

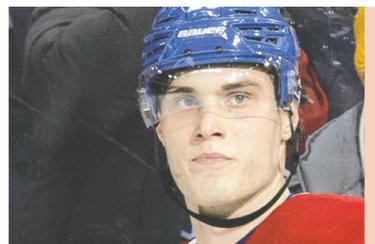
CAQ LEADER RACE BEGINS

Ministers must step down if they want to run **A3**



GROWING PAINS WERE WORTH IT

Slafkovsky starting to look like a No. 1 pick: Cowan **NP9**



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Valuation law unclear, non-profits say

Quebec lowers property taxes for 'modest' rents, but details fuzzy

LINDA GYULAI

A new bill passed by the National Assembly might provide some desperately needed property tax relief to non-profit housing boards and housing co-operatives across Quebec. They're just not sure yet if the legislation is the answer to their hopes because its wording is unclear.

"I would like to be able to shout it loud and clear that it's such good news and spread it on social media," Patrick Prévillé, executive director of the Fédération de

l'habitation coopérative du Québec (FHCQ), said of Bill 104, which was passed in November.

Prévillé's federation, which has been asking for tax relief for a decade, represents 480 non-profit housing co-operatives in the province, most of them in Montreal.

"But we can't make an announcement with this because we have too many questions still."

Bill 104 is an omnibus bill that includes a new method municipalities can start to use in 2027 to assess the value of buildings that contain low-rent and afford-

able housing. Municipal tax bills are charged on assessed property values.

The new method in Bill 104 factors a building's low rents into its assessment. It represents a big change for housing co-ops and non-profit housing buildings because they're currently assessed according to market rents in the speculative real estate market surrounding them, even though they can't be sold for profit or have their rents jacked up, and many of them have an explicit mission to serve a low-income clientele.

So the new assessment method taking into account actual rents in non-profit buildings would presumably lead to lower assessments and lower municipal property tax

bills.

However, the hiccup is over the wording in the legislation. Bill 104 says the new method applies to buildings charging subsidized rents or "modest" rents. The term "modest" isn't defined and it's unclear whether it would encompass all non-profit housing co-operatives and non-profit housing buildings, which typically charge below-market rents.

A co-operative is governed by the building's tenants, who collectively own the building. A non-profit housing building is owned by a non-profit corporation and managed by a board of directors that may include tenants and members of the community.

SEE EVALUATION ON **A2**



Maestro SVP owner Ilene Polansky shows oysters at the restaurant, which will be closing when its lease ends in March. "My feet hurt and my hands are arthritic after decades of shucking," she says. "I'm 64 years old. I just can't see myself doing this for another 10 years." **PIERRE OBENDRAUF**

Aww, shucks: famed oyster bar Maestro SVP is closing in March

After 30-plus years, 'St-Laurent is dead' and it's time to retire, 64-year-old owner says



BILL BROWNSTEIN

The last shuck is coming for the city's first all-purpose oyster bar. Maestro SVP is calling it quits in March after 35 years, the last 32 on the Main.

Maestro SVP founder-owner Ilene Polansky, one of Montreal's more colourful local characters, cites several reasons for the resto's departure, not the least of which is that the Main, particularly between Sherbrooke St. and des Pins Ave. where she is located, has lost a lot of its lustre

— and business. The street was the epicentre of this city's resto/club scene in the 1990s — when Maestro SVP was bivalve central — but that scene has dramatically shifted over the last decade to the southwest, northeast and parts in between. Long gone are such super-club havens as Buonanotte, Globe and Primadonna.

"My feet hurt and my hands are arthritic after decades of shucking," Polansky cracks. "It's time. My lease is over. Business is just not the same. I'm 64 years old. I just can't see myself doing this for another 10 years."

"I'm working alone now in the front of the restaurant and serving tables. I can't afford to hire anyone. It's unheard of what's happening. St-Laurent is dead. No cars, no traffic, no action, no

nightlife. After COVID, everything just went down."

Polansky insists it's not an issue of giving up. It's the new economic reality.

"It's not that I don't try or that others in the area aren't trying. I've got 12 types of oysters, including an oyster poutine, not to mention a solid variety of other seafood. But the fact is that people don't have the money they once had. A customer came in the other day and asked for an espresso. I told him I had to sell our machine. So it goes. Yes, there are restaurants opening all the time, but there are more that are closing."

"When I first got to the Main, it was the star street of the city. It was magical times for the restaurants and clubs here. The movie scene was big. Celebs were here throwing around money. It's a whole different scene today. It's become dangerous at times, with fights breaking out."

SEE BROWNSTEIN ON **A3**

Son not responsible for killing his parents

PAUL CHERRY

A young man who killed his parents and his grandmother inside the family's home in Rosemont nearly three years ago was declared not criminally responsible for the deaths in a decision delivered at the Montreal courthouse Thursday.

Quebec Superior Court Justice Annie Émond went over a long summary of 22-year-old Arthur Galarneau's mental health history — and how his family tried to help him — before delivering her decision.

On March 17, 2023, the young man stabbed the victims — Mylène Gingras, 53, Richard Galarneau, 53, and Francine Galarneau-Boucher, 75 — inside the family's duplex.

SEE GALARNEAU ON **A4**