

Drainage project set to transform flood spot

St. Boniface

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St. Norbert stakeholders are working to transform a traditionally flood-affected part of the community for future generations.

The St. Norbert Water Stewardship Coalition has been working with landscape architects Scalliff+Miller+Murray for the past year to develop a concept plan — dubbed Drainage Inside the Dike. The plan was presented at an open house to gauge community feedback and input on Dec. 8.

The plan focuses on an area that includes St. Norbert Community Centre, St. Norbert Farmers' Market, Ecole Noel Ritchot and the Behavioural Health Foundation.

A key organizer said the main goals of the plan are to improve drainage in an environmentally-responsible way through the development of natural systems — known as bioretention systems — and simultaneously build an engaging community space.

"St. Norbert is besieged with water problems, which do not respect property ownership lines," said area resident Janice Lukes, the coalition's project manager.

"And while most of the water problems come in the spring with floodwaters, many of the problems are year-round



(From left to right) Ron Buzahora, Janice Lukes and Bruce Berry stand at the site of the Drainage Inside the Dike project, with the Behavioural Health Foundation and Ecole Noel Ritchot in the background.

Photo by Simon Fuller

because the community is inside a dike. "When it rains, some water goes down the city's stormwater drainage system, but not all of it, because the land has not been developed in a cohesive manner to channel all the water into the system."

Lukes said the coalition is working with architects and planners to showcase a drainage solution "using an innovative and sustainable approach" instead of piping water into stormwater drains and flushing it into the Red River.

Another project organizer said it "will be nice to recycle and reuse the water energy" in the dike, that sits at the north-east corner of the targeted area. "I think this whole project will give the

community a green space it will want to use," said Ron Buzahora, a long-time area resident who is involved with several local organizations and is chair of the BHF.

"What's really exciting is that I've lived in St. Norbert for more than 30 years and this area is a hidden jewel," said Buzahora, who was principal of St. Norbert Collegiate for a decade. "The farmers' market has grown into one of the best in Canada and now there's the new golf course, the raising of the floodway and Duff Roblin Provincial Park," he added, noting the project will also pay tribute to the areas' Métis and aboriginal heritage.

Buzahora is excited about getting the

community's feedback on the project — which will be done in phases — and said architects have done their due diligence.

Area resident Bruce Berry, of the St. Norbert Foundation, said the possibilities for the plan include walking paths, hiking trails, a school football field — even an amphitheatre.

"By getting foliage, we can get some shade. We're looking at the idea of an amphitheatre, as downtown St. Norbert has no public stage to hold events right now," Berry said.

The coalition is made up of approximately 15 local organizations, including Rivers West and the St. Boniface-based Entreprises Riel.