

\$55-million plan to transform former Toronto brickyard

CBC News
Tuesday, November 20, 2007 | 12:20 PM ET

The site design for Toronto's Brick Works, a unique project that involves restoring nature in the city while incorporating heritage buildings and an art component, was unveiled Tuesday.

Evergreen, a non-profit group devoted to developing greener cities, has approved a \$55-million plan for the 16-hectare site — a former quarry and the Don Valley Brick Works, which provided millions of bricks in the 19th and 20th centuries to build Toronto.

Seven design firms, including landscape planner du Toit Allsopp Hillier and architects Diamond and Schmitt collaborated on the plan, which involves transforming 16 aging industrial buildings formerly used to make bricks.

Those buildings are currently "a giant swath of asphalt," according to Joe Lobko, a partner with duToit Allsopp Hillier and lead designer on the project.

"The first thing we have to do is heal the site and create a range of outdoor public spaces," Lobko said.

Part of the quarry has been restored by Evergreen over the past 10 years and the usable green spaces on the site are to be expanded.

There is almost no precedent for this kind of transformation of an urban industrial site into green space within a city, said Evergreen executive director Geoff Cape.

"It is unique in the world. I don't know of anything that explores green cities like we do," he said.

Evergreen has won \$20 million from Ottawa and \$10 million from the province for this project and is still fundraising for the remainder.

The first phase of the project also involves transforming two of the brickyard buildings for use in nature interpretation, historical displays and as a play area.

Also part of the plan is a Diamond + Schmitt redesign for one of the buildings as headquarters for Evergreen and a community building for meetings and conferences.

The architects have devoted one façade of the building for treatment by artists.

Cape said he drew inspiration from Barcelona in incorporating art into the project. "I was blown away by how art is woven into the city," he said.

"The façade of the building will be a giant art piece — a tapestry of screens that is constantly changing," he said.

Evergreen foresees incorporating everything from children's drawings to fabric art to multimedia works by internationally known artists into the outer wall of the building.

Toronto's Gardiner Museum of Ceramics is among those taking space in the building, possibly to provide studios for working with clay, the original material taken from the quarry.

The complex plan for the site, which could be ready by 2010, involves:

- * A seasonal farmers market, which began operation this past summer.
- * Community gardens.
- * Local food merchants and ethnic foods.
- * A restaurant.
- * A place to study geological and natural history.
- * A children's play centre.
- * Community conference facilities and meeting areas.



There are 16 old industrial buildings on the Brick Works site in Toronto's Don Valley. (du Toit Allsopp Hillier)



Federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty announces funding of \$20 million for Evergreen at the Brick Works last December. (Frank Gunn/Canadian Press)