



Chambre de commerce
du Montréal métropolitain
Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal

Downtown Montreal: A Major Metropolitan Development Issue

Brief of the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal Concerning the
Vocation of Downtown Montreal

Commission du développement économique
et du Centre des affaires

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A brief description of the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal boasts some 7,000 members. Its primary mission is to represent the interests of the Greater Montreal business community and to play an active and responsible role in promoting the economic development of the urban agglomeration. Bolstered by its three specialized service branches (Info entreprises, the Electronic Commerce Institute and World Trade Centre Montréal) serving merchants and businesses of all sizes across Quebec, the Board of Trade is the largest private organization in Quebec dedicated to economic development.

Introduction

Strategic planning for downtown development: a critical issue for the economic development of metropolitan Montreal

The Board of Trade is pleased to respond to the invitation of the *Commission du développement économique et du Centre des affaires* to share its thoughts and outlook on the development of Montreal's Business district. Given that over the next few months the City will be working on a "strategic plan for business district development," the Board of Trade believes that holding a preliminary brainstorming session on the issues pertaining to this sector is very relevant indeed. In this vein, the Board of Trade is presenting in this brief its initial reflections, which it deems important for the future of Montreal's core, i.e. both the downtown and the business district.

That said, the Board of Trade would also like to underscore the tremendous importance it places on the need for a strategic development plan for Montreal's core. In light of the economic importance of the downtown area for the city of Montreal, its businesses, merchants and workers, this plan must identify and hasten initiatives that could make a difference to the quality and pace of economic development in this part of the city.

1. Elements to be defined prior to developing a strategic plan for business district development

Before launching into an in-depth reflection on the development of downtown Montreal, the Board of Trade believes it essential to first make an extensive and accurate diagnosis of the current situation. Precisely determining the positive and negative aspects of the downtown area will make it possible to properly identify the priorities of the City of Montreal's future strategic development plan for the business district. According to the Board of Trade, such a diagnosis should:

- Clarify the **definitions and territorial boundaries** of the following entities:
 - *Downtown*, as defined by the City of Montreal as part of the consultation by the Commission du développement économique du Centre des affaires;
 - The new *downtown* "borough" as set out in the administrative reorganization plan adopted by Montreal City Council on September 5;
 - The *Business district*, which is part of downtown Montreal, as defined by Article 89 of the City of Montreal Charter;
 - The current *Ville-Marie borough*.

Accurately defining these different territories would make clearer exchanges regarding Montreal's core. The numerous existing statistics pertaining to the downtown area could be put to good use in this exercise, with the end result being a definite, mutually agreed upon picture of the core's economic and demographic weight in the City of Montreal, in the urban agglomeration and in Quebec.

- Determine **the budget required** to ensure the smooth operation of the downtown area.

The borough's financing is currently determined by the number of residents on the territory. This is a potentially problematic method because relatively few people actually live downtown. However, many travel there to work, and the area has major infrastructures that require substantial operating budgets. The Board of Trade believes it important to clearly evaluate just how much the downtown area needs to operate and to adjust the budget rules to ensure it actually receives the funds.

- Optimize the efficiency and scope of **downtown governance**.

While it supports the new reorganization model adopted by the municipal administration, the Board of Trade would like to see the search continue for ways to broaden the scope of the interventions carried out in the downtown area. As such, even as taking into account Montreal's particularities, it might be worthwhile to model our downtown governance on the experience of other North American and European urban agglomerations, notably in terms of the mechanisms employed to mobilize both civil society and private developers around a common development vision.

2. Priority issues regarding the development of downtown Montreal

Downtown Montreal has many assets that if preserved and properly leveraged will allow it to set a solid foundation for the region's economic development. However, to this end, a number of initiatives must still be undertaken, hence the absolute need for a solid, targeted and well-thought-out action plan.

Montreal is in no position to deprive itself of such a development lever. It bears pointing out that in terms of *per capita* gross domestic product (GDP), the metropolitan region ranks last among the 26 largest urban agglomerations in North America. Everyone must put their best foot forward to address this situation. In this context, the Board of Trade would like to participate in the process initiated by the *Commission du développement économique et du centre des affaires* by advancing some of its main ideas on how to make downtown Montreal a model of excellence and success. The Board of Trade believes the following issues should figure prominently in the development of the strategic plan for business district development

- **Metropolitan reach, metropolitan responsibilities:** The economic reach of downtown Montreal extends far beyond the limits of the Ville-Marie borough, and for that matter, the City of Montreal. This is why decisions regarding downtown development must be made from a metropolitan perspective. In return, this metropolitan reach means that the entire metropolitan area should show interest in downtown development and participate in some form in new investments in this part of the City. In this regard, the strategic plan should set out the reach and importance of downtown Montreal for the metropolitan region and establish how the latter can contribute its fair share.
- **Quality location, quality development:** As Montreal's international signature, the downtown area must have a vibrant, quality physical environment. In this respect, the Board of Trade expects the strategic plan to place great importance on the concept of "quality of place." This quality can mean paying particular attention to the upkeep and enhancement of existing public spaces. Major improvements are clearly required on this front: the lack of upkeep of such public places as Dorchester Square is a case in point.

Thus, the strategic plan should include explicit guidelines on the maintenance management of public spaces downtown. Beyond that, all new downtown projects should have to meet specific quality requirements. For the Board of Trade, the International Quarter project is a perfect example of attention to quality in urban design, notably, the meticulous attention paid to the design of both the infrastructure and the street furniture.

- **Maintenance of major infrastructures:** The smooth operation of downtown Montreal is directly tied to the quality of its major infrastructures such as the metro, the main road and rail arteries leading to it and large buildings like the Palais des congrès and Place des arts. The Board of Trade expects the strategic plan to clearly identify these major infrastructures as critical for the vitality of the downtown area and describe how the funds required to maintain and update these infrastructures will be provided.
- **Improvement and densification of the urban landscape:** Montreal currently has 1.6 million square feet of space available for the construction of buildings in downtown Montreal alone. In the eyes of the Board of Trade, enhancing these spaces by putting up all types of buildings and infrastructures are opportunities to densify the area, improve the urban landscape and hold onto Montrealers and businesses that would otherwise move out of the area. When preparing the strategic plan, it would therefore be a good idea to contemplate measures that would encourage the conversion of vacant spaces.
- **Major core projects:** The Board of Trade believes that “major projects” such as the International Quarter play an important role in the development and urban planning of the downtown area, mobilizing more stakeholders around a shared vision and resulting in more coherence in their development initiatives. For this reason, the Board of Trade considers it relevant for the strategic plan to place importance on the execution of major development and urban planning projects. Indeed, several such projects are already underway – the Quartier des spectacles and Société du Havre are two examples. The strategic plan should set up the conditions required to accelerate their realization.
- **Urban plan:** The strategic plan should coincide with the City of Montreal’s urban plan currently being prepared. The economic and urban development of the downtown area requires coherent action on the part of the various players involved. This same concern for coherence should also apply at the metropolitan level and allow the strategic plan to complement the initiatives of the MMC’s urban and metropolitan economic development planning initiatives.
- **The many faces of downtown:** The vitality of downtown Montreal is unquestionably part of its appeal. And that is largely because thousands of people both live and work downtown. In this context, the Board of Trade would like to see the many faces of downtown – a place to live, a place to shop, a place to enjoy cultural activities and a place to work – identified as worth preserving and enhancing.

Giving ourselves the right tools to improve downtown development

In terms of potential, Montreal has no reason to envy the other major urban agglomerations of North America and Europe. Montreal is fortunate to have a downtown that is pulsating with activities day and night thanks to the thousands of employees who work there each day, its bustling commercial areas and

its many cultural activities. This unique character, coupled with a safe environment, makes downtown a major asset on which to base the economic development of Montreal and the entire metropolitan region.

However, the Board of Trade is convinced that in order to achieve this goal, the downtown area must have specific development tools. And in this regard, the City of Montreal can play a fundamental leadership role by preparing a strategic plan for business district development. In this context, the Board of Trade would like to emphasize its interest, beyond this preliminary consultation, in actively contributing to the reflection and planning process regarding downtown development.