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## Green house takes on a whole new meaning in eco-friendly projects

BY MARIANNE WHITE, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE JANUARY 2, 2010

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The \$300-million, 800-housing units green neighbourhood, located close to the downtown in Quebec City, will feature a thermal heating system using wood waste, green roofs, solar panels, stormwater recuperation and sustainable design.

**Photograph by:** Canwest News Service, Canwest News Service

QUEBEC -- Canada's latest green community development - Cite verte - has drawn inspiration from leading national and international eco-friendly neighbourhoods and is further proof there's more interest in energy-efficient residential projects, supporters say.

"There is a trend towards the greening of development, and green neighbourhoods are going to be the way of the future if we want to reduce substantially our environmental footprint," said Mark Hutchinson, director of the Green Buildings Programs for the Canada Green Building Council.

The Quebec government is footing \$28 million of the \$300-million bill for Cite verte - 800 environmentally friendly housing units, located close to Quebec City's downtown.

The homes are designed to use 30 per cent less energy than standard residences.

The community will feature narrow streets to diminish the use of cars and promote self-service bikes. In addition, a basin will capture and recycle stormwater to irrigate green spaces and there will be green roofs, solar panels and LED street lamps.

The starting price for houses in Cite verte is expected to be around \$350,000, slightly higher than the market price for standard homes in the area.

"We want green projects to become our trademark," said Quebec City Mayor Regis Labeaume at the recent launch of the Cite verte - funded mostly by private investors.

The mayor wants to build two other green neighbourhoods in the next 20 years.

Quebec's plan is being billed as one of the most innovative residential projects east of the Rockies. That's because across the country at Victoria's Inner Harbour is Canada's first green community development - the Dockside Green project.

Dockside, a mixed-use residential and commercial real-estate development, has won praise across North America for its sustainability initiatives.

Dockside most notably creates power from a wood-based biomass gasification system and the recovery of waste heat from municipal sewage. The development is greenhouse-gas neutral and its "micro energy utility" could eventually sell any extra power produced on-site.

The community describes itself as a "model for holistic, closed-loop design" that promotes healthy living.

"We are doing something similar to Dockside Green," says Jean Morency, head of the real-estate arm of the SSQ insurance company and a promoter of the Quebec City project.

The SSQ, which has been working on the Quebec project since 2002, said it was also inspired by green developments in Europe.

The Quebec developers travelled to Sweden to see the restoration of Hammarby Sjostad, a thriving green waterfront residential community in Stockholm.

"That was a turning point," said Labeaume.

Hammarby Sjostad, a community of 15,000, is connected to the downtown core by streetcar, a free ferry and roads made of a type of asphalt that collects stormwater.

One feature of the Swedish project will be imported to Quebec: garbage bins and trucks are replaced by a series of colour-coded, vacuum-operated waste chutes. The material is sucked into a network of tunnels and transferred into the appropriate waste, recycling or compost depot.

The thermal heating system for the Quebec project - picked up in Austria - will consist of a biomass plant to convert wood waste into clean power to produce heat and hot water.

Hutchinson, of the Canada Green Building Council, said buildings account for 35 per cent of industrialized countries' greenhouse gas emissions.

The council has launched a pilot project to create a LEED certification - the gold standard in green building - for neighbourhood developments. Some 24 projects in Quebec, British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta have been studied and will be rated by a third party for their sustainability in order to receive the certification.

Victoria's Dockside Green is among them, and Quebec City's Cite verte will also apply for the certification, once the first phase of the project is completed.

It also seems Canadians are willing to pay a premium to live under a green roof.

Hutchinson pointed to a survey conducted for his organization last February that suggested that 85 per cent of Canadians claim that certification, like LEED, would play an important role in their home purchase decisions.

Eighty-two per cent of respondents said they would be willing to invest more money in a home purchase if it was certified green.

"Canadians are definitely interested in how green their house is and to pay more for that house being green if it can be certified," he said.

Hutchinson said that green housing continues to frequently be more expensive than standard homes, but stressed prices will eventually go down as demand grows.

"It is entirely possible to build a green home at the market rate, depending on how green you want to be. If you want to achieve the highest level of certification, there will no doubt be a premium," he said.