



Le maire
Ville de Québec

Jean-Paul L'Allier Heritage Award 2024

Context

The historic district of Old Quebec has been on UNESCO's prestigious World Heritage List since 1985. This heritage gem is home to the best-preserved walled city north of Mexico, with over 400 years of colonial architecture.

Quebec City's City Hall sector is a key historical, tourist, religious, political, educational and commercial hub, bringing together major institutions such as City Hall, Notre-Dame-de-Québec Basilica-Cathedral, Maison Simons, Université Laval School of Arts, Musée de l'Amérique Française and Séminaire de Québec. This unique convergence site includes major transit axes for cars, public transit and active travel (walking, cycling).

The City Hall area is the city's most popular place for urban entertainment, hosting events for more than a third of the year, including the Québec City German Christmas Market, the Grand Prix cyclistes, the Fête de la Ville de Québec, entertainers during the summer season, and numerous ecclesiastical and ceremonial events.

The evolution of the public square over the years

Since 1647, this public square has been a gathering place. Around 1875, the two main axes of composition, north-south and east-west, appeared, structuring the space where pedestrians and horse-drawn carriages could circulate.

In 1900, the square was officially renamed Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville following the construction of the town hall. Built as a central island, it is bordered by roads that follow the slopes of the area. In 1923, the monument to Alexandre Taschereau, the first cardinal born and appointed in Canada, was incorporated into the square.

In 1984, the City of Quebec redeveloped the Place de l'Hôte-de-Ville to improve its use. The space was enlarged for pedestrians and events, while showcasing the built environment. Underground infrastructure was also upgraded as part of the redevelopment.

To mark Quebec City's 400th anniversary, between 2008 and 2015, over \$16 million was invested in redeveloping the Hôtel-de-Ville gardens. A water mirror, an urban garden, the Jura clock and square, and the Codex Populi artwork enhance the gardens.

In 2020, the city receives \$11.5 million in financial assistance from the provincial government to revitalize Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville and complete the redevelopment of the entire area. For its part, the city is investing an additional \$7 million to complete a project worthy of its value.

Vision

The redevelopment of Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville is based on a vision of sustainable development. The planning and design teams are identifying innovative, sustainable solutions that better respond to contemporary needs for commercial vitality, transportation (active, vehicular and public) and adaptation to climate change, while paying particular attention to the sustainability of this heritage jewel.

The main objective of the project is to enhance and optimize the square as a complete living environment. In addition to supporting the city's vision of sustainable development, the project meets 10 of the United Nations (UN) 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The project is based on seven key principles:

1. Respect the history of the site;
2. Enhance the value of the Monument Taschereau;
3. Ensuring the commemorative character of the site, as a place of gathering and representation of over 375 years of history;
4. Work to reconfigure the streets adjacent to the square into user-friendly streets;
5. Include existing trees in the design;
6. Suggest appropriate street furniture;
7. Highlighting the built environment;

The project has five objectives (design compositions):

1. Strengthen the dialogue between City Hall and the Basilica;
2. Create a public square, from facade to facade;
3. Extend the basilica's forecourt into the square for public events;
4. Create a friendly, welcoming, accessible and resilient environment;
5. Rework a more discreet street geometry for a friendly, wall-to-wall square.

Multi-purpose layout

With its new layout in harmony with the heritage character of Old Quebec, this public square more than ever meets the contemporary and future needs of this unique meeting place in Quebec City.

Completely reconfigured, enlarged and modernized in keeping with the historical legacy of the site, the enlarged public square offers greater comfort to users, with its surface area increased from 1,245 m² to almost 4,400 m², an increase in available space of almost 50%. The redevelopment of the square has enabled the space to be redesigned for the benefit of pedestrians, who are free to circulate and enjoy the area in complete peace and quiet. The width of sidewalks in the surrounding streets has been increased from 2 to 4 meters.

With the expansion of the central area and its modular layout to suit the seasons and types of activity, the site has gained in versatility, conviviality, safety and comfort to vibrate to the rhythm of events, summer and winter alike.

In addition to the numerous gains made in terms of universal accessibility, pedestrian safety and sustainable development, the meticulous design approach has enabled us to maintain and enhance the tree and building heritage despite numerous technical challenges.

Particular care had to be taken to protect the nearby heritage buildings, the archaeological remains beneath the public square and the roots of the hundred-year-old elms on the site. A major constraint to the redevelopment was the steep slope. In order to protect the trees' root systems and respond to the topographical constraints, a self-supporting structure was custom-designed to adapt to the singularity of the site. Today, the site and its surroundings boast a significant surface area of vegetation and 17 trees, five more than before the redevelopment.

Finally, the public square features noble materials, worthy of its value to Quebec City. On the ground, granite slabs and pavers lend prestige and cachet to the site, as well as being durable. The custom-made benches in cast aluminum and wood are unique to Quebec City. As for the site's illumination, the architectural lighting imagined restores a soul to the site and establishes a dialogue between City Hall and the Basilica, while reflecting its rich history.

Underground infrastructure repairs, wi-fi deployment and restoration of the Taschereau monument are also part of the project.

Universal accessibility

Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville is accessible to people with reduced mobility from two entrances, one on rue Sainte-Famille in front of the Basilica and the other on rue des Jardins in front of the Town Hall.

Illumination of the premises

Illuminating the heritage buildings and the square completes the redevelopment. The lighting is designed to awaken and reveal the nocturnal setting, focusing primarily on heritage elements such as the Taschereau monument and the trees. At night, the lighting scheme confirms the island's function as a refuge and its contribution to our collective memory. In synergy with the surrounding architectural gems, the illumination of the Place helps to reveal this important meeting place.

Animating the public square

The redevelopment of this public square provided the spark for Quebec City to create a new free event featuring street arts, Réverbère. The first edition will take place in October 2024, and will be repeated every year. Old Quebec is a wonderful playground for the street arts, and the new Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville will consolidate its central role through this new event, in addition to all those previously identified.

Innovative features: tree canopy protection and stormwater management

Protecting mature trees was a key element in the redevelopment of this new square. Five valuable mature trees - American elms, the emblematic tree of Quebec City - were preserved thanks to innovative solutions. A large part of the square was raised on a system of stilts and gratings so as not to disturb the natural soil in place, and thus prevent the mortality of these trees.

What's more, the flooring is composed of permeable paving slabs: their large joints allow rainwater to flow through the granular foundation, where it is then filtered before percolating into the soil to water tree roots, thus ensuring optimum rainwater management. This type of permeable paving also has the capacity to drain ice and snow during periods of thaw. The joints allow air to pass through to the tree roots for improved health.

The mayor of Quebec City,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Marchand', is positioned above the printed name.

Bruno Marchand

April 15, 2024