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HABITAT VERIDIS FINALLY TAKING SHAPE



Construction is in progress on single-family homes for Habitat Veridis in Laval. The homes vary in appearance, but adhere to controlled architectural styles. PHOTO COURTESY OF HABITAT VERIDIS

JOEL CEAUSU
SPECIAL TO THE MONTREAL GAZETTE

Habitat Veridis, like most big construction projects, took some time getting started. But in this case, there was an extra detour.

The parcel of undeveloped land at the northern limits of Île Jésus is one of the largest residential real-estate projects in the region, but it wasn't zoning issues slowing things — it went from agricultural to residential years ago.

No, said Michel Benatar, vice-president of development for Montreal-based developer SIDEV, it was the political upheaval in Laval and its municipal administrations, trapping many projects in a protracted bureaucratic web, making everything take that much longer.

"It's been on the table since 2004," Benatar said, "and we finally got the go-ahead one year ago. The mess certainly didn't help us and the paralysis at city hall delayed us by about five years."

Veridis is now in full swing, and already seeing takers in the new Auteuil neighbourhood that will ultimately boast about 1,800 new homes and is valued at almost \$1 billion.

Of course, part of the appeal of the 3.6-million-square-foot development is location. South of the Mille Îles River and west of Pap-

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ALEXANDRE BOUHADANA, SIDEV

We only chose quality builders and we approve their models. They can't build (just) anything they want...

MICHEL BENATAR, SIDEV

ineau (the soon-to-be completed A-19), Veridis residents will be within walking distance of Laurentides Blvd., a few more blocks to the AMT's Ste-Rose commuter train station, and a five-minute ride from Highway 440, Carrefour Laval and Cité de la santé Hospital.

Expected to be a 10-year undertaking, Habitat Veridis represents a huge influx of people and vigour for north-central Laval, one of the island's oldest districts.

"This is the last piece of untouched land up here," said Alexandre Bouhadana, SIDEV vice-president of finance, ever mindful of the delay getting the project going. "Our objective is to develop this as fast as possible; no one wants to sit in their brand-new home and see dust and trucks everywhere."

"You can come here from anywhere," Benatar said, noting many

buyers hail from the North Shore "wanting to get a little closer to the island of Montreal, but not too close."

The project represents not only a massive transformation of fallow land the size of 50 football fields, but the creation of an actual village of almost 5,000 people. "The city will get big revenue from this project," Benatar added.

The two-phase plan is arranged around a central park which, when completed, will measure 700,000 square feet and feature a bike path, gazebos, play fields and more.

The southern first phase offers a mix of detached and semi-detached single-family homes, triplexes and condominiums, as well as apartment rentals and 100 units in a five-storey condo building — the iVie — for the 55-plus crowd.

More than two dozen homes have

already been built and delivered by SIDEV, who brought along a roster of renowned builders — Construction Voyer, Presti Demeures, Beauchamp Ouellet & fils, and KF Construction, a Laval-based firm that begins digging on the 24 Phase 1 triplexes in a few weeks.

Selling for about \$695,000 each — with half already sold — the response has been tremendous, Bouhadana said, virtually assuring that more triplexes are to come in Phase 2. "What we see are many people looking at acquiring a revenue property, or living in a multi-generational home," he said. "For many buyers, it's an interesting proposition."

Veridis is surrounded by agricultural land and long developed spaces, so it's the sector's first transformation. "There was large demand for this from many locals," uninspired by old housing stock yet enamoured with the area, Benatar said. "They love the area and want to bring their family here; it's an absolute trend."

Expected to finish in three years, Phase 1 will include 450 condo units in addition to mixed housing targeting a variety of buyers — from highly custom detached homes approaching \$1 million to modestly sized condo units for the first-time buyer or empty nester.

SEE PROJECT ON **G4**



Habitat Veridis is being built around a central park which, when complete, will measure 700,000 square feet and feature a bike path, gazebos, playing fields, and more. This artist's rendering shows Phase 1 of Veridis, south of the park, which will feature a large mix of homes — from 10-storey condo buildings with elevators, to upscale single-family detached homes.