

Affordable Housing through Cooperative Development in Saint-Michel

• Challenge •

In creating a vision for Saint-Michel — a neighbourhood in central Montreal — Vivre Saint-Michel en santé (VSMS) identified three strategic areas of intervention, including the provision of adequate housing for low-income individuals and families. The condition of housing stock in Saint-Michel is generally poor, so although the rents are lower than the average for Montreal, the living conditions are inferior and the situation leads to high rates of transience.

In the past five years, only 20 new affordable housing units have been built in Saint-Michel. Le Chantier — an outgrowth of VSMS that is Saint-Michel's Vibrant Communities convenor organization — set a goal of improving the housing stock while also working to increase family incomes. Success in these areas will help create a greater sense of neighbourhood belonging and engagement. In particular, this project hopes to promote the development of housing initiatives that will serve families, youths, the unemployed and special-needs groups, such as the elderly, persons with disabilities and lone-parent families.

• Strategy •

The existing urban plan for Saint-Michel has identified the northern and eastern areas of the neighbourhood as requiring improved housing. A number of housing initiatives have been recently discussed, leading to expectations among residents that improvements can be made in local housing conditions. Initial planning has also identified the availability of properties that are suitable for new construction and some buildings that have the potential for renovation or retrofitting.

The plan of action suggests obtaining access to, or ownership of, certain properties and buildings in Saint Michel. If developed, this additional housing stock would encourage newcomers and youths to live in the neighbourhood and would provide an incentive for existing residents to stay. The aim is to enhance the social cohesion and diversity of the residential population through the availability of affordable housing to people with a range of incomes.

This particular project is part of Le Chantier's overall plan of action and will extend ongoing initiatives as well as support citizens' groups that wish to propose housing projects. At present, 130 co-operative housing units are being planned, of which 74 are approved.

Le Chantier is working with several local partner organizations, including the municipality, Centre de la Petite Enfance Saint-Michel, Le TOHU (a nonprofit circus arts organization) and Cirque du Soleil. This team approach has already resulted in the creation of the Coopérative Côté Soleil, an anticipated housing project whose 74 units will be co-located with the Centre de la Petite Enfance, as well as 6,000 square feet of commercial space. The Centre will provide childcare services to the employees of the nearby Cirque de Soleil complex.

The local urban planning authorities have already approved a plan for the new building and final negotiations are currently under way with the Commission Scolaire de Montréal, the owner of the property. Construction is expected to start in the spring or early summer of 2006.

• *Impact* •

The planned outcome of Le Chantier's overall housing priority is the availability of an additional 150 units of affordable housing for the target population. The co-operative housing initiative is expected to contribute to that goal.



In From the Field: Preliminary Initiatives from Trail Builders in Vibrant Communities