

Francon Quarry, we don't forget you!

Interview avec Lois Lindsay de Evergreen

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1. Would you please briefly introduce yourself? Also tell us about EVERGREEN?

I'm Lois Lindsay, Chief Advancement Officer at Evergreen. I've been a part of Evergreen for almost 20 years, and have led the organization's program design and management, strategic planning and fundraising efforts.

For over 30 years, Evergreen has been facilitating change in communities through connection, innovation and sustainable actions. Our approach is to bring together different people and lead with a mind-set focused on solutions so we can test and scale the ideas needed in cities. We believe that no one actor can solve these challenges alone. We convene and engage to revitalize and transform spaces into great places that are inclusive to all people and sustainable at their core.

Through our work at Evergreen Brick Works (our headquarters) in Toronto, our collaborative initiative Future Cities Canada, and programs across the country, we're working to make cities that are more liveable, green and prosperous.

1 Vanessa Sykes Tremblay, Direction générale, VSMS

2 Agnès Barthélémy, chargée de concertation Mobilité et charge du projet de la Carrière Francon, VSMS

2. Are you familiar with any urban regeneration project comparable with the FRANCON quarry project? If so, can you share some of them or give us some internet links that would help us to think big?

Well, top of mind is Evergreen Brick Works, our organization's headquarters. 20 years ago, we started our journey in revitalizing the Don Valley Brick Works – a century-old factory that produced the bricks that built Toronto, located on a river that has been a settlement site for many Indigenous people for thousands of years. There's so much deep history in the area! When the factory closed down in the late 1980s, all that was left was a damaged ecosystem, crumbling buildings and contaminated soil. Now, this once industrial brick factory is an internationally renowned showcase of green design, an award-winning public space and a test site to pilot ideas that can be scaled across the country to shape our cities for the better.

An important part of the journey to transforming the historic brick factory into the Brick Works was learning through piloting. The Brick Works site opened just over 10 years ago, but our first test was a small farmers market, which has grown to become one of the largest in Toronto and part of a resilient local food system. The lesson for us was: big ideas can come to fruition through seemingly small 'experiments'.

Here are a few other examples of successful and inspiring revitalization projects we had identified in another article on Evergreen.ca -- we could pull one or two that inspire you/Evergreen.
<https://www.evergreen.ca/blog/entry/7-public-spaces-that-got-it-right/>

3. What thoughts went through your mind as you were strolling around the area where the FRANCON quarry is located? Did any specific ideas come to mind?

I was fortunate enough to 'stroll' through Francon on two wheels, with Vanessa¹ and Agnes² as tour guides! Three main impressions come to mind. First: as we cycled along, I was amazed by how the quarry was hiding in plain sight. We could ride through the adjacent neighbourhood, mere meters from the edge of the quarry, and hardly know it was there! It's hard to galvanize support for a project that seems invisible, even when it's having a profound impact on the community, as the Francon quarry obviously is. It was only when I was shown aerial photographs, maps, and models that I realized the scale of the opportunity in Francon – the opportunity to heal the land after intense and sustained industrial use, and the opportunity to knit together a neighbourhood that's been physically divided for so long.

Secondly, I was of course struck by the similarities between the Francon quarry and the Evergreen Brick Works site – that is, how the Brick Works looked and felt prior to revitalization and adaptive reuse. To me, the main impression is one of tremendous potential, and also poetry. At Francon – as at Evergreen – the quarry was a source of materials to build a city. Now, the residents are doing their own citybuilding, with a focus not on extracting resources, but on connecting people with one another, and with nature. This is fundamental to the sustainable and inclusive communities we need to create together, across Canada.

¹ Vanessa Sykes Tremblay, Direction générale, VSMS

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Finally, my tour of Francon immersed me in a truly vibrant neighbourhood – a tremendously diverse and resilient community that faces significant challenges, and yet is coming together to offer mutual support, and to pursue a big ambition for a green and connected neighbourhood. This is sustainable placemaking at its best and most inspiring: bringing the creativity and energy of diverse residents together to co-create a public space that will heal the land, and benefit residents for generations to come.



4. What advice would you give to the population and the community services in the Saint Michel district?

This is your neighbourhood – let your voice be heard! We know that engaging with the community is vital for success, and so Evergreen has relied deeply on our participatory design process when redeveloping urban spaces. Together, the community can create a compelling vision that helps inspire others to support, or get involved.

I'd particularly encourage youth and children to lend their voices. The FRANCON quarry project makes me think of yet another exciting transformation that is taking place in an abandoned quarry in Toronto's East end called the Birch Cliff Quarry Lands. It's currently being redeveloped into a mix of public parks and housing. Evergreen's role was to bring forward the voices of children to the park consultation process in partnership with the developers, the City and the students from the local public school. These types of fun and interactive capacity-building workshops served to deepen relationships within the community, provided meaningful input into the designs and help raise awareness about the benefits of engaging all aspects of a neighbourhood's demographic in the city planning process.

The project team put an interesting video together capturing the vision the children had of the site and their ideas on how to make it more inclusive and accessible to all. [Child-Friendly Park Consultation and The Quarry Lands](#).



5. How might we go about seeking to persuade the public authorities to take decisive action in favour of the people living around the quarry?

Lasting change depends on community buy-in, and transformation of this kind is impossible from a purely top-down approach. We know that a main ingredient of thriving public space is people-centred design, and the key to truly successful revitalization work lies in community engagement. This people-centred design approach means that existing community organizations, key partners in the project, and community members are working side-by-side with authorities and other stakeholders every step of the way.

We have seen first-hand that when transformation takes place through a community-driven process, it can launch economic development, stronger social cohesion, and civic pride. So, for Francon, I'd say the first thing is to tap into the community's passion and vision. That bold vision can help other stakeholders get excited about what's possible at Francon, rather than focusing on barriers. And it can function as an open invitation for others to get involved – including public authorities, civic decision-makers, and those who influence them.

6. What advice would you give to those who are trying to move the project forward as rapidly as possible?



The vision for Francon is tremendously inspiring, and equally ambitious. While there may be understandable impatience to make it a reality, there is also something to be said for a process that moves at the speed of trust – the trust that needs to be built with partners, authorities, funders, residents, and Indigenous land stewards. But that doesn't mean you need to sit idle while the large project advances slowly!

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We all need to see the fruits of our labour, in order to feel encouraged and motivated to continue. Evergreen learned that lesson well in the early days of building momentum for the Brick Works redevelopment.

That's why we started out by piloting the farmers market, and then adding other placemaking elements – music, performances, gardens, community festivals and art installations. By activating the site early, we were able to spark visitors' imagination, build broad-based support for the big idea, and celebrate successes along the way.

7. What would be your vision of the FRANCON area in ten years' time?

There's tremendous power in the idea that Francon can be transformed from a utilitarian, industrial site to a flourishing community asset, connecting all parts of the neighbourhood, and creating new green, inclusive spaces for all to enjoy. Given the scale of the quarry, it has the potential to be a city-changing idea! Of course, it's not my vision to articulate, but the community's. What I can say is that when Evergreen began dreaming about revitalizing the Brick Works site, we started with a high-level vision that was clear, but had room for growth and change.

Then, we layered in more details and ideas as the project progressed, as new stakeholders joined us, and as our experimental pop-up programming taught us more about the site's potential.



The community's vision for Francon is so inspiring. My advice, based on our experience at Evergreen Brick Works, is to stay focused on that vision for the long term, while bringing it alive in smaller ways day-to-day. When I visited the Saint Michel neighbourhood, I saw pop-up markets, vibrant parks and green spaces, thriving gardens and community hubs. The big vision for Francon may take years to realize, but in many ways the community is fueling that vision every day, by ensuring Saint Michel is liveable, green and prosperous place for all to enjoy.

*Merci à Lois Lindsay
Équipe de VSMS*

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