

# **AFFORDABILITY AND CHOICE TODAY (A•C•T) DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**

## **Downtown Revitalization**

**City of Drummondville, *la Société Biancamano, Bolduc* and *le Groupe Urbi*  
Drummondville, Quebec**

Prepared for:

**Federation of Canadian Municipalities**

**Canadian Home Builders' Association**

**Canadian Housing and Renewal Association**

**Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation**

Prepared by:

**Energy Pathways Inc.**

**Ottawa, Ontario**

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## FOREWORD

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The project documented in this case study received funding assistance under the Affordability and Choice Today (A•C•T) Program. A•C•T is a joint initiative, managed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Canadian Home Builders' Association, and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, together with the funding agency Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The A•C•T Program is administered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

A•C•T, which was launched in January 1990, was designed to foster changes to planning and building regulations and residential development approval procedures in order to improve housing affordability, choice and quality.

Through A•C•T, grants are awarded to municipalities, private and non-profit builders and developers, planners and architects to undertake innovative regulatory reform initiatives in municipalities across Canada. Three types of projects are awarded grants under the A•C•T Program: Demonstration Projects, Streamlined Approval Process Projects, and Case Studies (of existing initiatives).

- *Demonstration Projects* involve the construction of innovative housing that demonstrates how modifications to planning and construction regulations can improve affordability, choice and quality.

- *Streamlined Approval Process Projects* involve the development of a method or an approach that reduces the time and effort needed to obtain approvals for housing projects.
- *Case Study* grants are awarded for the documentation of existing regulatory reform initiatives.

Change and innovation require the participation of all the players in the housing sector. A•C•T provides a unique opportunity for groups at the local level to work together to identify housing concerns, reach consensus on potential solutions, and implement action. Consequently, a key component of A•C•T-sponsored projects is the participation and cooperation of various players in the housing sector in all phases of each project, from development to realization.

All projects awarded a grant under the A•C•T Program are documented as case studies in order to share information on the initiatives and the benefits of regulatory reform with other Canadian communities. Each case study discusses the regulatory reform initiative, its goals and the lessons learned. Where appropriate, the cost savings resulting from modifications in various planning, development, and construction regulations are calculated and reported.



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## PROJECT OVERVIEW

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The City of Drummondville, like many other municipalities in Quebec, has been losing its population to the suburbs. In the 20-year period between 1971 and 1991, nearly 15 percent of Drummondville's population moved from the inner city to outlying areas.

In 1991, the City adopted a downtown revitalization program to encourage people to remain in Drummondville. Among other things, the program provided for the creation of downtown residential districts, intended for young households traditionally attracted to the suburbs. The districts would combine single- and multi-family housing in the form of rental, cooperative and condominium units.

In February 1993, the City of Drummondville, working in cooperation with *la Société Biancamano, Bolduc* and *le Groupe Urbi*, received a grant under the A•C•T Program. The purpose of the project was to conduct a study to determine the financial and technical feasibility of revitalizing one of the downtown districts targeted by the city.

The project was carried out with the support of a number of local agencies, including *le Programme rues principales, la Société d'initiatives et de développement des artères commerciales Centre-ville, l'Association provinciale des*

*constructeurs d'habitations du Québec*, and the Chamber of Commerce.

The project team aimed to foster innovative and affordable housing in the Centre 1 District, adapted to the target client groups' needs. The team:

- Evaluated market trends
- Prepared development and architectural concepts
- Developed a financing and land assembly plan
- Reviewed the regulatory framework

Regulatory amendments were made to permit the implementation of the project in the Centre 1 District. The official community plan was modified to allow for the innovative approaches proposed by the project team. Zoning by-laws were amended so that land use would be in compliance with the revised official plan, and a siting and architectural integration plan was adopted for the area.

The project team found that it is possible to build, at reasonable cost, innovative housing units and create a quality downtown living environment.

Once lots are assembled and a financing program is established, it will be possible to redevelop the Centre 1 District following the approach proposed by the project team.



# 1.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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## 1.1 Downtown Revitalization

The City of Drummondville, like many other municipalities in Quebec, has been losing its population to the suburbs. In the 20-year period between 1971 and 1991, nearly 15 percent of Drummondville's population moved from the inner city to outlying areas.

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## 1.2 Project Objective

The overall project objective was to facilitate the revitalization of downtown Drummondville. The project team aimed to create development and architectural concepts for the Centre 1 District to attract the client groups that are

drawn to the type of housing available in the suburbs.

The target client groups were identified as the following:

- Young households wishing to purchase their first homes at competitive prices
- Households that include seniors
- Low-income households

## 1.3 Project Methodology

In addition to representatives of the City of Drummondville, *la Société Biancamano, Bolduc* and *le Groupe Urbi*, the project was carried out with the support of various local agencies, including:

- *Le Programme rues principales*
- *La Société d'initiatives et de développement des artères commerciales Centre-ville*
- *L'Association provinciale des constructeurs d'habitations du Québec*
- The Chamber of Commerce

The project team created a revitalization plan for the Centre 1 District, conducting the following activities:

- Evaluation of market trends
- Preparation of development and architectural concepts
- Development of a financing and land assembly plan
- Review of the regulatory framework

The revitalization plan for the Centre 1 District proposed by the project team offers quality of life and living environment, in the heart of the city and close to services. The proposed approach will make it possible to offer housing that

blends with the existing built environment at competitive and affordable prices.

The results of the study are summarized in the following section.

## 2.0 CENTRE 1 DISTRICT REVITALIZATION PLAN

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The results of the downtown revitalization study for the Centre 1 District are presented in *Programme A•C•T, Quartier du Centre I, Programme de mise en valeur*.<sup>1</sup> Highlights of the report are presented below.

### 2.1 Development Concept

Containing mostly vacant lots, the Centre 1 District of Drummondville is bounded by Lindsay Street, Desforges Boulevard, a railway line and the *Place Drummond* shopping centre. Figure 1 shows the location of the Centre 1 District in the city core.

The development concept is centred on a square land parcel, with extensive landscaping between the two main arteries where single- and multi-family units will be built. Figure 2 presents the site plan for the proposed development. Elements of the concept are discussed in the following.

#### *Access to Site and Road System*

A main entrance leads to central square, which will be accessed by an extensively landscaped boulevard.

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<sup>1</sup> *La Société Biancamano, Bolduc and le Groupe Urbi*, (December 1993). The report is available in French. A copy of the report may be purchased from Gérald Bolduc, *Société Biancamano, Bolduc*, 1385, rue Laurier est, Bureau 201, Montréal (Québec), H2J 1H6.

A copy may also be purchased or obtained on loan from the Canadian Housing Information Centre, 700 Montreal Road, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P7, Tel: (613) 748-2367, Fax: (613) 748-4069, TTY: (613) 748-2143.

Secondary entrances will lead to parking areas, and traffic will be one-way.

#### *Distribution and Siting of Buildings*

The development concept provides for the creation of 137 housing units in a variety of housing forms and densities:

- 49, two-storey row houses and semi-detached single-family units
- Five, three-storey quadruplexes and one, three-storey double quadruplex with commercial space on the ground floor
- Five, three-storey double sixplexes

The new buildings will be grouped by density. High-density dwellings will be situated along the main arteries, and low-density dwellings will be located in the centre of the project, away from the main arteries. The development pattern will encourage the preservation of the commercial character of the main arteries, as mixed-use buildings will include businesses on the ground floor and residential units on the upper floors.

#### *Green Spaces*

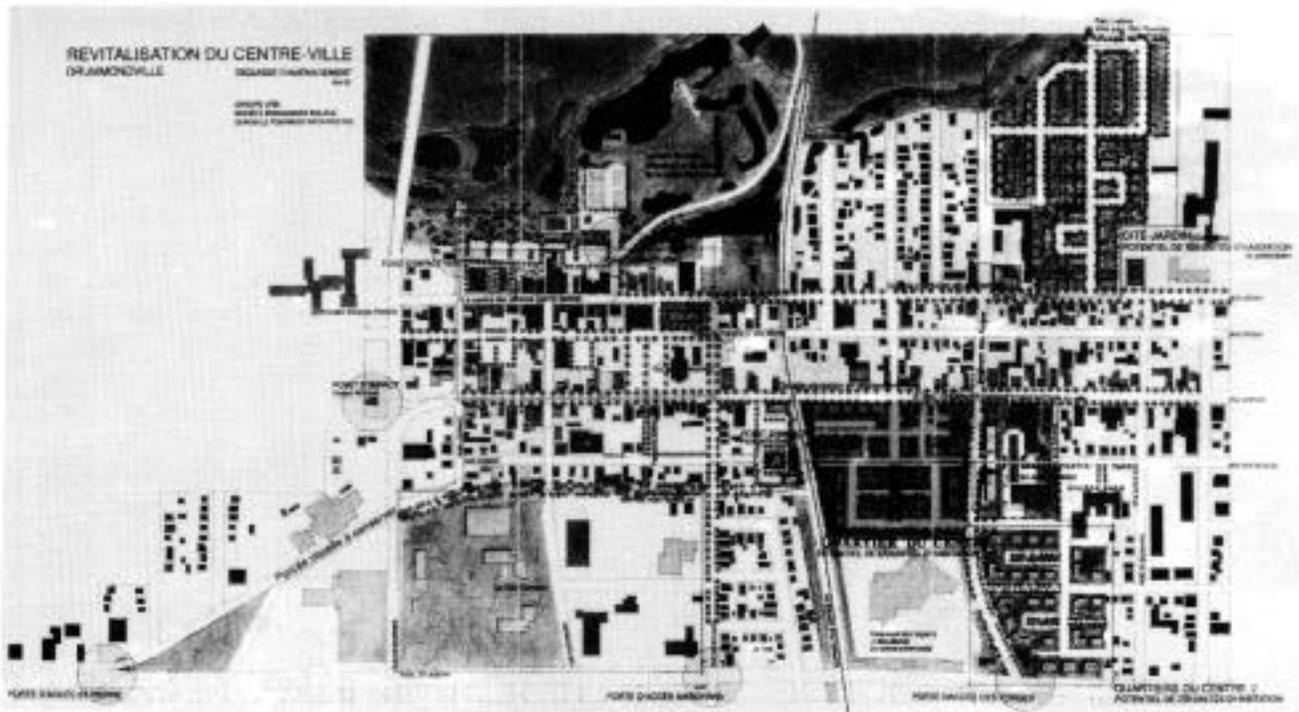
The development concept optimizes the number of housing units while retaining approximately 16 percent of the area for green space, including parks, buffer zones and pedestrian pathways. The location of housing units overlooking the square will promote maximum interaction between the units and green space. A landscaped embankment will conceal railway lines and act as a sound buffer. Trees will be planted along the main arteries and local roads.

### *Parking*

Parking will be provided on the basis of two parking spaces per low-density housing unit and 1.5 parking spaces

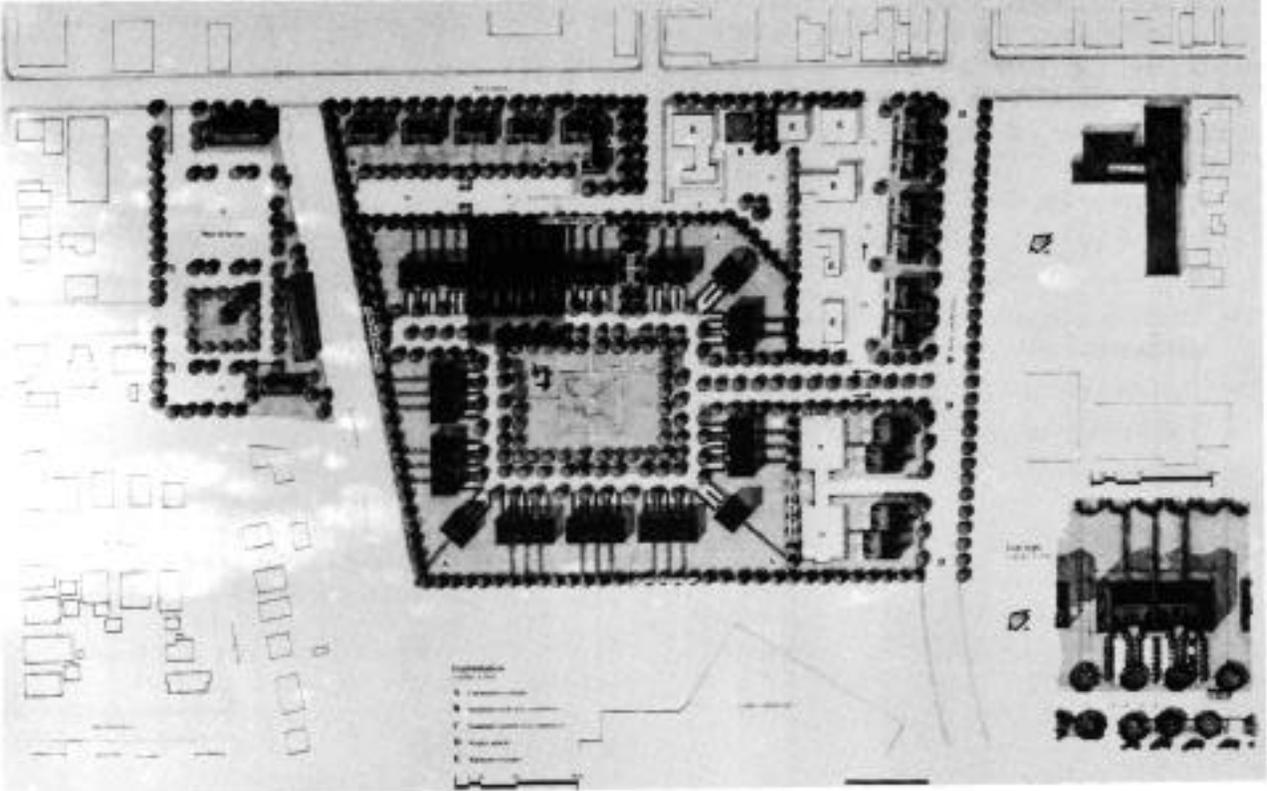
per high-density housing unit. These allocations were made based on available space. Public parking areas will also be provided for the commercial area.

**Figure 1. The Centre 1 District—Location**



Source: Société Biancamano, Bolduc

**Figure 2. The Centre 1 District—Site Plan**



Source: Société Biancamano, Bolduc

## 2.2 Architectural Concept

Both the single- and multi-family housing proposed for the Centre 1 District have architectural elements similar to those in *Le Carré Celanese*. This historic zone in the City of Drummondville contains residences reminiscent of country homes, cottages, and traditional British farms. These residences are characterized by the following:

- Sloped or gabled roofs, shed dormers and asphalt shingles
- Protected verandahs, bay windows and gable windows
- Earth-tone masonry and stucco walls
- Tall brick and baked-clay chimneys
- Protected entryways

### *Single-Family Units*

Single-family row and semi-detached units will be built on lots with an average area of 198 m<sup>2</sup> (2,131 ft<sup>2</sup>). The units will be 6 m wide and 9.7 m in length (20 ft. x 32 ft.), for a total area of 117 m<sup>2</sup> (1,259 ft<sup>2</sup>).

The layout features common areas (living room, dining room, kitchen and washroom) on the main floor, and three bedrooms and one complete bathroom on the second floor. The basement is unfinished.

Figures 3 and 4 show the front elevation and floor plans for the single-family row house units.

### *Multi-Family Units*

The multi-family units vary in size from 78 m<sup>2</sup> to 88 m<sup>2</sup> (840 ft<sup>2</sup> and 947 ft<sup>2</sup>) with a maximum width of 30 m (99 ft.) and a minimum length of 10 m<sup>2</sup> (108 ft<sup>2</sup>).

The interior layout of the double sixplex unit features living and dining areas at one end of the unit opening onto a balcony. The laundry room and the bathroom are located in the centre of the unit, with the bedrooms at the other end.

Figure 5 presents the front elevation for the double sixplex; figure 6 presents the floor plan for the second-floor double sixplex units.

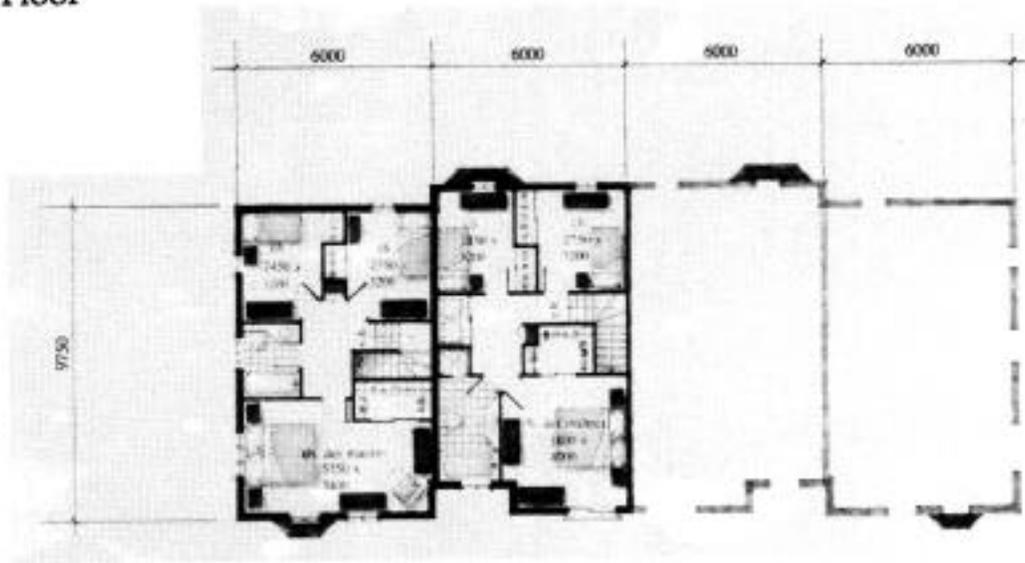
**Figure 3. Single-Family Row Houses—Front Elevation**



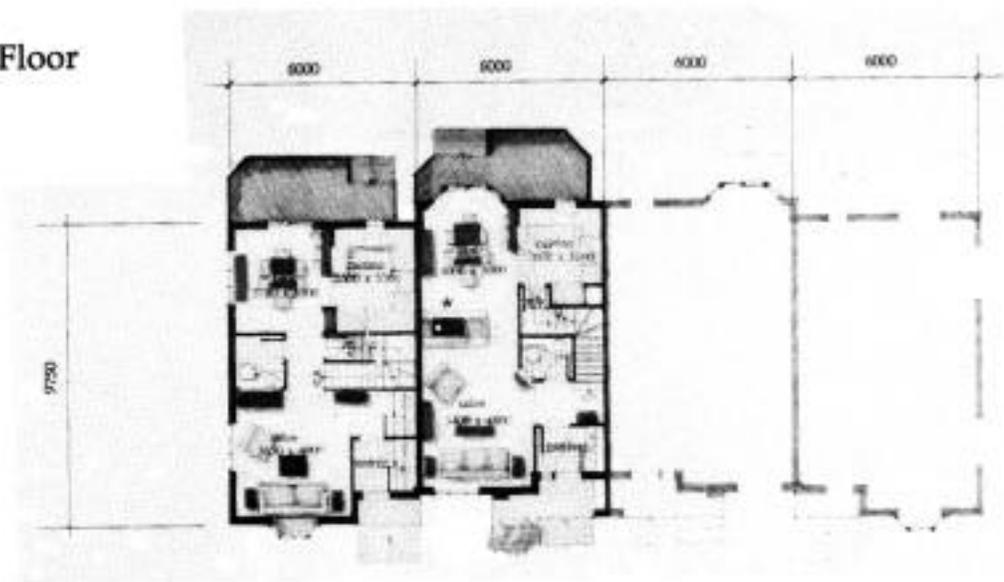
Source: Société Biancamano, Bolduc

**Figure 4. Single-Family Row Houses—Floor Plans**

**Second Floor**



**Ground Floor**



\* Fireplace optional

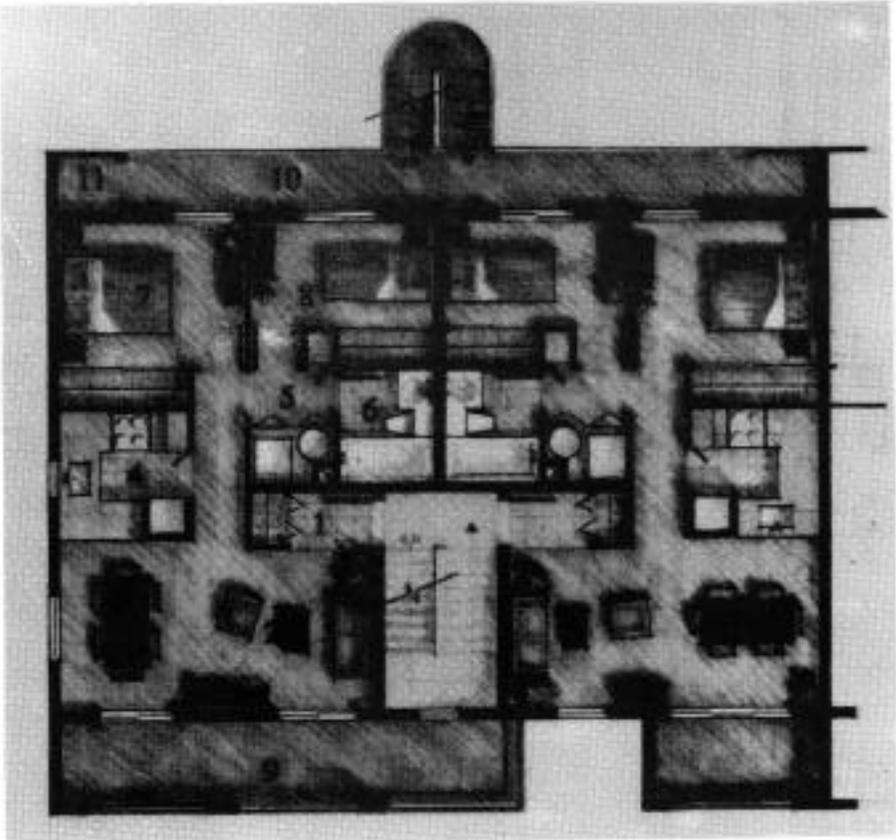
Source: Société Biancamano, Bolduc

**Figure 5. Double Sixplex—Front Elevation**



Source: Société Biancamano, Bolduc

**Figure 6. Second-Floor Double Sixplex Unit—Floor Plan**



Source: Société Biancamano, Bolduc

## 2.3 Project Costs

### *Land Assembly*

The project team analyzed three approaches to land acquisition and assembly. In all cases, the value of the lots does not include landscaping costs for the square (\$303,600), for the embankment (\$51,425) and for tree planting (\$59,250).

Under the first approach, the City would assemble and acquire the vacant lots for a total cost of \$2,688,141. This is based on a cost of \$107.64 per m<sup>2</sup> for lots on Lindsay Street and \$32.29 per m<sup>2</sup> for the other lots. Infrastructure costs would be \$950 per linear metre, with contingency costs estimated at 10 percent of the acquisition and infrastructure work costs.

To recover its investment, the City would need to sell the lots on Lindsay Street at \$139.94 per m<sup>2</sup> and the other lots at \$88.04 per m<sup>2</sup>.

Under the second approach, the vacant lots on Lindsay Street, plus one other lot already developed, would not be purchased. Acquisition costs would total \$1,276,670, based on values varying from \$5.31 per m<sup>2</sup> for inner lots to \$32.29 per m<sup>2</sup> for the lots adjacent to Desforges Boulevard. Infrastructure and contingency costs are calculated as in the first approach.

The City could sell the building lots at prices ranging from \$39.18 to \$129.25 per m<sup>2</sup>. This approach would make it possible to reduce the net cost of the lots to be used for residential purposes.

The third approach considered by the project team follows the second approach to acquiring and assembling the building lots, but reduces the infrastructure costs to \$610 per linear metre for sewer and aquaduct costs. A tax of \$340 per linear metre would be charged to the owners to cover paving, curbs and lighting, once the units are built.

In this case, the cost amounts to \$1,052,270. The City could sell the building lots at prices between \$37.67 and \$88.19 per m<sup>2</sup>.

### *Land and Construction Costs*

Land and construction costs for single-family row house units were estimated at \$79,000 to \$90,000 per unit, depending on the approach to land assembly chosen by the City.

Land and construction costs for a double sixplex were estimated at \$780,000, (\$100,000 of this being the estimated land cost), for a per unit cost of \$65,000.

## 2.4 Regulatory Changes

A number of regulatory amendments were made to permit the implementation of the project in the Centre 1 District. The City of Drummondville's official community plan was modified to incorporate the planning concepts developed by the project team.

Zoning by-laws were amended so that land use would be in compliance with the revised official community plan. Lots in Centre 1 District were rezoned from commercial to residential areas.

### *Siting and Architectural Integration Plan*

The adopted siting and architectural integration plan incorporated the project team's planning concepts.

When the development proceeds, the time involved in obtaining building and

subdivision permits should be minimized, as the detailed planning was completed in creating the siting and architectural integration plan.

#### ***Siting and Architectural Integration Plans***

*Siting and architectural integration plans are a provision of Quebec's Loi sur l'aménagement et l'urbanisme, introduced in June 1989, which provide municipalities with greater flexibility in applying their by-laws. These plans make it possible to achieve the following:*

- *Better siting and architectural quality for projects*
- *Effective application of regulatory standards while being attentive to quality objectives*

*A municipality can require a siting and architectural integration plan, before issuing subdivision and building permits, which provides information on such aspects as a building's siting, vehicular access, landscaping and other features.*

## 3.0 THE COMMUNITY AND THE KEY PLAYERS

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### 3.1 Drummondville, Quebec

Between 1971 and 1991, Drummondville's population dropped sharply by 15 percent, from 40,882 to 34,462. During this time, the population of the suburban area, encompassing the municipalities of Grantham-West, Wendover, Simpson and Saint-Nicéphore, jumped from 7,000 to 20,000.

The type of housing available in Drummondville compared to that available in the suburbs contributed to the outward migration. Single-detached housing represents 31 percent of the real estate market in the city, while 75 percent of housing in the suburbs is single-detached. The majority of multi-family housing is in the city.<sup>2</sup>

The A•C•T demonstration project was initiated in accordance with an action plan developed by the City of Drummondville for the downtown revitalization program.

*La Direction générale et le Service de l'habitation et du développement urbain* participated in all aspects of the feasibility study. In addition, Drummondville's City Council organized consultation sessions throughout the project.

### 3.2 *La Société Biancamano, Bolduc and Le Groupe Urbi*

*La Société Biancamano, Bolduc*, an urban planning consulting firm, was responsible for determining development criteria, developing the architectural concept and evaluating proposals for executing the work.

*Le Groupe Urbi* was responsible for putting the initial project together, and for the financial component of the study.

### 3.3 Consultation and Cooperation

This project was made possible through the collaboration of a number of other project participants, listed in section 1.3, as well as consultation with residents of Drummondville.

The consultation process carried out by the project team provided the opportunity for a number of organizations, citizens, interest groups and builders and developers to comment on the project. Many expressed their support for the Centre 1 District revitalization project. Suggestions for improvements were considered by the project team in finalizing the implementation plan.

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<sup>2</sup> Population statistics are from the 1986 and the 1991 Statistics Canada Census. The data on housing types are from housing start surveys conducted by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in 1986.

## **4.0 REGULATORY REFORM INITIATIVES AND IMPACT ON HOUSING COST, CHOICE AND QUALITY**

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As discussed in section 2.3, the cost of single-family row house units was estimated at \$79,000 to \$90,000. The average selling prices in the area start at \$65,000 for a unit in Drummondville, and \$50,000 in the suburbs.

The value of the double sixplex units, if they were sold as condominiums, was estimated at \$65,000. The project team estimated that a monthly rent set at \$562 would ensure a 10 percent return on an initial 25 percent capital investment to finance and build the double sixplexes.

The estimated housing costs compare favourably to the current market when the quality of the housing, downtown

location and services offered are taken into account.

The project team demonstrated that it would be financially and technically feasible to develop attractive, affordable housing in an urban core area—housing that could compete successfully with suburban markets and encourage residents to remain or to relocate to a central district.

Once lots are assembled and a financing program is established, revitalization of the Centre 1 District can proceed, following the approach proposed by the project team.