Revitalization of the Don Valley Brick Works is an initiative of a Canadian charity, Evergreen, that aims to engage citizens in restoring degraded and abandoned urban places through active participation. This specific project consists of the revitalization of an industrial heritage site as an education center focused on sustainable cities. The key issues to be developed and communicated to the broad public encompass environmental and community health, "brownfield" redevelopment, heritage conservation, sustainable design and the need for innovative public-private partnerships.

The altered and upgraded buildings hosting classrooms, exhibitions and various social services will comply with today’s requirements regarding resource and energy consumption. This very broad approach to the complex task of urban transformation combined with an efficient management of the urban metabolism, driven by a strong partnership between citizens and authorities are the outstanding merits of this project.

Quantum change and transferability
Energy systems will be selected based on performance attributes and interpretive qualities while maintaining the heritage value of existing structures. The project will broaden the definition of buildings and comfort conditions given the variety of open, closed and transition spaces. Multiple green building and community assessment tools will be used to demonstrate achievement in measuring and monitoring sustainability in the built environment. Systems will be visible, metered, monitored, and signed with descriptive narratives. Additionally, the system will provide learning opportunities related to energy consumption, native plant habitats (eg. green roof), and natural resources.

Ethical standards and social equity
Over 1,000 people have attended public consultation meetings. A values charter will commit all site partners to achieving a set of shared environmental and social goals. A “good neighbor” policy will minimize the impacts of site operations; it will be developed and monitored with the help of community stakeholders. Evergreen will procure trades according to the City of Toronto’s Fair Wage policy.

Ecological quality and energy conservation
Targets include: 70% reduction in fossil fuel consumption, limited mechanical cooling, passive and active energy controls, and recovery technologies. Generation strategies include: ground source heat pump system, solar photovoltaic system, and solar thermal energy. An integrated storm water management plan will significantly reduce potable water use and run off. Waste diversion by 95% will be realized through composting, closed loop product supply and recycling. Land use efficiency is realized through brownfield reutilization. Our ecology strategy will encourage habitat restoration and mitigate brownfield toxins through remediation, capping and removal of existing hazardous building materials. Construction resources will include donated, recycled, reclaimed materials.

Economic performance and compatibility
The site will operate on the triple bottom line philosophy, providing social, environmental and economic returns. Programs and services will fulfill Evergreen’s social and environmental mandate. Economic sustainability will be achieved through space rental, admissions, events, sponsorship and parking. Retail opportunities will serve as a venue for employment and training for youth with potential.

Contextual and aesthetic impact
The synergy between natural, built and architectural landscape will be realized through restoration of the habitat and buildings, the reuse of materials, and the re-establishment of landscape and water flows through the industrial pad to accommodate flooding. A natural heritage strategy was prepared to protect the ecology from the future increase in visitor numbers.

Acknowledgement prize 2008 North America

Evergreen Brick Works heritage site revitalization, Toronto, Canada

Project data

Project description by author

Evergreen is a Canadian charity that builds relationships between nature, culture and community in urban spaces. Evergreen’s programs aim to engage citizens in restoring nature’s place in our cities through participatory design, hands-on planting activities, and site stewardship. In partnership with the City of Toronto, and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Evergreen is revitalizing an industrial heritage site, the Don Valley Brickworks, as an education center focused on sustainable cities.

Key characteristics of the site include: 4.9ha of “brownfield” land in the heart of Toronto’s ravine system; a designated heritage buildings dating back to 1895 totaling 183,492ft2 or 17,000m2, brick making artifacts, its location in a floodplain, proximity to a 16ha park space (the Weston Quarry Garden), and a site of archaeological significance. The site will be a venue for exploring fundamental challenges facing sustainable cities of today such as environmental and community health, “brownfield” redevelopment, heritage conservation, sustainable design and the need for innovative public-private partnerships.

Acting as a hub, the project will inspire, educate and engage local, regional, and international communities in the sustainable city movement.

Key program infrastructure will include: a LEED Platinum Innovation Center, an incubator for environmental NGOs with classroom, conference and event facilities; a native plant nursery with retail and educational benefits; demonstration gardens and wildlife habitats; a nature-based children’s playground; a farmers market with food programs focused on sustainable local food growing and distribution; artifacts and displays related to industrial and geological heritage; a climbing tower and ropes course for skills development and adventures; it will be developed and monitored with the help of community stakeholders. Evergreen will procure trades according to the City of Toronto’s Fair Wage policy.

Further author(s) & legal guardian(s)

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Comment of the Holcim Awards jury North America

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