

Action Plan

To Maintain the Vitality of Downtown Montréal in the Coming Months

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June 3, 2020

Foreword

On May 21, 2020, Montréal Mayor Valérie Plante set up an advisory committee to reflect on Montréal's recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, and this committee of leaders from the metropolitan community has begun its work.

The mayor asked us to examine the particular situation of the commercial base in downtown Montréal. This request no doubt arose from our repeated expressions of concern in recent weeks about the great vulnerability of downtown businesses and the proposed solutions of the Quartier des Spectacles Partnership (PQDS) to maintain cultural facilities and activities around the Quartier des Spectacles.

We must expect low customer and tourist traffic in this area for several months due to the general cessation of activities, even as public authorities authorize the gradual reopening of businesses. It will take time for downtown Montréal to be refilled once more by the 310,000 workers in its towers and by its many students and millions of tourists.

After reviewing the situation and holding multiple consultations with the business sector, we have put forward eight actions that we believe are absolutely necessary to avoid a collapse of the downtown commercial base. A collapse would be devastating not only for all these business owners but also for Montréal's vitality and its medium- and long-term growth.

With this plan, we believe that many establishments will be able to stay open. We also believe that a lack of swift action will make it too difficult to successfully reverse the situation. We are therefore calling for immediate action by governments and municipal authorities.

Overall, this action plan should be understood as one of the tools stemming from our work. In collaboration with multiple front-line organizations, the PQDS has created a preliminary program to help enliven the area and attract optimal visitor numbers while respecting the health rules in effect during the pandemic.

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Eight actions to ensure the vitality of downtown Montréal's commercial base

The COVID-19 crisis created an almost immediate economic crisis in Quebec and around the world. All of the territory's economic sectors were hit, and a significant portion of the population was forced into unemployment.

The gradual reopening of the economy is good news, as long as it is done in an orderly fashion. In particular, merchants and businesses in the non-essential goods and services economy are gradually seeing signs of hope. Even though sales volumes will remain weak for some time, this gradual recovery will give these sectors some breathing room.

However, the situation for downtown Montréal is quite different. Businesses in this area have had to get through an additional three weeks of closure, for a total of 11 weeks of interrupted revenue. Downtown shopping centres have also been hard hit since, unlike other shopping centres in Quebec, their reopening date has not yet been announced. Beyond the issue of reopening, Montréal's downtown area is at risk because its vitality depends largely on traffic generated by its 310,000 workers, 11 million tourists and 100,000 students who used to eat and shop in the area but who will not return for many months. The spectre of bankruptcies looms, which would create pockets of inactivity in the landscape and make the area unattractive for a long time to come.

Montréal's downtown core is the international showcase of the city and, by extension, Quebec as a whole. Its weight makes it a true driving force for the province's economy. This is why this situation, which threatens the entire commercial fabric of downtown, is very worrying and must be urgently addressed by governments. This report proposes an action plan to alleviate the situation and ensure that Montréal's commercial downtown area does not collapse and instead will be in a position to aid in the post-crisis recovery.

1. Downtown Montréal: A strategic territory for Quebec

Montréal has long defined itself as a place of trade and travel. From its founding, Montréal quickly became one of the continent's gateways thanks to its ocean port, which opened markets around the Great Lakes, in the West and in the Far North to ships coming from Europe and vice versa.

Today, Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau Airport handles 84% of international passenger traffic in eastern Canada,¹ and the Port of Montreal remains a hub for world trade. The downtown area above all has remained a place of trade and travel with an international profile.

It has the offices of major multinational corporations and 65 international organizations, including the headquarters of one of the UN's 17 specialized agencies, the International Civil Aviation Organization. A very high percentage of local businesses and institutions in the downtown area are active internationally and heavily contribute to Greater Montréal and Quebec's influence and appeal. Downtown Montréal is also a showcase for Quebec in the world and for the world in Quebec.

A job concentration that multiplies the area's daily population by six

Downtown Montréal, or roughly the area between Papineau and Atwater and between Sherbrooke and the river, is a dense sector teeming with activity where people work, study, and play and where a certain resident population continues to live. What distinguishes downtown Montréal from the vast majority of other cities in North America is its diversity of sectors and the way these sectors are intertwined.

While other cities often have districts reserved almost exclusively for specific activities, such as finance, Montréal mingles everything together in an area that is barely 9 km².

¹ Eastern Canada's airports include the international airports of Montréal, Halifax, Quebec City and Ottawa.

Major business addresses such as Place Ville Marie or the other skyscrapers on McGill College or René-Lévesque are surrounded by major universities, while places of worship find themselves next to entertainment and cultural venues, and department stores stand close to community service centres. Above all, downtown and its neighbourhoods are inhabited by a population of 90,000 people with an equally diverse profile of students, recent immigrants, young professionals and a growing number of families.²

The diversity of these sectors makes the territory lively and vibrant, where people mill about at all hours of the day and night. Outdoor events such as major festivals show off our city's celebratory colours, especially since downtown Montréal is among the safest city centres in the world.

Paul Romer, winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, has shown that the intense interaction that is characteristic of cities is extremely productive. This is especially true in downtown Montréal, since its mix of activities in a limited area generates a high degree of interaction and synergy. Before the stay-at-home order, over 536,000 incoming trips were made to the downtown area every day.³ A large portion of this traffic was from workers (59.1%) and students (14.4%).

A vibrancy that usually relies on millions of tourists and students

The downtown area is home to a concentration of the main offices and headquarters of major local companies, such as the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, Air Canada, National Bank, CAE, CGI, CN, Cogeco, Hydro-Québec, Desjardins, Pomerleau, Power Corporation of Canada, Quebecor, SNC-Lavalin, Transat, and WSP (to name just a few), or the head offices of international companies such as IBM or Rio Tinto. This considerably adds to the economic weight of the territory not only because the area is home to major head offices, but also because these companies promote the growth of local companies in the sectors of technology, artificial intelligence, creative industries and professional services.

Added to these workers are over 100,000 post-secondary students who attend school at UQAM, McGill University, Concordia University, ÉTS, Cégep du Vieux-Montréal and Dawson College, and many training and research centres, starting with the CHUM, Quebec's largest university hospital centre.

The downtown area is also Montréal's historic core, which means that Montréal's 11 million annual tourists either stay in or at least visit this area. These tourists are attracted by the history of this neighbourhood and by its high concentration of hotels of all categories, four major museums, the Bell Centre (which holds large-scale shows), dozens of other artistic venues such as art galleries and state-of-the-art museums, a number of performance halls and, last but not least, major and niche events held year-round.

These visitors include hundreds of thousands of business tourists who mainly stay around the Palais des congrès and the Quartier international and who hold their conventions in Montréal because of the quality of the downtown experience. The Palais des congrès hosted over 353 events in 2019, attracting more than 915,000 people to the city and generating an estimated \$214.5 million in tourism revenue,⁴ and 2020 started out looking very promising.

Businesses that meet unique demand in Quebec

It is important to stress that the personality of the downtown area is strongly influenced by the original and diverse businesses found throughout almost the entire territory. For example, this area is home to the Eaton Centre, the busiest shopping mall in Quebec. Retail businesses, cafés, bars and restaurants on the street or in Montréal's underground city, as well as indoor food halls such as the Time Out Market, Le Cathcart and Le Central, are often trend setters in the business and food-services sector in Quebec and Canada.

² Ville de Montréal, *Profil sociodémographique de l'agglomération de Montréal 2016*, downtown territory, according to the breakdown defined by the Quebec government's Order in Council 1229-2005.

³ 2018 Origin-Destination Survey. These 536,000 trips represent inbound trips to the downtown core by residents of the Montréal metropolitan region during an average week day (24 hours).

⁴ Palais des Congrès, Annual Report 2018-2019.

Finally, it is important to stress the role of the downtown area as a driver of economic activity for all of Quebec. Downtown Montréal accounts for 26.7% of jobs in the Montréal agglomeration and 14.7% of businesses, whereas the population of downtown Montréal represents only 4.6% of the population.⁵

Just before the pandemic hit, downtown commercial and office space had an enviable occupancy rate. As a clear sign of this vitality, the vacancy rate for office space in the first quarter of 2020 was 7.6% in downtown Montréal and 6.3% for the central business district. Three years earlier, these rates were 11.5% and 9.8%, respectively.

The strength of Montréal's downtown core does not detract from Quebec's other downtown areas. On the contrary, the development of downtown Montréal raises other territories up. Large companies in this area award contracts and finance projects throughout eastern Canada, and tourists attracted to Old Montréal end up visiting adjacent neighbourhoods along with Quebec City and regional tourist destinations. Overall, the vitality of downtown Montréal benefits all of Quebec and eastern Canada.

2. Downtown Montréal: An economic hub hit hard by the crisis

Merchants across Quebec have been heavily affected by the closure of non-essential businesses since March 16. But this situation has been even harder for the Greater Montréal area, as businesses in the Montréal metropolitan community (CMM) had to wait another three weeks before reopening, meaning they will have had little to no income for 11 weeks.

Despite the restarting of non-essential business activities on May 25, not every business is expected to make it through the crisis given the pressure on liquidity and rising debt levels. Retail businesses, restaurants and bars in the downtown area have become particularly weakened by the crisis. Downtown shopping centres are also being hit hard and, unlike those in the rest of Quebec, their reopening date in Greater Montréal has not yet been announced.

Lack of workers and students

In addition to suffering the effects of the prolonged closure of non-essential businesses, merchants in downtown Montréal have been debilitated by decreased employee numbers at large private, institutional and public employers in this sector. For health reasons, these employers decided to have most employees work from home during the summer and most likely beyond, or until the contagion risks are controlled.

Many of these large employers have already announced that employees will continue to work remotely until the fall, and some even until January 2021. During these months, employers estimate that a maximum of 20% of their employees will commute to their downtown offices. Some predict much lower staff levels, particularly in business towers, where employees must access their offices by elevator. This will affect all businesses and restaurants that depend on the daily influx of 310,000 workers to the area.

CEGEPs and universities have announced that most courses will be given online until January 2021. However, the Quebec government has asked educational institutions to get ready to receive at least 30% of students on campus this fall. This means that up to 70% of students will not be coming downtown. We must also add the impact from the lack of international students and students from the rest of Quebec who will not be moving into housing and residences in and around the downtown area.

Lack of international and local tourists

Montréal is the main region visited by international tourists to Quebec. However, when it comes to tourism, we have to assume that there will be no international visitors to Montréal between now and early fall and that a solid recovery in the tourism sector will not come until much later.

⁵ Statistics Canada, 2016 Census and 2018 Business Register.

While non-essential travel between Canada and the U.S. will be banned until at least June 21, a number of airlines have indicated that they will continue to suspend international flights well into the summer. There is also no sign of recovery in the cruise ship industry for the near future, as the summer season for international cruises was cancelled after Transport Canada announced that ships carrying over 100 passengers will be prohibited in Canadian waters until October 31. Business travel, which is an important part of the city's tourism activity, will also be suspended during this period, and a solid recovery in this type of travel is unlikely before summer 2021.

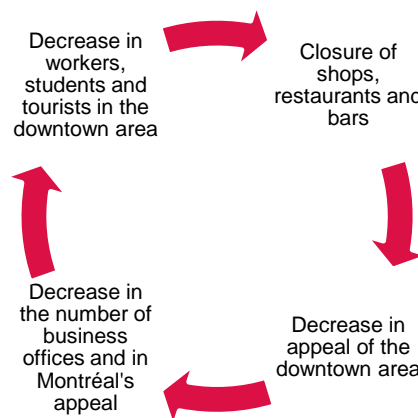
Tourism spending—which was \$4.86 billion for Greater Montréal in 2019—must therefore be added to the shortfall for the entire crisis period as well as for the period of uncertainty that will follow.

An alarming scenario that must be avoided

All of these factors mean devastating declines for downtown traffic, which in turn will have an impact on the survival of businesses in the area. Given that its major centres of attraction will be less busy, the economy of the entire metropolitan region is likely to suffer.

The strength of downtown Montréal lies in the diversity and juxtaposition of its different activity sectors, many of which are directly affected by the current public health restrictions. Restaurants as well as event, entertainment and arts venues will be among the last centres to resume their activities. According to Altus Group, 60% to 65% of spending in downtown stores is done by tourists and office-tower workers. In many cases, lost earnings represent the difference between a business's survival and closure, especially when the period is months- rather than weeks-long. The longer the forced shutdown and slowdown last, the more the downtown area is likely to become so insecure that it will take even longer and more work to get back to its previous economic standing.

Downtown Montréal's potential cycle of devitalization



The spirit and character of downtown is strongly linked to its restaurants, bars, theatres, museums and other attractions. But without workers, students and tourists, many of these shops, stores and venues will be driven to bankruptcy. The appeal of downtown will diminish, which in turn will discourage businesses and organizations from potentially moving there. This will further devitalize the area and create a downward spiral.

The current situation is serious: without urgent measures, many businesses will most likely not make it through the summer due to a lack of liquidity. The situation in the medium term is just as worrisome, as increased work-at-home measures put in place by companies whose employees used to fill downtown offices could lead to a sustained decrease in business traffic. The current crisis therefore poses an immediate but also structural risk to the vitality of downtown Montréal.

Additional risk factors

The “devitalization scenario” in downtown Montréal created by the pandemic has a particular form, as businesses that want to set up shop there face higher rents, which impacts the amount of payable property taxes. These significant costs to operate downtown mean that merchants in the area are harder hit than those on other commercial arteries in the city or in the downtown areas of other municipalities.

Some of the major attractions of downtown also have pressures that sectors outside the downtown area either do not experience or experience to a lesser extent. This is the case for cultural venues in Montréal, which receive less public support than those in other regions. In fact, Montréal theatres have a hard time qualifying for some grant programs and do not receive the support for community venues that their regional competitors qualify for.

3. Three proposals to save downtown Montréal

In response to the crisis, the Ville de Montréal and its boroughs have quickly implemented measures to help businesses. The due date for the second installment of municipal taxes has been extended. In collaboration with PME MTL, the Ville has enhanced the Emergency Assistance to Small and Medium-Sized Businesses program that the Quebec government set up to support eligible businesses in need of liquidity of less than \$50,000.

PME MTL also initiated an automatic six-month moratorium on the capital and interest for loans to the private and social economy enterprises that it subsidizes. The \$3-million business reinforcement fund will provide grants of up to \$10,000 to support business owners. More targeted measures are also being deployed, such as the urban delivery service coordinated by Montréal’s economic development corporations (SDC).

In mid-May, the Ville de Montréal unveiled its summer urban development plan to make the summer season as enjoyable as possible for residents. The plan allows merchants to occupy more public space, and permits at a lower cost can be issued quickly. This is a step in the right direction. However, the particular situation of the downtown area requires a specific action plan. If we manage to preserve the majority of the commercial base, the end of the crisis will be much less painful, and all of Greater Montréal and Quebec will benefit from a city with a booming downtown.

We salute the efforts of the Ville de Montréal and the governments of Quebec and Canada for their agility and speed in implementing business assistance programs. Given the Ville’s limited budget capacity and the strategic importance of the sector, we propose that the governments of Quebec and Canada contribute to a plan to save downtown Montréal. We are therefore making three proposals that can be broken down into eight concrete actions.

Reduce operating costs for downtown business owners

The targeted and short-term assistance measures proposed by the municipal authorities in each borough were necessary to provide solutions adapted to each situation. However, local measures will not be enough for downtown Montréal. The magnitude of this task will absolutely require specific actions from other levels of government.

One of the obvious avenues of action will be to lower costs for businesses, with rent being the most obvious burden to alleviate. The first step is therefore to continue the existing Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) program set up jointly by the governments of Canada and Quebec.

This program should provide a lifeline for businesses hit hard by the crisis. However, the program has been very difficult to calibrate, as businesses have run into technical issues when applying and property owners find it cumbersome to manage.

This mechanism needs to be adapted so that the relief is applied as soon as a request is submitted by a business that rents space on a street, in a high-rise building or in the underground city and that was operating as of March 16. The income loss threshold should also be lowered. The program must apply for at least six months (up to and including September), or even longer depending on how long the crisis lasts for downtown merchants.

Action 1: Modify the implementation of the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) program so that it applies as soon as a request is submitted by any eligible downtown business tenant, without requiring a decision from the property owner, for a minimum of six months, or from April to September inclusively.

- **Lower the eligibility criteria for lost revenue to ensure that all business owners in need can access this aid, even after businesses can reopen.**

This action is absolutely necessary for the survival of businesses in downtown Montréal and falls under the authority of the Government of Quebec. We understand that the federal government is prepared to provide the required funds to cover its share of the program costs. Furthermore, we invite the government to consider extending this measure to all of Quebec and to other downtown cores that are also vulnerable. We also want to stress the importance of implementing this action right away.

Increase financial assistance to downtown business owners

The different levels of government have provided significant funding to help businesses of all sizes get through the crisis. Once again, the government's ability to listen and react must be stressed, as it has continued to adjust available assistance to help as many businesses as possible.

The expansion of the eligibility criteria for the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) has been well received by the business community. This program provides eligible businesses with up to \$40,000 to pay for their operating costs during the crisis period, and repayment of the balance of the loan by December 31, 2022 will result in a 25% loan forgiveness of up to \$10,000.

Downtown businesses are in a special situation and will need additional assistance, especially since many of them cannot take on more debt. We propose building on this existing program, which has proven to be worthwhile, by increasing both the loan guarantee and the proportion that can be converted into a grant.

Action 2: Adapt the CEBA for Montréal's downtown businesses:

- **Increase the amount of guaranteed loans for downtown businesses from \$40,000 to \$60,000.**
- **Increase the loan forgiveness amount from \$10,000 to \$30,000 if the loan is repaid within the established timeframe.**

Again, we must act very quickly given that business owners only have until July 2, 2020 to pay the second installment of their property taxes. As the crisis is having a major impact on the revenues of the Ville de Montréal, which is not allowed to run a deficit, the Ville can neither lower taxes nor extend the due date again. We are asking the Quebec government to develop a subsidy program to help businesses in downtown Montréal. The government could also extend this measure to other areas that have been particularly affected.

Boost visitor numbers in the downtown area to optimal levels

If we want a chance to preserve the majority of the commercial fabric of the downtown core, substantial efforts must be made to increase visitor traffic to the area. The goal is to achieve optimal numbers while allowing visitors and residents to respect physical distancing guidelines. The initiatives deployed in recent

weeks are excellent foundations to build on while focusing on urban planning, public space regulations, and support for community organizations.

To start, a strategy must be adopted to increase traffic to businesses in the area while respecting health regulations, relaxing some business regulations, and speeding up the permit approval process to make it easier for public spaces to be used by businesses and visitors.

The Borough of Ville-Marie has already taken action, for example, by proposing its temporary COVID-19 business recovery support program. This plan will suspend fees for seasonal public property occupancy permits and fees for sidewalk café permits for summer 2020. Sidewalk cafés can also occupy up to 50% more space on the street.

We must do more and draw inspiration from the recovery measures recommended by multiple European cities. We also ask that the Ville de Montréal facilitate the development of large terraces and pop-up markets in public spaces, in compliance with health regulations, and exempt businesses from paying fees to occupy these spaces. To make this measure as effective as possible, alcoholic beverages should also be permitted in pedestrian-only public spaces and the same type of regulations as for parks should be adopted. These combined measures will ensure that Montrealers and visitors alike can enjoy attractive commercial arteries while respecting physical distancing.

Action 3: Deploy a strategy for optimal visitor numbers to safely visit downtown businesses by relaxing regulations and speeding up the permit approval processes to make it easier for businesses and visitors to use public spaces.

- ***Authorize the development of large terraces and pop-up markets in public spaces, in compliance with health regulations, and exempt businesses from paying fees to occupy these spaces.***
- ***Provide hygiene facilities and stations so that downtown visitors can comply with public health guidelines.***
- ***Allow alcoholic beverages in pedestrian-only public spaces and have the same type of regulations as for parks.***

Given that the downtown area's iconic summer events—such as festivals, sports and arts events—will be postponed or cancelled, we recommend strong action to change the perception of the situation in downtown. One way to do this is to create a permanent pedestrian-only, central east-west axis that is also intersected by pedestrian-only spaces.

During this vulnerable period for the downtown core, we ask that Sainte-Catherine become a pedestrian avenue from Atwater to Papineau seven days a week. We are also asking for a pedestrian-only north-south link between Old Montréal to Sainte-Catherine while taking care to preserve car and delivery truck traffic. A few arteries on the north-south axis for one block on either side of this area could also be made pedestrian-only, as long as traffic in the area can be kept flowing.

Creating pedestrian avenues and installing the appropriate street furniture is the only way to let people enjoy these spaces while respecting health regulations.

Action 4: Create pedestrian-only public spaces using urban design and furniture to attract residents and visitors to the downtown area.

- ***Make Sainte-Catherine from Atwater to Papineau a pedestrian avenue for the entire summer period while maintaining access to indoor parking lots where unavoidable and maintaining access for delivery services during off-peak hours.***
- ***Make other arteries on the north-south axis pedestrian-only, particularly to connect Old Montréal to Sainte-Catherine, while maintaining the flow of car and delivery truck traffic.***

We must devise a way to attract optimal visitor numbers to the area without creating large gatherings. We propose organizing urban programming that recalls the distinctive character of the area while encouraging continuous movement so that Montrealers and visitors alike can discover the downtown area and its businesses in an enjoyable and safe way.

Several options have emerged from the collaboration between organizations and businesses, residents, and municipal authorities. These small- to medium-scale initiatives only require moderate budgets, thanks in particular to the often voluntary contributions of the people involved.

With examples ranging from parklets in front of businesses to pop-up spaces such as the Station F-MR or those created by La Pépinière, citizen participation projects, or even green spaces co-developed by boroughs and citizens, it is clear that Montrealers can develop innovative initiatives to make downtown come alive.

The Ville and governments must support this vitalization effort and give an organization the responsibility for planning and overseeing this program. We propose that the Quartier des Spectacles Partnership (PQDS) be given this role. The PQDS has extensive experience organizing activities in public spaces and could use its existing facilities to enhance the downtown area. The PQDS has already started a vast consultation and mobilization effort in this area and could deliver this program over the next few weeks.

It could carry out this project in collaboration with Montréal's SDC and could quickly enlist the help of artists and businesses in the area, with whom it already has close ties. It should be granted a substantial budget to ensure that these activities reflect this sector's distinctive character. The PQDS must also work with cultural institutions in the sector to help them implement activities through thematic routes that will attract a variety of audiences. These routes or paths could be enhanced with ground markings and signage, fixed installations, art work exhibitions, and special podcasts describing these features. The artists and craftspeople behind these creations have stressed that these installations are excellent sources of discovery for small numbers of people, i.e. families or individuals.

In collaboration with property owners, the PQDS can also help plan pop-up venues in private spaces, vacant lots, and storefront windows. Thanks to their creativity, community stakeholders and property owners can continue to build Montréal's image, window by window and street by street, as we wait for the city's usual liveliness to return. Specific measures will also be deployed to enhance the business offerings in Montréal's underground city.

Action 5: Ask the PQDS to oversee activities in the entire downtown area and provide it with a substantial budget for programming that will reinforce its distinctive character, particularly along Sainte-Catherine and the pedestrian-only arteries.

- ***The PQDS will steer this project in collaboration with the business development corporations in the territory.***
- ***The PQDS will also enlist the help of all cultural institutions in the area to help implement these initiatives through themed routes that connect to different poles of creativity.***
- ***These routes or paths could be enhanced with ground markings and signage, fixed installations, art work exhibitions, and special podcasts describing these features.***
- ***In collaboration with property owners, the PQDS can also help plan pop-up venues in private spaces, vacant lots and storefront windows.***
- ***The budget for this program must come mainly from the governments of Canada and Quebec. The role of the city will be mainly to help the PQDS and its partners implement the project in compliance with health regulations.***

This approach must respect the demands of business owners, who want to reopen in conditions that facilitate access to their commercial areas and accommodate all clients, whether they decide to get there by active transportation, public transit or car.

While we are strongly behind public transit, it should be noted that in the immediate term, a significant number of people will be reluctant to take the bus or metro to get downtown with their families given the challenges of meeting physical distancing guidelines on public transit.

If we want to attract residents from the island and the CMM and all Quebeckers, we must expect and facilitate all types of travel, which must include actions for both car and bicycle parking.

Action 6: Provide free access to street parking during the summer, on weekends and in weekday evenings.

- **Invite property owners to participate in a plan to provide free access to private indoor parking with proof of purchase at a downtown business.**

Action 7: Develop four large bicycle parking areas next to the downtown core to encourage active transportation while respecting the pedestrian-only nature of pop-up venues.

To attract Montrealers and visitors from the suburbs and regions, we must get them interested in downtown activities and ensure that measures are in place to let them get around safely. The business owners we contacted have stressed the importance of implementing a communications strategy that will get people interested in what is going on downtown. The messaging and focus must be on the city's assets, which have remained firmly in place. The downtown rescue plan must rally people around a strong and distinctive slogan and brand image.

Action 8: Develop a communications campaign to get Montrealers, residents of the metropolitan region, and all Quebeckers interested in and curious about visiting the businesses and public spaces set up downtown.

- **Rally people around a strong and distinctive slogan and brand image.**

Of course, this strategy does not mean finding some magic slogan; it means using what the city has to offer while respecting physical distancing.

4. We must act now

The economic crisis caused by the pandemic stands out from other economic crises because of the extreme speed with which it struck. Overnight, supply and demand collapsed simultaneously. Fortunately, governments responded almost immediately. The federal government, with the support of the Bank of Canada, the Government of Quebec and the Ville de Montréal, deployed ambitious measures to avoid the worst.

Downtown Montréal must be rescued with the same sense of urgency. Otherwise, the devitalization cycle will accelerate in a downward spiral. The consequences for Montréal, Quebec and Canada would be heavy, and the energy to fix the situation would be considerably greater than the effort required today.

We are therefore asking that our governments (Borough of Ville-Marie, Ville de Montréal, Government of Quebec and Government of Canada) work right now to implement the actions we have proposed in a coordinated manner. We must directly support business owners, but they need more: they need enough customers and clients to survive.

A substantial budget must be allocated to the PQDS to launch activities downtown from June to September with the help of the SDC, and we must enlist the help of all downtown cultural institutions. The Ville and our governments must immediately adjust the different regulations that could hinder these efforts. The following actions in particular, although not exclusively, must be taken:

- Issue authorizations to make the identified streets pedestrian-only.

- Make occupancy of public spaces for sidewalk cafés and sales activities free for businesses that have a space downtown.
- Immediately allow restaurants and bars in the area to sell and deliver alcohol without food.⁶
- Allow take-out and delivery of wine, beer and spirits from licensed bars and restaurants.
- Temporarily authorize the sale of alcoholic beverages on a temporary sidewalk terrace or a closed site without the need for the business to submit an application or pay fees.
- Increase flexibility in the application of the *Regulation respecting lay-out standards for establishments* under the *Act respecting liquor permits* to allow the consumption and sale of alcoholic beverages outside the boundary set out in the granted liquor licence in order to comply with social distancing standards.
- Temporarily authorize changes in capacity, such as on a terrace, without the license holder having to make a request and without charging additional fees.

We are calling on the Government of Quebec to quickly amend the conditions to apply the rental assistance program so that it is accessible to all downtown business tenants who need it, and we are calling on the Government of Canada to facilitate this change. There is also a need to increase the generosity of the CEBA to increase the loan and loan forgiveness amounts.

The actions outlined in this plan apply specifically to Montréal's downtown area, and they are justified given the particular nature of this territory and the disproportionate impact that it has experienced from the crisis over a longer period. Some of the proposed measures could be extended to other downtown areas in Quebec and Canada or to other particularly affected areas, but this must not slow down the process for downtown Montréal.

Our current health crisis will inevitably come to an end. It is up to us to make sure that as much of downtown Montréal's commercial base survives and that it can support our economy's post-pandemic recovery.

⁶ *This measure is already included in An Act to modernize the legal regime applicable to liquor permits and to amend various other legislative provisions with regard to alcoholic beverages adopted in 2018 but that is not in force.*