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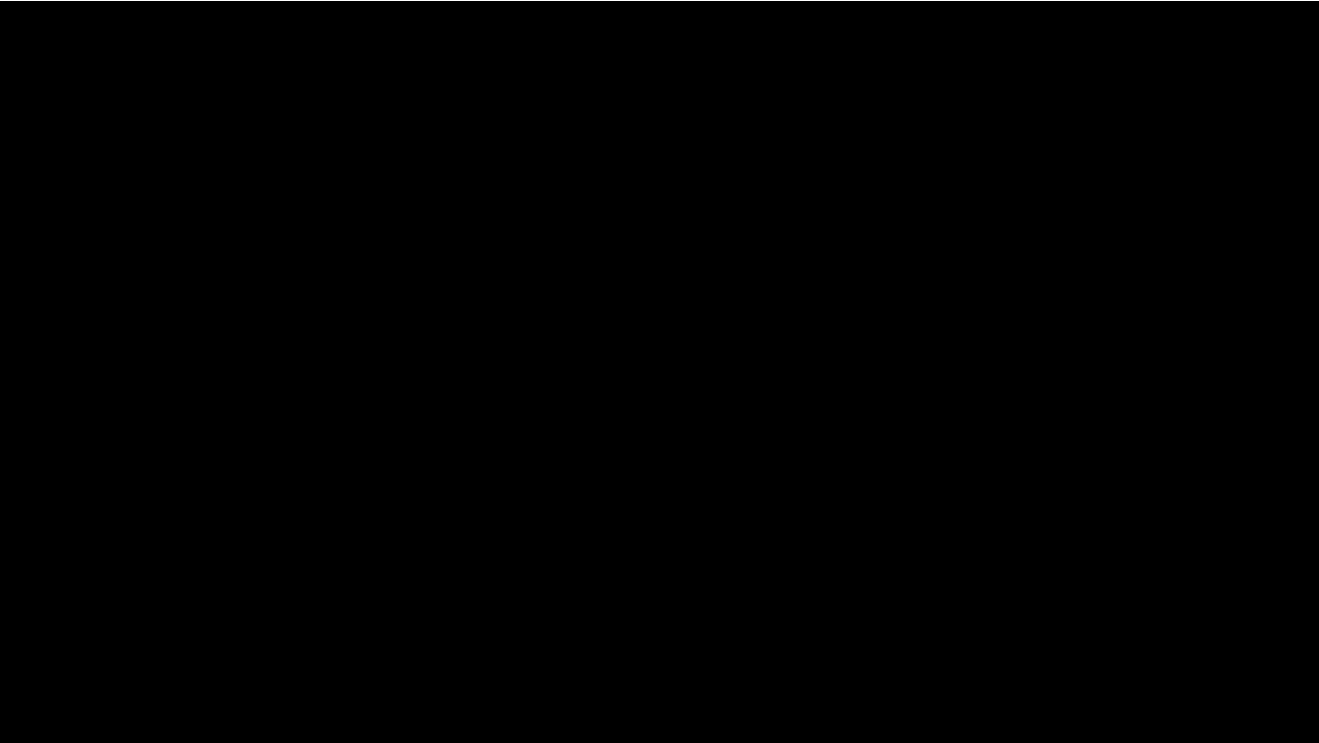
It’s difficult to shake the impression that Montreal is being engulfed by condo development, and that’s because there’s some truth to it. While some may view it as a sign of prosperity, it also raises concerns about the city’s urban development, perhaps because Montreal offers a few examples of neighbourhoods that thrive without new buildings.

Somewhat quietly, Villeray has turned into one of Montreal’s most vibrant and viable neighbourhoods. The Jean-Talon Market and the roomy two- and three-storey housing attracts young families, and inexpensive commercial spaces have invited a slew of new businesses, a lot of them fashion-oriented. Notably, many of the business owners also live in or near Villeray.

“It doesn’t make sense for everyone to live in one neighbourhood, work in another, and shop in a third,” said Dr. Pierre Gauthier, a Concordia professor in the Department of Geography, Planning and Environment. “We have to think of neighbourhoods as a whole, and develop them that way. We have to make sure small businesses can stick around if they grow.”

He recommends looking at neighbourhoods holistically, and to assess each new project based on an area’s social fabric and its unique features — things like a major thoroughway that cuts across the core, or a public market that attracts many visitors.

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“Individual projects don’t build a city,” Gauthier said. “It takes a global vision. What connects these projects is the shared, collective space of the city, and what guarantees their success is a balanced diversity.”

Condos, Condos Everywhere

In March 2014, a team including Dr. Ted Rutland, also a Concordia professor in the Department

of Geography, Planning and Environment, published a report on condo conversion in Petite-Patrie, a neighborhood close to Villeray, which noted a few phenomena that are limiting options for tenants.

A great many Petite-Patrie apartments have been converted to condos over the last 14 years. In 1991, for example, 93 per cent of the properties on St-André St. contained rental apartments. By 2013, that number was down to 35 per cent. (*See infographic.*)

What's also worrisome is that it's relatively difficult to know just what happens to tenants who are illegally shooed away.



“One way is to kick out a tenant to say you want to enlarge an apartment or shrink it,” Rutland explains. “But once the tenant is gone, landlords won’t actually shrink or enlarge the apartment, and there is no follow-up. In some cases, tenants prove a landlord has used this strategy many

times before, and the Régie du logement will say the past is not a prediction of the future.”

Despite the city of Montreal’s moratorium on condo conversions in the early 1980s, a loophole has allowed a new condo category to emerge. Usually, when we think of condos, we think of a “divided” co-ownership: this means one building, several units, and several owners each paying their own property taxes on their respective units.

What Rutland and his colleagues discovered was that in Petite-Patrie, more than half of the condo conversions since 1991 were “undivided” co-ownerships. Traditionally, undivided co-ownership has provided a way for people to own a part or share of an overall building. Since 1994, however, it has become possible for these shares to be linked to particular housing units within the building. The units of the building can then be bought, sold, and lived in very much like a divided co-ownership.

The conversion of rental units to “undivided” condos largely happens under the radar. The city keeps no information on this process, continuing to tax converted spaces as if they are still apartment buildings. This results in much lower taxes for undivided condo owners.

Most significantly, the undivided condo category is not covered by the moratorium, making the protective policy increasingly irrelevant.

Soft densification

In Griffintown, a concentration of highrise condo buildings is causing other kinds of problems. For one, not everybody can afford to buy a condo, so those who can will inevitably create an environment that’s socio-economically homogenous. Secondly, they’re often too small for families.

According to Gauthier, those conditions tend to send people to the suburbs, and it’s just not sustainable. Research indicates seniors are already opting to move away from the urban core in increasing numbers. (*See infographic.*)

“We have to stop the sprawl,” he warned. “Car dependence isn’t viable. When 40 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions come from cars driven by individuals, it’s urgent that we move towards change.”

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So the challenge is to keep people, especially families, in the city. Gauthier points out that those rows of duplexes and triplexes that are nearly synonymous with Montreal have always been ideal homes for families, who've historically occupied one level.

Focusing on two- or three-storey houses like these, rather than highrises, is what Gauthier calls "soft densification." This approach paves the way for a neighbourhood's density to build slowly, which also provides more time and space to develop any necessary infrastructures nearby. On the long term, soft densification seeps into parks, schools, businesses, and everything that makes a neighbourhood fun to live in.

To make living arrangements more affordable, Gauthier recommends helping families cover the cost, either by boosting the city's affordable housing program or by creating incentives.

"In Germany," he said, "instead of subsidizing real estate, they subsidize people directly, supplementing their income to help them pay for the housing they need."

Inviting Innovative Ideas

In his courses, Gauthier asks students to propose neighbourhood development projects that are the antithesis to piecemeal planning. Recently, his students took on the Hippodrome de Montréal, a vacant 43.5-hectare site near the Décarie Expressway and Jean-Talon St.

Encouraging them to plan from the ground up, Gauthier's students proposed solutions that could turn this area into a bustling, integrated district.

They explored working with the highway instead of knocking it down. In their plans, a portion of Décarie was covered up to block out the noise, and its access ramps were rerouted to keep trucks out of the neighbourhood. For public transportation, they looked at providing access to AMT

trains via the existing Namur metro station.

They also suggested “destination” zoning that would allow for a farmer’s market, cafés, boutiques and art galleries. For residents, they called for amenities like parks, a library, a skating rink, a school, and daycare centres.

In terms of housing, students proposed a variety of housing types, from smaller apartments to single-family homes in buildings ranging from three to ten storeys, with the possibility to rent or own.

Talking about it

Perhaps the most important part of ensuring that Montreal grows sustainably is to encourage people to participate in discussions about how it’s growing. Public consultations are key, and Gauthier knows they garner promising results.

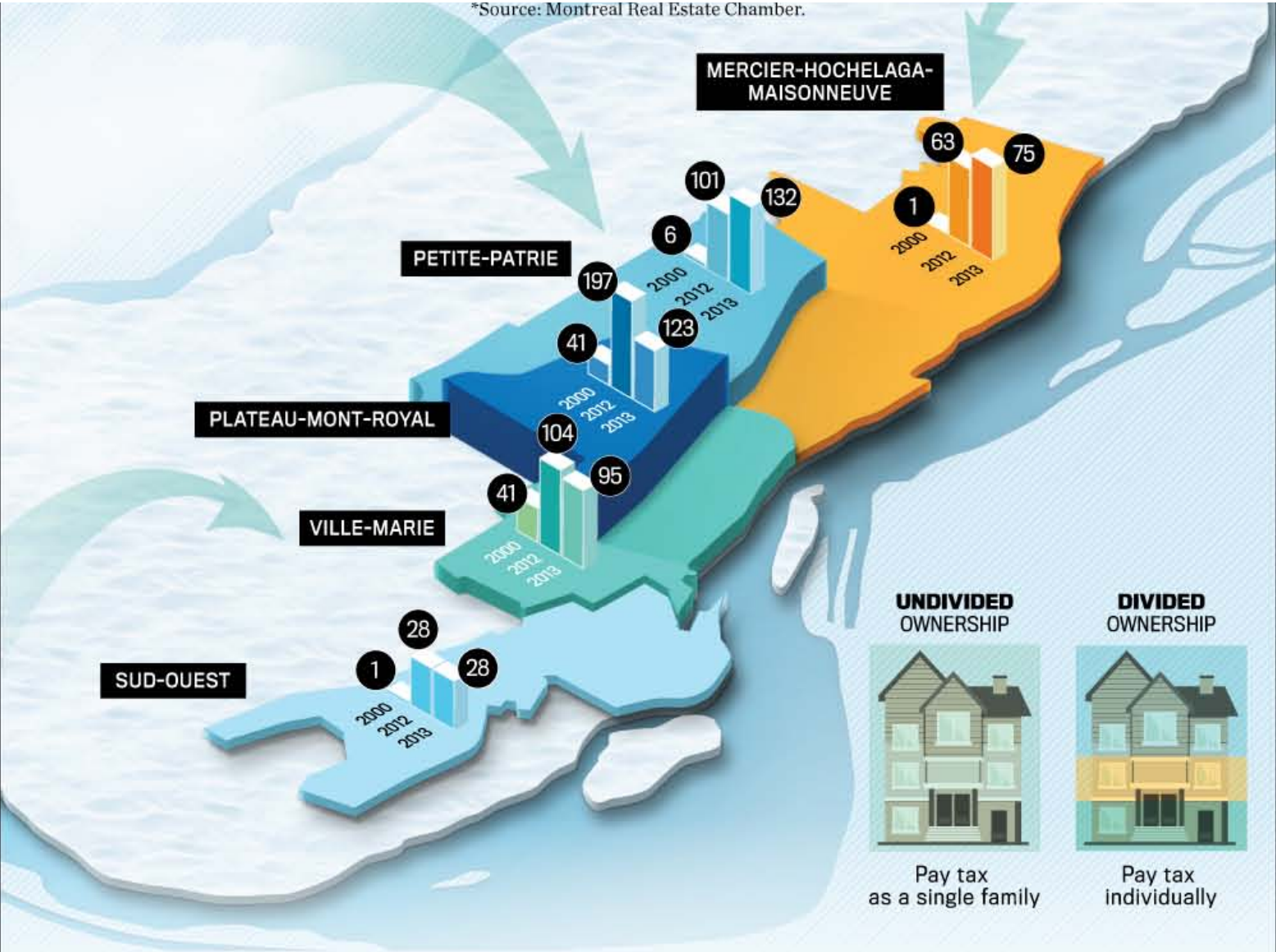
“During discussions between participants preparing for the consultations about the Turcot Interchange, I was fascinated by the maturity of the debate,” he said. “There were citizens, industrial people, community organizations, civil servants, and everyone was able to empathize with one another. No one showed any signs of not-in-my-backyard syndrome.”

If public debates can work that well for a project that big, Gauthier is convinced they’ll be just as effective in finding sustainable solutions for our neighbourhoods.

MONTREALERS ON THE MOVE

NUMBER OF CONDO UNITS SOLD A 'HIDDEN' FORM OF DEVELOPMENT

“Undivided” condos are units in the same building that, legally, are considered to be one entity. So, for example, a triplex with three livable units could be seen as a single-family home with a sole owner. Then, the ownership agreement is written in such a way that allows other owners to live in the available units. Undivided condos pay the taxes of a single-family home, rather than for each individual condo unit. Most importantly, the moratorium on condo conversions does not apply to undivided condos.

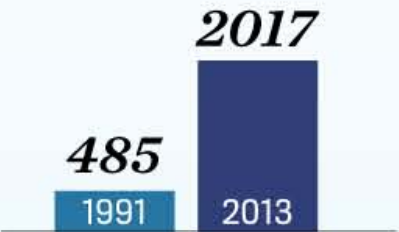


NEIGHBOURHOOD SPOTLIGHT

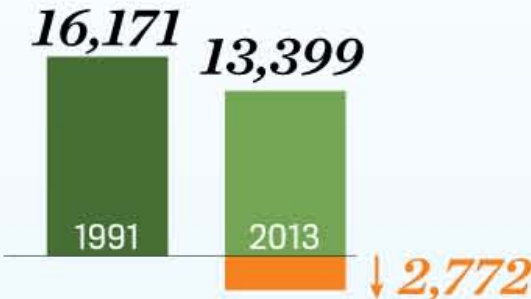
PETITE-PATRIE



THE NUMBER OF UNDIVIDED CONDOS HAS MORE THAN QUADRUPLED IN 22 YEARS.**



RENTAL APARTMENT UNITS IN 1991 & 2013:



****Source:** "L'érosion du parc de logements locatifs de la Petite Patrie," Comité logement de la Petite Patrie, Laboratoire Urbain de l'Université Concordia, March 2014

AVERAGE PROPORTION OF APARTMENT BUILDINGS



AVERAGE PROPORTION OF RENTAL UNITS



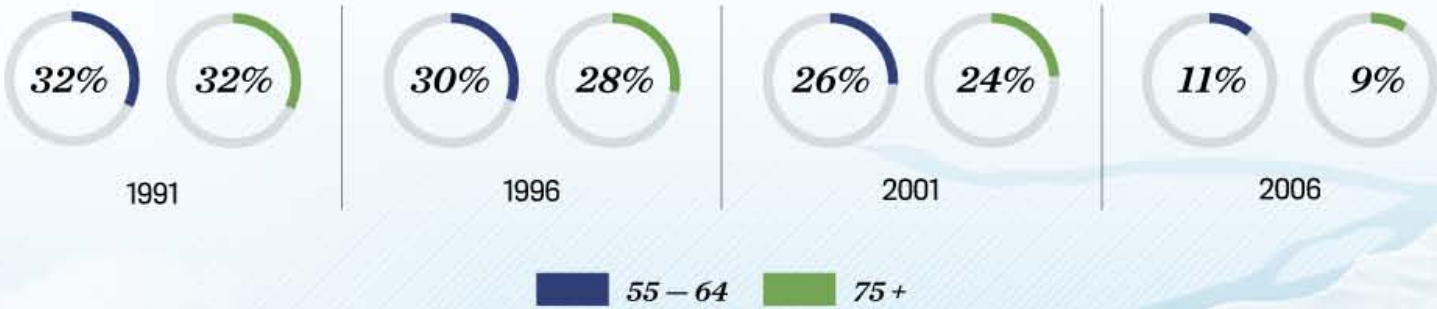
Most significant decrease:
ST-ANDRÉ & BOYER

Apartment buildings: ↓ 62%

Rental Apartments: ↓ 26%

***Source:** Property evaluation (City of Montreal) and Quebec's online property registry.

PROPORTION OF SENIORS MOVING TO URBAN CORE



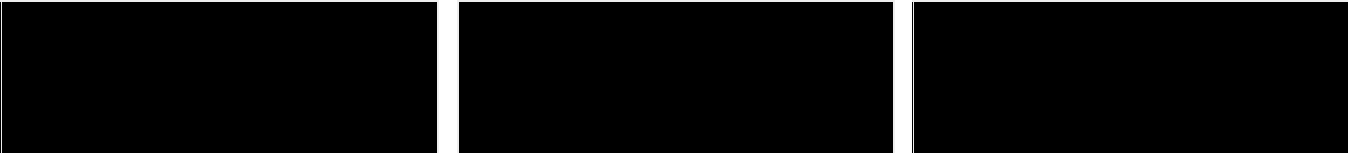
***Source:** "Use of the Urban Core Index to analyze residential mobility: the case of seniors in Canadian metropolitan regions," Zachary Patterson (Concordia University), Simon Saddier (Concordia University), Ali Rezaei (Concordia University), Kevin Manaugh (McGill University), published in Journal of Transport Geography, 2014.

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Moustapha Moukahal · Montreal, Quebec

very good article but the proper questioning should be the "WHY"behind this and the cons and pros.

renting is great but people prefer to own an asset as well.

Montreal is a great city but it lacks in many domains and infra and supra structure,

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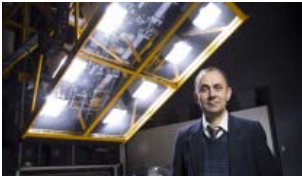
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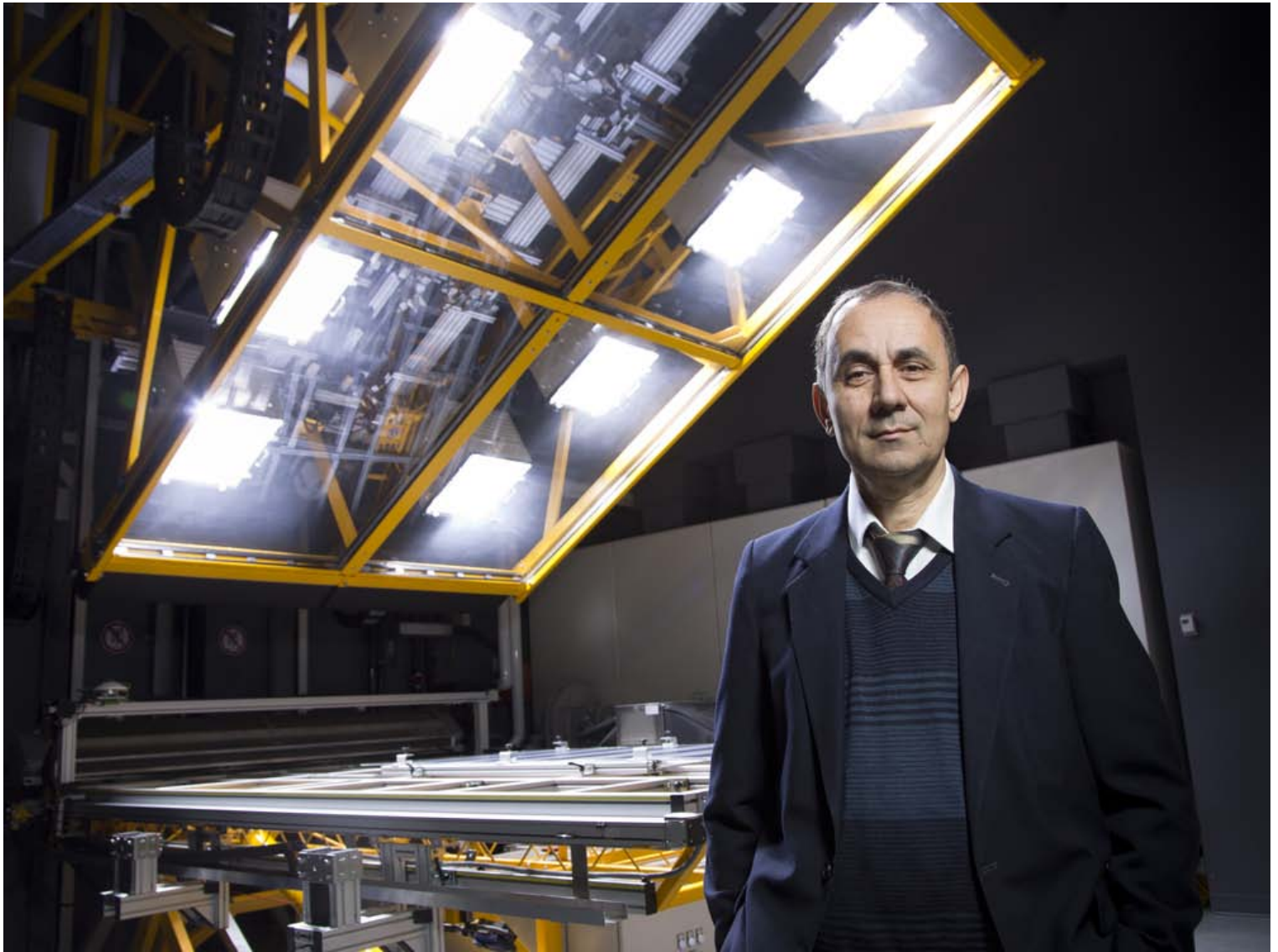
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A smarter city is more adaptable one — it keeps working no matter what happens



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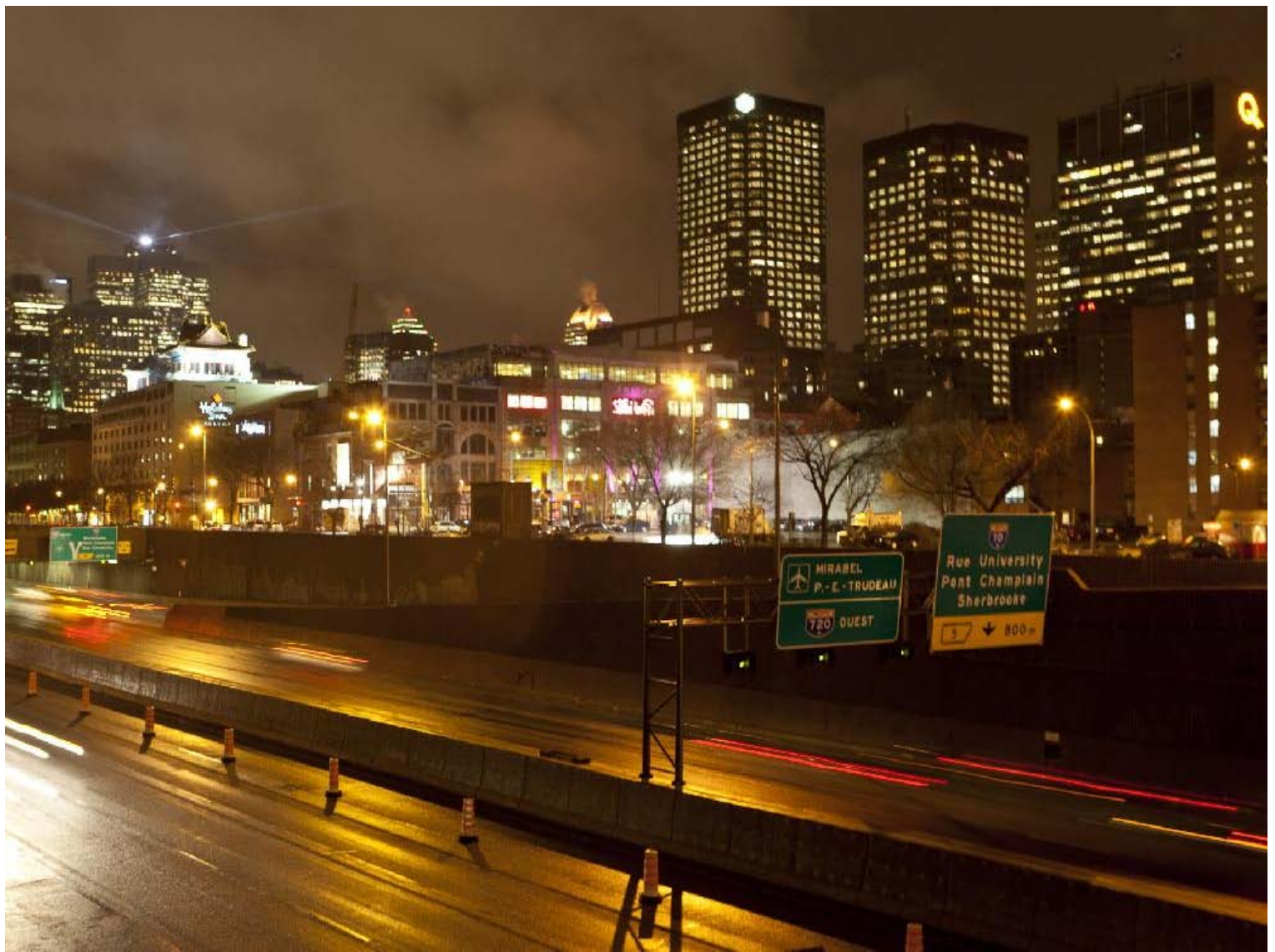
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As Montreal prepares to host the Smart City Expo conference this month and with plans to mark the city's 375th anniversary gaining momentum the Montreal Gazette kicks off a five-part series today that examines initiatives that could help make Montreal a more livable and vibrant city.



Future considerations: Montreal Reimagined

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Our new series looks at ideas and leaders who are working to make our city even better.

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