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FCM Sustainable Communities Awards 2012 Winner — Planning – Neighbourhood

City of Terrebonne, Quebec
Population: 105,021



Aerial plan of the Côte Terrebonne sector, site of the Urbanova project
Credit: City of Terrebonne

Côte Terrebonne Master Plan for Sustainable Development (Urbanova project)

Summary

The City of Terrebonne chose to develop a vast section of vacant land, covering 1,220 hectares, based on sustainable development principles and practices. To do this, in 2006 the city imposed a moratorium targeting all development in the Côte Terrebonne sector and developed a master plan for sustainable development. This plan was approved by city council in 2011.

When complete, Côte Terrebonne will accommodate approximately 13,000 housing units as well as commercial and industrial zones. On an unparalleled scale in Canada, the Urbanova project is based on an integrated plan where components such as the environment, engineering, development, traffic and social development will ensure the a cohesive plan for this green sector.

Background

Located on the northern edge of the suburban ring surrounding greater Montréal, the City of Terrebonne is blessed with a dynamic agri-environment and a highly residential urban environment. It boasts five industrial parks as well as businesses and community facilities throughout the region, plus a heritage city core dating back to 1673. Terrebonne is currently experiencing unparalleled demographic growth. Lying southwest of this municipality of over 105,021 residents, the Côte Terrebonne sector is a special place with enormous development possibilities and the potential to accommodate approximately 32,000 residents.

This is how Terrebonne came to develop the Côte Terrebonne Master Plan for Sustainable Development. The plan also reflects the city's desire to offer its residents an innovative project (Urbanova) and to stand out in a market dominated by traditional housing. In addition, this initiative builds upon and realizes the sustainable development process begun by the city when it launched its Green Plan in 2006.

Terrebonne is managed by a mayor and sixteen municipal councillors, with eleven departments overseeing the region's maintenance, police force, engineering and special projects, as well as recreation and community life.

Project Development and Implementation

Terrebonne based its sustainable development plan on two key aspects: profitability and integration with nature. To ensure Urbanova's viability, the city hired experts to evaluate the project's financial feasibility according to the population base being served. The results of a market study surpassed all expectations and reassured the city's elected officials. Terrebonne also conducted a major survey among potential buyers to determine their interest in living in a green community. Their answers showed that, on average, buyers are willing to spend up to \$18,000 more to live in an energy-efficient home and that they are strongly in favour of this type of social contract.

Based on new urbanism principles, the Côte Terrebonne project integrates development with nature. The city envisioned a biodiversity corridor to protect vital nature zones. Rather than imposing itself on nature, the project is based on an analysis of environmental data. For example, instead of designing a traditional street grid, then overlaying it on the natural landscape, the city studied the environment's footprint as the background for the street grid.

Because much of the land that makes up Côte Terrebonne is privately owned, the city must acquire the land to protect it in perpetuity and to make it publicly accessible. Legal consultation suggested expropriation as a way to accomplish this, so the city adopted a loan bylaw as a means of financing professional fees.

The innovative nature of the project forced the city to review its entire bylaw strategy to adapt it to the concepts of sustainable development. For example, the city had to rethink rainwater management. Instead of a conventional sewer system, the project's rainwater management approach takes natural factors into consideration. Paved surfaces (such as parking lots) are made more permeable, and small built-in basins minimize pressure on receiving waterways. Along the same idea, Terrebonne is working to reduce heat islands by using light-coloured, porous construction materials and by planting more vegetation.

Terrebonne also encourages active and public transportation, so the city designed an urban way to reduce vehicular movement and encouraging walking. The road network makes it more awkward to get to nearby businesses by car, and easier on foot or by bicycle via bicycle and pedestrian corridors. Terrebonne is also looking into providing better public transit. More widely used and more efficient public transport is supported by more reserved lanes. These modes of transportation combine to cut down on automobile use.

Urbanova will be completed with public spaces on a human scale, and small village centres will be created to lend a neighbourhood atmosphere and to give the subdivision its own special appeal. This "personality" will be reflected in the distinctive urban design for Côte Terrebonne, which aims to let residents and visitors alike know that they are in an environmentally aware community. From the simplest trash can to bus shelters, to signage and lighting, even the street furniture will serve as a signature for this green neighbourhood.

In line with the new urbanism approach that makes Urbanova an original, innovative project, the city has planned for more efficient and less costly street lighting through the use of motion sensors. When there is no traffic, the lights gradually dim; but then increase in intensity as soon as the movement of a vehicle is detected. Safety is not compromised, and electricity is not wasted.

Traditionally, available land in a municipality is exploited by a developer who submits project plans to the city; these plans may be approved, rejected or altered. In doing the opposite, Terrebonne is showing leadership by developing land according to its own vision for the future. To be successful, this process must have the political will of city council and municipal leaders to undertake the necessary preliminary studies on the land to be developed. This could serve as an inspiration to all municipalities wanting to take the reins of development into their own hands.

Results

- 37.7 per cent of the total Côte Terrebonne area is dedicated to a biodiversity corridor.
- With more than 160 hectares of wetlands and waterways already subject to the *Environment Quality Act*, Terrebonne is protecting an additional 462.7 hectares.
- Compared to the traditional development model, this approach helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- The innovative stormwater management concept makes it possible to reduce problems created by peak flow in waterways, by retaining runoff at dwellings.

- This project encourages social interaction and ensures easy access to facilities and parks for all citizens.
- The eventual arrival of over 30,000 residents will bring the city a new source of revenue and stimulate the municipality's medium and long-term economy.

Lessons Learned

- **THE GRASS IS GREENER.** Contributors such as accountants and elected officials will rally around any well prepared and well defined project that deals with the environment. They can be convinced that this kind of project is feasible and profitable, and that it contributes to the well-being of all citizens. "What's important is to know how to make the most of the environment to make a project work and not view it as an obstacle," says Marc Léger, sustainable development and environment coordinator for the City of Terrebonne.
- **WORK WITH THE BEST.** "In order for such a process to succeed, you must surround yourself with trusted individuals with impeccable qualifications," advises Léger. "Don't be afraid of removing barriers, doing things differently and thinking outside the box. You must be ready to commit yourself to a project that's off the beaten track."
- **PAY ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS.** In a project of this scope and complexity, it's essential to pay attention to every detail of every step along the way to avoid unpleasant surprises. It's best to proceed cautiously.
- **COOPERATION IS KEY.** Since the beginning, partner departments have been cooperated openly and generously and have wholeheartedly supported the project.

Related and Future Initiatives

The next step consists of designing the master plan for the main street axes and then building them, along with a distinctive brand for this green neighbourhood. The regulatory framework for the sector must also be quickly mapped out. Once complete, these factors will pave the way for future projects and ensure consistency. The city will then begin construction of key institutions, such as libraries and the community centre. This plan must also be done in concert with developers, who will build according to guidelines set out by the city. The first buildings will be completed in spring 2012.

Partners and Collaboration

The project's success is due to the exceptional commitment of various municipal departments, whose work was coordinated by the Direction de l'aménagement du territoire (Land Development Department) and the Direction du génie et des projets spéciaux (Engineering and Special Projects Department). Support also came from external partners, such as the RMC of Les Moulins and various provincial ministries such as Développement durable, Environnement et Parcs (Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks), Ressources naturelles et faune (Natural Resources and Wildlife); and Affaires municipales, Régions et Occupation du territoire (Municipal Affairs, Regions and Land Occupation).

Contact

Marc Léger
 Coordinator, Sustainable Development and the Environment
 City of Terrebonne, QC
 450-961-2001
marc.leger@ville.terrebonne.qc.ca