



# SAGUENAY

## Reinventing a former railway line with tactical urbanism

The story of the Active Neighbourhoods Canada (ANC) project in Chicoutimi, a borough of Saguenay, begins with a municipal election in 2013. The residents of District 11 elected an independent councillor who had promised to invite more citizen participation. This was no idle promise: within a year, a residents' committee was formed in the district. The group would enable residents to participate in investment decisions related to the municipal councillor's budget, and to influence actions aimed at improving their living environment. It soon became clear that the priority was to make the neighbourhood more walkable and improve intersections that were problematic for active-transportation users.

## SHOW OFF A PEDESTRIAN PATH

While identifying its work priorities, the District 11 residents' committee took an interest in a former Canadian National railway site in downtown Chicoutimi, now owned by the city. The land is partially developed as a pedestrian walkway, already used by many residents. The committee set as their main priority to upgrade the path's design as a pedestrian zone. It was imperative for them to involve citizens so that the community would embrace the project. Partnering with ANC and using a participatory planning approach allowed them to do this. On the recommendation of the Montréal Urban Ecology Centre, a linear-park committee – the Comité du parc linéaire (COPAL) – was formed, composed of representatives of the City of Saguenay, members of the District 11 residents' committee, and representatives of local organizations such as Eurêko!. Several months later, during the project's launch phase, the old railway site was renamed the Traverse du Coteau.

## TACTICAL URBANISM: AN ESSENTIAL TOOL

Several activities were organized as part of this project. Some, such as the professional workshop, had a significant impact. With around 15 participants from different municipal departments, the MAMOT<sup>2</sup>, the MTQ<sup>3</sup>, and the Cégep de Jonquière, there was an opportunity to explore design solutions to enhance the walkway and improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists at two problematic Traverse du Coteau intersections. Beyond developing original planning solutions, participants noted that the workshop had the benefit of bringing together professionals from different disciplines to work in concert on integrated solutions.

Following the workshop, the COPAL, in collaboration with the City of Saguenay, decided to issue a call for residents' proposals. The goal is to ensure that residents embrace this public space through temporary tactical planning measures. There will be two calls, with a total of six citizen projects on the themes of urban art, greening and urban agriculture.



*In addition to the development of original design solutions, one of the positive impacts of professional workshops is to bring professionals from different disciplines together to work on integrated solutions.*

## MOBILIZATION PAYS!

This project shows that much can be accomplished given sufficient political will and citizen mobilization. With hard work, a positive vision and plenty of imagination, the District 11 residents' committee had a tangible impact on its community. It should be stressed that the municipal councillor was involved in the project from the start and did remarkable work, showing that it is possible to develop very interesting participatory projects for fellow citizens when residents and civil society organizations are engaged.

The next step for the people behind the Traverse du Coteau is to make sure that the project's lessons inform the city's standard practices and have a snowball effect on other neighbourhoods. An elected repre-

sentative who participated in the professional workshop has already expressed her intention to bring participatory urban planning to her district. Some of the other participants in the project also want this type of approach and its associated expertise to be institutionalized for use elsewhere in Chicoutimi. The goal is to maximize residents' opportunities to take charge of their neighbourhoods and living spaces. By anchoring the application of participatory urban planning principles in the city itself, these practices will become the norm.



**VIEW THE PORTRAIT HERE:**

La Traverse du Coteau : un parcours de déplacement actif au centre-ville de Chicoutimi  
[WWW.ECOLOGIEURBAINE.NET](http://WWW.ECOLOGIEURBAINE.NET)

<sup>2</sup> MAMOT : Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Occupation du territoire du Québec (Quebec Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Land Occupancy)

<sup>3</sup> MTQ : Ministère des Transports du Québec (Quebec Ministry of Transport)