



Letter co-signed by:

Simon Brault, president, Culture Montréal
Benoit Labonté, president, Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal
Robert Lacroix, rector, Université de Montréal
Phyllis Lambert, president, Canadian Centre for Architecture
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Mr. Jean Charest
Premier of Quebec
Honoré-Mercier Building
835 René-Lévesque Boulevard East
3rd floor
Quebec City, Quebec G1A 1B4

Mr. Premier:

We were most interested to learn that four sector-based forums will be created next spring with a view to encouraging reflection on the main issues facing Quebecers today: health and social services; education, training and employment; the family and social development; and lastly, sustainable regional economic development.

At a time when urban centres are playing a growing strategic role in the economic, cultural and social development of nations, we believe it is relevant to hold a fifth forum of importance to Quebec on the topic of metropolitan Montreal.

Metropolitan Montreal does not live in a vacuum. Quite the contrary, much like its North American counterparts, it is subject to the broad trends and influences that are shaping the organization, management and economic development of major urban centres around the world. Since the birth of Montreal, the world and the reality of cities have undergone profound changes. These changes mean that today, urban centres are playing a dominant, key role in the global economic landscape. Urbanization, be it on a global, national or provincial scale, is reaching new heights. People are increasingly gravitating to urban centres. More than 50% of Quebec's population lives in the metropolitan region. The urban regions of Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver alone account for more than 40% of Canada's population, and thanks to the industrialization of developing nations, in less than 20 years, more than half of the world's population will be living in urban centres. This growing urbanization trend has nothing to do with a renewed affection for city living. Rather, it stems from, and is driven by the concentration of economic activity. In today's knowledge economy, human resources are more important than natural resources. Therefore, logically, businesses emerge or locate within reach of the largest pool of human resources: urban centres. Their raw materials – individuals – being the same for everyone, cities resemble each other much more than, for example,

resources regions. And it is precisely because of this resemblance that competition between them is more intense.

Considering that Greater Montreal, with its 3.4 million residents – or close to half the Quebec population –, generates 80% of the province's high-tech exports and 54% of its GDP, the ripple effect on the rest of Quebec is both powerful and incontrovertible.

Greater Montreal's role as an economic engine is not limited to the economy but extends to culture and knowledge. Montreal is the largest location for training, cultural creation and dissemination, all components that contribute to Quebec's development. As for knowledge and research, suffice it to say that in addition to being home to four major universities, Greater Montreal is responsible for 75% of all university research conducted in Quebec, and its institutions produce a good number of Quebec's future scientists and professionals.

Yet it is also in Montreal where poverty and exclusion issues are often more keenly felt. For example, Montreal has the highest concentration of people aged 65 and under (12.5%) who receive social assistance. It is also here that the challenges of immigrant integration are most acutely felt.

Beyond that, the fact that in terms of *per capita* GDP metropolitan Montreal ranks an unenviable 26th out of the 26 largest cities in North America and 44th out of 65 comparable cities internationally should be of major concern to all Quebecers. While Montreal has what it takes to increase its competitiveness vis-à-vis the other major cities of the world, it is still not fully leveraging all its resources. It is time to redouble our efforts if we want our metropolis to become a major player in the Quebec, Canadian and global economy and the leading hub of innovation, productivity and competitiveness it aspires to become. If Montreal is to realize its tremendous economic potential, it must first and foremost demonstrate more coherence in its development planning and cohesion between the strategic players, as well as show proof of more creativity, an essential condition to economic growth.

For these reasons, we firmly believe that setting up a forum dedicated specifically to the issues of Greater Montreal would offer an exceptional opportunity to reflect on the means that must be implemented in order to make a solid, enduring contribution to the growth of Quebec's economic engine.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.