

# GETTING THROUGH THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS

## The principal action priorities of the Memphremagog CLD

In recent days, the board of directors of the CLD de la MRC de Memphrémagog, its local development council, held its annual general assembly for the purpose of reporting on its activities over the last year and to provide an overall picture of the region's current economic situation.

It is in this context that the board of directors adopted its principal priorities for intervention over the next year, especially with regard to the current economic situation, which is quite bleak.

After having enjoyed a decade of economic growth, our region has been hard hit in recent years by a situation that has led to the closing of several big plants and the loss of hundreds of jobs. But we have also enjoyed some good economic news and, as well, have welcomed new companies to our territory. These rays of hope, while perhaps less covered by the media, have served to re-launch and diversify our local economy, to the overall benefit of the region.

For most of the last two years, the members of the CLD board of directors and numerous entrepreneurs have been going through a strategic planning exercise for the future economic development of the Memphremagog MRC. This process was completed in the fall of 2008, at the same time as the full force of the world recession started to affect everyone. Inevitably, we had to reorient our efforts and our actions to redefine our priorities to help confront this economic downturn, a situation over which we have little power.

We would like to share the results of this strategic retooling and the main intervention priorities established for the next year with you in

the following paragraphs. We cannot report in detail on all the efforts currently being deployed by the CLD and its personnel, but we would like to inform you of the actions that we consider a priority to deal with the current situation.

We are confident that the region can take on the numerous challenges that it is currently facing. We have risen to the challenge in the past and we sincerely believe we can do it again with the help of all the stakeholders in our community in the next few months.

ants. These professionals continue to update the latest tools and offer training that is adapted to the needs of companies and organize networking activities. We plan to support as many companies as possible in their approach to create and maintain new companies on the territory of the MRC de Memphrémagog.

### Ensuring the survival of the Mont-Orford tourism station

The future of the station touristique du Mont-Orford is a major economic issue in our region because it generates an annual economic windfall of some \$20 million, which represents the equivalent of 560 full-time jobs.

Following the recommendations made by the MRC de Memphrémagog to the Quebec government, there will be several other hurdles to cross during the course of the next year if we are to keep and strengthen this most important local tourism infrastructure. The CLD will actively collaborate with the various efforts being made across the region and by those of the MRC in this dossier.

### Investing to consolidate and develop our tourism sector

Tourism plays an important role in the region's economic activities. That is why it is essential to continue to invest in its development and help spread the visibility of the Memphremagog region.

The tourist outlet, the Bureau d'information touristique (BIT) de Memphrémagog will soon have the opportunity to move its activities into the new highway stop that will be built on the Eastern Townships autoroute (10) at exit 115. This move permits the CLD to offer both its tourism services as well

as a greater visibility for the region and its partners. We also hope that this relocation will serve to double the amount of information provided by the BIT. The opening of this facility is planned for September 2010.

The CLD Tourisme will also update its website: [www.tourismememphremagog.com](http://www.tourismememphremagog.com). Since the internet is now such a widely used tool by tourists, it is important to keep abreast of the latest trends and offer a site that meets the expectations of visitors. This tool is currently generating some 400,000 visits annually.

Finally, the CLD also offers help and support to the various businesses in the tourism sector for their investment projects.

### Putting in place our tourism development and regional positioning plan

A number of public consultations were carried out in 2006 and 2007. The purpose of this exercise was to establish the issues and strategic objectives for the upcoming years in terms of tourism development. The elaboration of this strategic plan (2008-2012) was both part of a local (MRC) process but also a regional one (Eastern Townships) with the goal of harmonizing our orientations with those of our overall tourism region. The report that was delivered in 2007 allowed us to target major objectives to continue the tourism development of the Memphremagog region.

After the release of this report, the CLD Tourisme went on to prepare its marketing plan for 2008-2011. This plan permitted us to identify in a precise way the actions that will be taken in the different areas of the strategic plan, the places where CLD Tourisme is in a position to intervene directly. In the next few months, therefore, the CLD will concentrate its efforts on implementing these actions.

### Helping manufacturing companies come through the economic crisis

There are currently 167 manufacturing companies who employ more than 4000 persons in our region. Despite the bad news of recent years, the manufacturing sector is still an important part of our economy and constitutes one of the principal areas of activity. The priority of the CLD is to deploy all its efforts to help the various companies that need assistance to get through the current downturn.

We are conscious of the limits of our intervention capacity because we have no influence or control over what may be happening in the world's economy. However, we intend to fully assume our role which consists of steering the companies involved toward the right resources and the assistance programs that have been set up by the government to help support them in the present difficult context.

### Offering assistance to workers who have lost their jobs

Several persons have lost their jobs in the plant closings of recent years. While many of these people are highly skilled, many have less education even though they are very competent, and this will restrict their opportunities for new employment.

To help meet this situation head-on, in collaboration with the reclassification committees and Emploi-Québec, the CLD will promote an integrated linkage between those who seek jobs and companies who are looking for workers, acting as a catalyst between the offer of employment and the demand for employment. Workers can also count on these organizations as well as the Centre de santé et de services sociaux de Memphremagog to help them develop their network and their skills to be able to adapt to the new realities of the work place, so they can more easily find new employment. We also plan to carry out new initiatives such as the joint staging of a virtual job fair with the CLE de Magog, which we did last spring.

### Take advantage of vacant industrial buildings to attract new companies once the economy has turned a corner

The cessation of activities by certain companies in recent years has caused a situation in which buildings were left vacant in Magog's industrial park. This is notably the case with the structures that were occupied by GDx Automotive and Dana Canada, which will close its doors in the next few months. These recently built industrial buildings constitute a real plus for the region when the time comes to make a pitch to attract new companies to our region. The CLD is currently sparing no effort to find new takers for these structures and at the same time be in a position to coordinate job efforts with local workers. These undertakings are carried out in collaboration with Investissement Québec and real estate agents. Opportunities and the possibility for re-launching these buildings will be better when the economy turns around.

### Define a vision and a development strategy for the CSBS complex in Magog, by preparing a master steering plan

The cessation of activities of the CSBS company in 2008 left vacant an enormous industrial complex. A cornerstone of the earliest origins of Magog's industrial development, this complex still today possesses an important reconversion potential which could give this sector a renewed vocation as an economic engine. To this end, a steering plan with the aim of identifying one or many possible uses for the complex will be prepared. This very important process will include phases for public consultation and work with the local community.

### Toward a new sector of economic activity: the Information Technologies and Communications (ITC)

About a year ago, the region began an important process to diversify its economy and steer it in the direction of value-added and growth sectors offering well-paying jobs. Following the completion of a study to identify the opportunities for our region, the information technology sector was retained, following a positioning analysis and further study of the companies involved in this business window of opportunity.

A first strategic step was taken with the signing of a partnership agreement with the Université de Sherbrooke in the area of ITC. This was followed by the creation of a new organization dedicated to the development of the ITC sector. The latter is proceeding with the coordination of the availability of office space to welcome the companies from this sector as well as carrying out prospecting activities to attract them to the region.

### Focusing on the promising sectors for our manufacturing development

The presence on our territory of companies that are involved in such sectors as renewable energy (wind and solar) give us hope for the future.

In addition, the presence of the Centre intégré de formation industrielle (integrated centre for industrial training) and its capacity to adapt to the needs of local companies constitutes a real plus in the development of new windows of opportunity for manufacturing in areas that will experience strong growth in the coming years. Our region also boasts a strong pool of well qualified, experienced and available manpower in the polymer sector. These strengths help position us favourably when it comes to welcoming new companies in promising sectors and will be highlighted when our prospecting strategy is applied.

### Put the emphasis on the creation of new companies

It is a known fact that when there is a period of economic crisis, but especially during the recovery period, even if it is a modest one, new business opportunities arise and as a result, new companies are born. One of the reasons that the CLD exists is to support and offer a support framework to business start-ups. Since we were created 10 years ago, we have supported the creation and expansion of 590 companies which in turn created 3502 jobs in our region. These services represent an important part of the activities of the CLD and it is of the highest importance to support this function because it constitutes a major element in the economic rebirth of the region.

More than ever, the CLD continues its mission of support to the business community, thanks to its team of qualified consult-

### The board of directors of the CLD stands together!

The members of the board of directors of the CLD de la MRC de Memphrémagog would like to show their solidarity and their commitment in support of the companies and workers of the region during this difficult economic time. These action priorities, adopted at the last meeting of the board, are proof of this.

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