

## **Montréal: standing tall**

In moments of crisis, a city's resilience and its citizens' solidarity are revealed. When times are hard, we have to work together more than ever.

Montrealers, like all Quebecers, are being called on to make major sacrifices, for the common good and for their own health. It is impressive how a large part of the population is following instructions about confinement. People are staying home. Those who can are working remotely, and commercial activity has been pared down to essential services.

These tight restrictions – which are essential – are receiving universal support.

However, the current situation presents an unprecedented economic challenge for workers, businesses and the city as a whole. The impacts are significant.

The Ville de Montréal and all of the city's strategic economic institutions are on alert and ready to act.

The Port of Montreal, which is the heart of the logistics chain and essential to the economy, is busy maintaining supply and merchandise import and export channels. Critical activities continue, and businesses that depend on the Port remain connected to the rest of the world. Teams at the Port and along the logistics chain are showing a level of commitment we can all admire.

Montréal-Trudeau Airport also remains open. Health and information control measures for passengers have been reinforced, and Canadians returning to the country are being advised of their obligation to remain in isolation for fourteen days. The marked drop in the number of departures and arrivals is having an impact on the thousands of employees who make up the airport community. But the airport is ready to support the resumption of flights as soon as that becomes possible.

Organizations that attract foreign investment are obviously seeing a major slowdown in decisions to invest. But there is a long list of projects under discussion, and we can expect trade to resume as soon as the situation allows. Every effort is being made so that once the crisis has passed, new investment will be plentiful.

This is an unprecedented challenge for SMEs. Stores, small and medium-sized enterprises and startups are facing struggles with cash flow, forcing many of them to suspend operations. Governments were quick to respond when economic activity dropped off. Despite its limited resources, the Ville de Montréal has joined its efforts with those of other levels of government, in part by postponing deadlines for property taxes and creating an emergency fund. If additional measures need to be considered, the Ville de Montréal is prepared to do so.

The situation for large businesses is not easy either. While some have most of their employees working remotely, others cannot. Unfortunately, there have been many temporary layoffs. For those who have lost their jobs, governments have initiated efforts to facilitate access to financial support programs. The decision at the beginning of the week to suspend all non-essential services for three weeks, however, will require further action.

One of Montréal's great strengths is its rich culture, events and festivals – pillars of tourism that annually attract millions of local and international visitors. All of these activities have been suspended. It is too early to tell how the situation will evolve in the coming months, but the window for decision making is closing quickly. We do know the extent to which these activities require a host of creative talent, highly dynamic non-profit organizations and specialized small businesses. The Ville de Montréal and governments will do everything in their power to help them through this difficult time.

We will definitely need to study how to support certain major corporations whose survival could be compromised by the situation. Major air carriers and hotel chains are the most obvious examples of this, but others face precarious circumstances, too. Governments are working to identify measures that will help these companies weather the crisis so they can regain their momentum as soon as the situation allows.

We know that one day a few months down the road, we will want to celebrate together again in the streets and in the downtown core and start welcoming millions of business and pleasure tourists who will fill hotels, restaurants and conference spaces.

Denying the significant challenges ahead will not help us find the best solutions to weather the crisis. This is why we all have to work to prepare for when economic activity resumes and keep our eye trained on what comes after the crisis. When the time comes, everyone will want to be part of the economic recovery with large and small projects. We will be ready.

Montréal was experiencing powerful momentum when this major upheaval forced us all to press pause. We are confident that momentum will resume in a few months' time.

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