life. (He) was a guy who loved life. He played the mandolin and he took it with him to parties," said another friend, Councillor Marvin Rotrand, who represents the Snowdon district where Mr. Kowaluk lived. "His death was a very big shock."

When the MCM folded into the Montreal Island Citizens Union at the time of the one-island-one-city merger, Mr. Kowaluk worked with that party, recently winning election to the party's Côte des Neiges/Notre Dame de Grâce borough executive. He was also on the borough's urban-planning advisory committee.

"Whenever there was a developer threatening to knock down trees and put up a big building, Alex was there," Bennett said.

Mr. Kowaluk was married and divorced three times, and left an adult son, Andrei, who lives in Toronto, and a younger daughter, Amanda, who lives in Dorval.

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