

FOR QUALITY, ATTRACTIVE, AND HEALTHY LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT – SUMMARY

TOWARD A NATIONAL URBAN AND LAND USE PLANNING STRATEGY



Cover photo: Axel Drainville

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SUMMARY

Since January 27, 2021, numerous experts and key players in government, municipalities, associations, and universities, and members of civil society, have engaged in numerous discussions at committee meetings, think tanks, and innovation laboratories to assist the government's reflection on urban and land use planning. The aim of this great national discussion among municipal leaders, First Nations and Inuit, the general public, and associations and groups involved in land development is to provide Québec with a national strategy on creating sustainable living environments that promote the health and well-being of those who live in them.

This consultation document reports on the findings, vision, and potential solutions put forward during the discussions that have taken place to date and lays the foundations for Québec's development based on sustainability and quality of life.

A broader consultation for a shared vision

Over the summer, Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Habitation will increase the number of communication channels and discussion opportunities so it can take comments on the proposed orientations from both the general public and key players. Citizens and interested groups will be able to participate in the discussions through an online consultation in French, an opportunity to take part in a process that will shape not only the way we use the land, but also our lifestyles and the quality of the environments in which our communities develop.

To develop a coherent strategy, it is important to have a clear idea of the current situation and define the objectives accordingly. The first step in this vast undertaking was to get an accurate picture of land use planning in Québec.

A preliminary overview was first drawn up by the Ministère, in collaboration with the some fifteen government departments and agencies involved in urban and land use planning. This preliminary overview was then the subject of consultations with municipal and civil society organizations, as well as researchers and specialists with specific expertise in the issues targeted by the strategy.

The work is organized along five main axes:

- Governance
- Urban growth
- Living environments
- Rurality
- Finances and taxation

The Ministère, in collaboration with other departments and agencies, will draft the strategy during the fall of 2021 and winter of 2022, for publication in April 2022. Thus the work will take place over a total of 15 months, divided into four main stages.

The following pages provide a summary of the vision, the preliminary orientations, and avenues to explore for each orientation.

One vision, five main axes

In 2042, Québec's territory is considered to be a common heritage, a non-renewable and precious resource, a legacy for future generations, an integral part of the national identity. Quebecers are proud to live in complete, high quality, friendly, and inclusive living environments that contribute to the health, safety, well-being, and development of all. These living environments promote sustainable mobility and are adapted to the impacts of climate change without contributing to it.

This vision is complemented by the following five principles:

- Quality of life, health, and equity
- Resilience and responsible use of resources
- Protection of natural environments and cultural heritage
- Attractiveness, vitality, and complementarity
- Community commitment, expertise, and government exemplarity

Main axis 1: Governance

Land use planning requires society to make choices about how it wants to use its territory. Decisions are made at different levels, including the government, municipalities, and the public. Although Québec has a robust legislative and regulatory framework governing land use planning, discussions among key players consulted to date have revealed deficiencies in the monitoring mechanisms at various decision-making levels, tools whose potential is underused, and a disconnect between current issues and those addressed by the legislative and regulatory mechanisms in place.

The government recognizes that it must reaffirm and strengthen its leadership in the area of land use planning by rallying municipal leaders and the public around a powerful vision based on sustainable development, the health and well-being of all, and a balanced environment, without compromising economic development. It must also strengthen existing mechanisms to ensure that its actions are in line with its own land use planning framework.

Discussions with First Nations and Inuit representatives revealed that Aboriginal communities feel that they are not sufficiently involved in certain discussions and planning processes that concern them, particularly with respect to development projects. They also emphasized that there needs to be more dialogue and collaboration between Aboriginal communities and land use planning authorities to ensure that Aboriginal issues are given greater consideration.

The orientations explored in this document therefore provide for:

- An in-depth reflection on the land use planning framework to promote the development of sustainable communities
- A government that applies its own guidelines consistently and in an exemplary fashion
- Consideration of First Nations and Inuit realities before decisions are made

Main axis 2: Urban growth

Current land development practices in Québec encourage land use patterns that are costly both from a public finance perspective and in human and environmental terms. Urban sprawl perpetuates the use of cars to access services, to the detriment of active modes of transportation that are healthier for people and the environment. To create quality spaces, prevent the destruction of environments of interest, and help Québec meet the challenges of climate change, we need to develop the land in such a way as to concentrate the population near services while preserving agricultural land and natural environments. Tax incentives and wise transportation choices also have a role to play.

The orientations currently being considered concern:

- Integrated planning of land use and transportation promoting sustainable mobility
- Human-scale densification of living environments near services
- Protection and enhancement of non-urbanized areas, including agricultural land and natural environments

Main axis 3: Living environments

Land use planning is a major determinant of quality of life, both collectively and individually. Québec is currently faced with the devitalization of certain communities, a deficit of natural areas that are essential to people's mental and physical health, the loss of heritage sites, and families suffering from limited access to quality housing and local services. Landscapes must be protected and industrial zones consolidated and reserved for activities that are incompatible with living environments, especially those associated with heavy industry. All too often, health and well-being are overlooked in land use planning decisions, even though our quality of life depends on them.

The land use planning orientations are therefore designed to promote:

- Living environments that provide access to nature and everyday services
- Ways to revitalize communities and devitalized areas
- Health and safety for all in order to build sustainable and resilient communities

Main axis 4: Rurality

Rural areas as living environments are multiple and diverse. Québec is lucky to have some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. This rich territory offers significant opportunities for farming and resort activities and access to natural environments. Over time, however, our practices have prevented us from properly preserving and taking advantage of these assets. Optimal planning would allow for a more harmonious land use mix and attenuate potential conflicts. The current development framework is practically uniform throughout Québec and applies to both urban and rural areas, despite the fact that their respective realities are different. Québec would gain by considering the diversity and vitality of rural areas as central components of sustainable development and dynamic land use.

Main axis 5: Finances and taxation

The current tax system and financial mechanisms affect numerous development choices. While they can drive development, they can also lead to decisions aimed at obtaining new short- or medium-term revenue for municipalities. The decisions are sometimes to the detriment of natural environments, and their effects must be considered from a longer-term perspective. These practices must support Québec's vision of its development and encourage responsible choices focused on sustainable development, for the benefit of all.

SUMMARY OF ORIENTATIONS

Main axis 1 – Governance

Orientation	Avenues to explore
Orientation 1: A new land use planning framework for sustainable communities	▪ A results-based approach to more efficiently update and harmonize plans on multiple scales and further empower the parties involved ▪ A land use planning framework that makes for agile municipalities and takes regional specificities into account (government policy directions regarding land use planning, urban planning tools, etc.) ▪ Inclusion of sustainable development principles and current planning and development issues (climate change, energy transition, healthy lifestyles, maintenance of built heritage, biodiversity conservation, sustainable mobility, etc.) in the land use planning framework, particularly in the Act respecting land use planning and development and in the government policy directions regarding land use planning ▪ A collaborative approach and partnership between the government and the parties concerned (regional and metropolitan stakeholders, municipal bodies, and civil society), as well as government support for communities ▪ A greater role for regional county municipalities (RCM), especially in arbitrating supralocal issues ▪ A land use planning and development plan that pulls together the various plans affecting RCMs ▪ Greater consideration for the role of municipal planners to ensure optimal use of their urban planning tools ▪ Recognition and support for expertise and sharing of resources at different scales ▪ Resident understanding of the land use framework ▪ Greater collaboration among supralocal entities

Orientation 2:

A government that consistently supports responsible land use planning and development in an exemplary fashion

- Public analyses of the anticipated impacts of land use planning choices on the territory and its resources
- Optimal placement of government equipment and infrastructure and compliance with the land use planning framework, especially the government policy directions regarding land use planning
- Ministère's leadership within the government (coordination, arbitration, etc.) with respect to land use planning and development based on active and effective collaboration with departments and agencies in line with their respective responsibilities and expertise
- Mechanisms to ensure that land use and urban planning issues are better taken into account in the implementation of government department and agency plans and projects
- Government-funded projects and financial support programs that encourage sustainable land use planning

Orientation 3:

Processes that promote a sustainable, integrated approach to land use planning in northern areas

- Better knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of key players in land use planning and the applicable framework in northern Québec
- Identification of land use planning issues and tools based on the specific characteristics and needs of northern Québec
- Sustainable land use planning in northern areas (e.g., access to the land, protection of heritage and natural environments, infrastructure security, and housing)
- Greater land use planning support from the government for local key players based on northern agreements

Orientation 4:

Greater dialogue with First Nations on land use planning before decisions are made

- Land use planning processes that take First Nations' points of view into account
 - New discussion forums for gathering First Nations' input on land use planning
 - Closer cooperation between key players in land use planning and First Nations
 - Promotion of exemplary practices regarding interactions between municipal partners and First Nations
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Main axis 2 – Urban growth

Orientation

Avenues to explore

Orientation 5:

Compact distribution of urban growth that supports Québec's competitiveness, protects undeveloped areas, and curbs urban sprawl

- Growth concentrated in urbanized areas that already have infrastructure and facilities
- Planning choices that limit resource use
- Optimal placement of housing and activities
- Human-scale densification of existing living environments
- Requalification of underused spaces and redevelopment of urban wastelands prioritized according to community needs (new construction, public spaces, ecosystem restoration, etc.)
- Protection and enhancement of all non-urban areas, including agricultural land and natural areas, in particular to ensure connectivity between them

Orientation 6:

Integrated planning of land use and transportation promoting sustainable mobility

- Channeling of urban growth near access points to the public transit and active transportation network
- Development practices that reduce dependence on cars and decrease GHG emissions
- Increased cohabitation of uses in the vicinity of existing infrastructure, equipment, and strategic transportation facilities, to maintain their efficiency
- Access to everyday goods and essential services through active transportation, and access to places of employment via more sustainable mobility
- Intermodal transportation, both for people and goods, and universal access to transportation services and infrastructure

Main axis 3 – Living environments

Orientation

Avenues to explore

Orientation 7:

Complete living environments designed to provide access to nature and everyday services

- Human scale living environments encouraging sustainable and active mobility
- A diversity of uses and optimal placement of local services
- A sufficient supply of quality, accessible, and affordable housing that meets a diversity of needs
- Private, public, and community neighborhood services that help create fair, inclusive, quality living environments
- Greening of our communities and green and blue spaces in urban areas that are accessible to all, particularly through active and public transportation, and that promote biodiversity conservation
- Attractive, accessible, adaptable, and multifunctional streets and public spaces

Orientation 8:

Communities relying on their dynamism and full development

- Vital city centers, neighborhood cores, village cores, and heritage sites
- Development of natural and cultural heritages and landscapes as an economic driver and a source of vitality for communities
- Optimal placement of economic activities in relation to land use planning
- Growth of economic development hubs that contribute to complete living environments
- Development of commercial spaces that contribute to community vitality
- Optimal planning of areas earmarked for heavy industry

Orientation 9:

Healthy and safe environments that contribute to sustainable and resilient communities

- Land use practices and planning that allow for better adaptation to current and anticipated effects of climate change and various hazards and that reduce environmental vulnerability
- Greater consideration of natural and man-made constraints in planning and development practices
- Harmonious cohabitation of uses to ensure public health and safety in line with sustainable development principles
- Greater consideration of seasonality in land use planning

Main axis 4 – Rurality

Orientation

Orientation 10:

The diversity and vitality of rural areas as central to sustainable development and dynamic land use planning

Avenues to explore

- Greater consideration of local specificities in planning guidelines and documents
- Development of mineral, forest, land, and agricultural resources in collaboration with the key players involved
- Judicious land planning practices to ensure harmonious cohabitation and respect for the characteristics of different environments when new activities, such as new natural and recreational areas, are added to existing environments
- Promotion and protection of natural areas, biodiversity, landscapes, and heritage sites in rural areas
- Consideration of the importance of rural service areas and how enhancing them can affect surrounding communities
- Land use planning that promotes sustainable mobility for the benefit of communities
- Protection of agricultural land and the primacy of agricultural activities in agricultural areas to help increase food autonomy
- Sustainable land use planning that takes into account the demographic challenges that certain areas are or will be facing

Main axis 5 – Finances and taxation

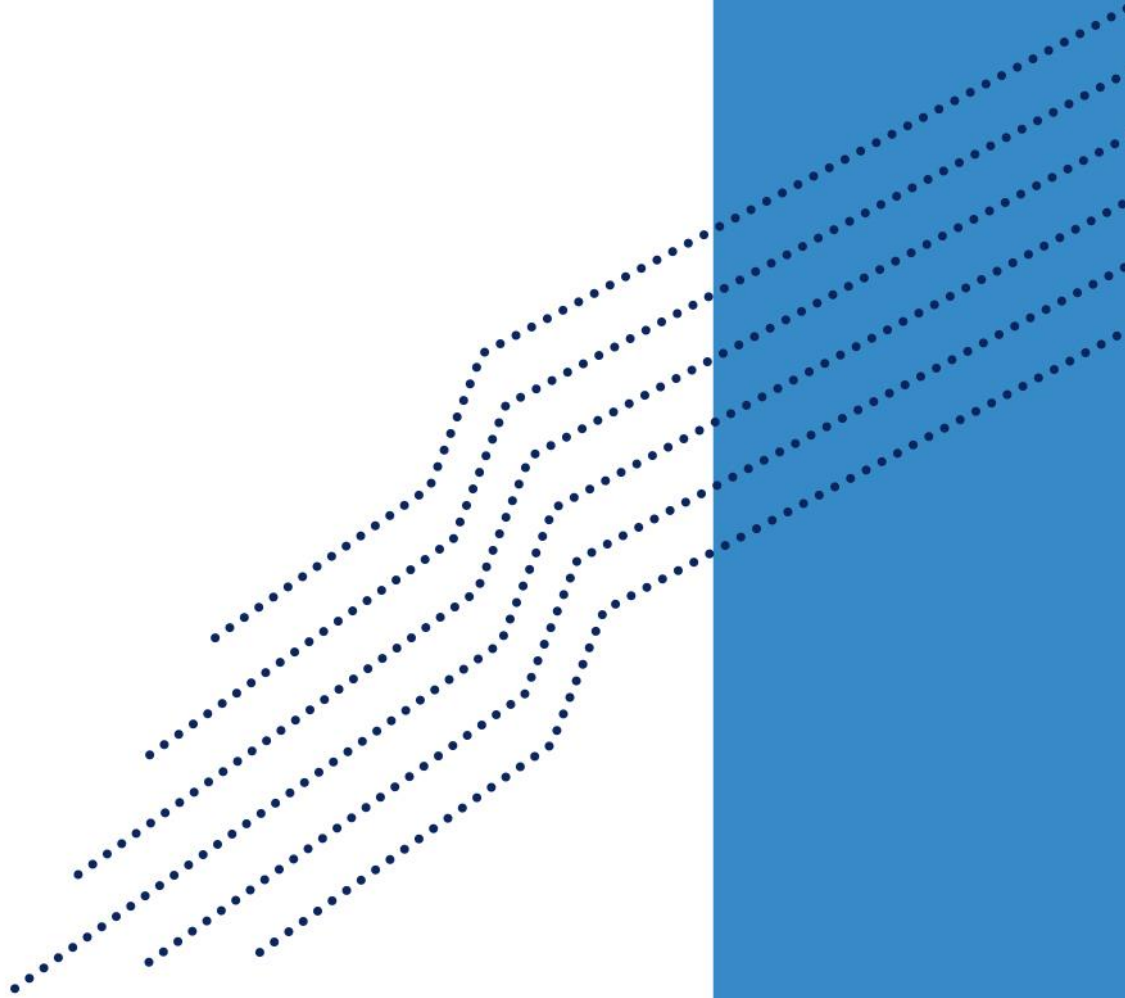
Orientation

Orientation 11:

Informed planning and taxation choices that contribute to sound public finances and sustainable land use planning for the benefit of all

Avenues to explore

- Development and dissemination of knowledge about the costs associated with different management models and the value of ecosystem services
- Internalization of land development costs to optimize the use of public infrastructure and services
- Government and municipal financial tools that support sustainable land use planning and development (financial assistance programs, municipal reserves for infrastructure and sustainable development, funds supporting good practices, ecoconditionality criteria, etc.)
- Tax measures that make better use of existing powers and promote the consolidation of existing environments and sustainable development of the territory



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