



CASE STUDY | COMMON THREADS: WEAVING CLIMATE ACTION IN MONTREAL

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Montreal is a city with a diverse ecosystem of changemakers who are committed to engaging in novel collaborations to advance climate action on multiple fronts, from organizing neighbourhood assemblies to co-create equitable ways of living together to developing bold partnerships across multiple sectors. This case study looks at how a group of actors in the Montreal climate ecosystem engages with residents to leverage relationships and build a shared vision for collective action and social change. #ClimateAction #Montreal #TransitionCities

OVERVIEW

In 2020, the City of Montreal launched the Montreal Climate Plan 2020-2030, which sets out a strategy to make the city greener and more resilient by working with residents and stakeholders from across sectors to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

The development of the Climate Plan has been shaped by the City of Montreal's commitment to climate action in response to the global and local contexts of the 21st century. The signing of the One Planet Charter at the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco in September 2018 and the Montreal Climate March in September 2019 contributed to inform the development of the Climate Plan. The Plan's strategy and goals also stem from the City of Montreal's commitment at

About Montreal's administrative landscape

There are 16 municipalities in the agglomeration of Montreal: 15 reconstituted cities plus Montreal, which has 19 boroughs. The agglomeration manages common services (e.g., police, fire, water production and wastewater treatment). The reconstituted cities, downtown Montréal and the boroughs possess jurisdiction over domains such as public works, libraries, and sports and recreation. These administrative entities also share other jurisdictions, such as urban planning and mobility.

Source: [City of Montreal](#)

the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit to decrease greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 55 per cent below 1990 levels by 2030. Lastly, the pandemic marked a pivotal moment in the discussion on equity and the climate emergency as it shed light on the unequal impacts of COVID-19 and the climate crisis among residents, and the need to collaborate across sectors to ensure a just and equitable economic recovery while respecting [our planetary boundaries](#).

Civic mobilization is critical in order to effectively respond to the climate crisis and to reach carbon neutrality. This can only be done through collaboration between residents, city staff, community organizations, all levels of government and businesses. Developed collaboratively by the City of Montreal, an advisory committee and a co-creation group, the Montreal Climate Plan for 2020-2030 provides a framework for the development of local actions to embark on this transition. In addition, several organizations have been contributing to drive a just and equitable climate transition across Montreal by mobilizing residents, sharing best practices and building a common vision of what a transition can look like in neighbourhoods. These organizations continue to play a central role in supporting citizen-led action and raising awareness of the urgency to act.

MONTREAL: A VIBRANT ECOSYSTEM FOR CLIMATE ACTION



Photo credit: [Matthieu Joannon](#)

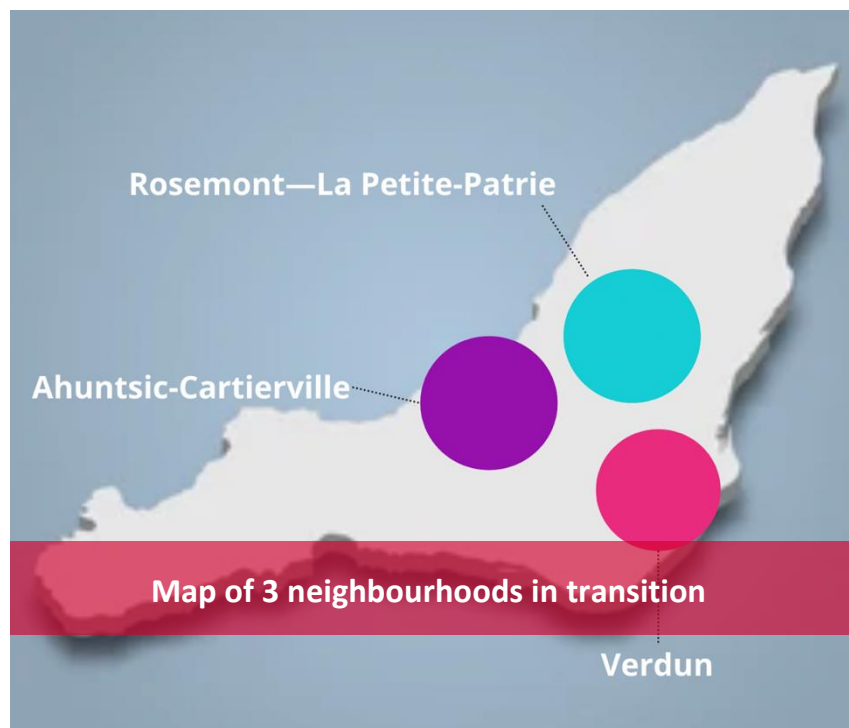
The Montreal climate ecosystem has a diverse group of actors engaging in climate action on multiple fronts, from strengthening food security in neighbourhoods to mobilizing residents to participate in active transportation policy discussions. There is a deep level of engagement and a collective awareness of the urgency to act that has been growing as a result of the movement-building work that leaders from the community and private sectors, advocates and researchers have been championing over the past decades. This level of engagement is also driven by a common vision of priorities, including mobility, food security, energy transition, civic engagement and the circular economy. Demain Verdun, Mobilisation environnement Ahuntsic-Cartierville and Solon are examples of resident-led groups that

are exploring some of these priorities as they engage in conversations with community members on building a just and equitable socioecological transition.

Residents are also involved in supporting social change by being part of coalitions and partnerships to strengthen the collective capacity to drive bold action. The Montreal Climate Coalition is connecting residents, political decision-makers and other stakeholders involved in energy transition work, such as researchers and activists, to support carbon neutrality by 2042 (Montreal's 400th anniversary). Through their mobilization efforts, including the [#MTL400 Declaration](#) and publications such as white papers and consultation briefs, the Coalition contributes to shaping consensus around pillars of climate governance, including participatory carbon budgeting and more timely GHG emissions inventories. The [Montreal Climate Partnership](#) is mobilizing civil society to help reduce its carbon footprint by leveraging relationships between philanthropic, community, economic and institutional groups to reduce Montreal's GHG emissions by 55% by 2030 and to achieve carbon neutrality and strengthen the city's resilience by 2050, in line with the city's Climate Plan.

The Montreal climate action ecosystem is rooted in a culture of social solidarity and democracy, which in turn contributes to the emergence of novel approaches for systems change. For example, last year, the City of Montreal set aside \$10 million to carry out ideas proposed by residents through a participatory budget exercise which resulted in the implementation of [seven projects](#) that contribute to the city's socioecological transition. Another example is the recent launch of the [Campus de la transition écologique](#), which involves a diverse group of changemakers and demonstrates the potential of collective action to develop tangible climate solutions through research, experimentation and awareness. The initial themes of the Campus are inspired by the natural landscape of its location in [Parc Jean-Drapeau](#), and are linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals: agriculture and biodiversity, water cycle and wetlands, forestry, citizenship and climate justice, culture and heritage, and energy and mobility.

SNAPSHOT OF THREE NEIGHBOURHOODS IN TRANSITION



DEMAIN VERDUN – MOBILIZING ACTION FOR A MORE RESILIENT FUTURE

In 2018, [Emmanuelle Falaise](#) gathered with some neighbours on her Verdun balcony to discuss democracy and what a neighbourhood-based ecological transition could look like, inspired by the optimism showcased in the book [Demain le Québec](#), which portrays stories of residents helping create a greener and more democratic world. These conversations evolved into what is now Demain Verdun: an optimistic and non-partisan movement to accompany residents in Verdun's socioecological transition by collaborating with local organizations and promoting the development of resident-led initiatives.

Demain Verdun believes in the potential of participation and civic action to help communities achieve a socioecological transition while fostering a sense of belonging and social solidarity. The movement gained momentum following a public consultation in 2018 that led to the launch of working groups and local projects. Demain Verdun has also gained recognition from organizations in the social innovation ecosystem, including the [Maison de l'innovation sociale \(MIS\)](#) for their participation in the [2018-2019 Civic Incubator cohort](#).

The movement is also collaborating with the [Maison de l'environnement de Verdun](#), which manages the relationships with the Borough of Verdun and the City of Montreal. Examples of projects anchored in this collaboration include recognizing and protecting biodiversity in Verdun and developing gardening initiatives to maintain a healthy natural ecosystem. While Demain Verdun has not been directly involved with the City of Montreal around its official Climate Plan, the movement creates value for residents in unique ways by cultivating a strong sense of community that is deeply rooted in belonging and by recognizing everyone's potential to drive change. Local projects reflect this view and are anchored in community priorities, including food security, employment, affordable housing and participation. Demain Verdun also participates in the Montreal Climate Partnership as a citizen group in order to share their lessons learned.

MOBILISATION ENVIRONNEMENT AHUNTSIC-CARTIERVILLE – MOBILIZING AN ENERGY TRANSITION AT THE NEIGHBOURHOOD SCALE

[Mobilisation environnement Ahuntsic-Cartierville \(MEAC\)](#) is a citizen's committee that was founded in the summer of 2015 to denounce the Energy East pipeline project in the context of the federal election. The goal of the MEAC committee is to mobilize residents around environmental issues – such as the



In response to the climate emergency, Montréal is committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions with the objective of becoming carbon-neutral by 2050. The 46 measures in the Climate Plan will set Montréal on the path to being a resilient, inclusive and carbon neutral city.

– City of Montreal, 2020



transportation of hydrocarbons by pipeline, energy transition, urban planning, and active and public transportation – and foster a culture of participation to transform our living environments.

The MEAC committee is well connected with the climate action ecosystem and there is complementarity with the efforts of other Montreal climate advocates, including the David Suzuki Foundation, Demain Verdun and Collectivités ZÉN project of Front commun pour la transition énergétique. They also collaborate with [Ville en Vert](#), an organization that manages the Éco-quartier program in the borough and whose mission is to raise awareness, educate and support residents and organizations around sustainable development practices. MEAC collaborates with Solon on the LocoMotion car sharing project as well as on the Chantier de transition carried out by the Solidarité Ahuntsic neighbourhood roundtable. Another important partner is Éco-quartier Lachine, which collaborates with the committee through knowledge sharing in the context of the Chantiers de transition from Collectivités ZÉN. Lastly, the MEAC committee occasionally participates in conversations with the Montreal Climate Coalition and the Montreal Climate Partnership. These relationships help inform the design of engagement activities. Community engagement priorities include collaborating through neighbourhood roundtables and organizing local conversations on decarbonization, mobility, participation and the role of residents and financial institutions in supporting a green energy transition.

Although the MEAC committee does not have a direct relationship with the City, they have been in conversations with the Ahuntsic-Cartierville borough to mobilize their support for transition projects, highlighting the unique role that municipal staff can play in accelerating social change in areas such as mobility, education and awareness. Through research, documenting and reporting, the committee communicates neighbourhood priorities to elected officials to inspire them to support climate action.

SOLON – STRENGTHENING SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AT THE NEIGHBOURHOOD LEVEL



LocoMotion, a neighbourhood project to support car and bike sharing.
Photo credit: Solon collectif

Founded by a group of neighbours in 2015, Solon supports resident-led efforts to develop local projects that create welcoming and resilient communities. For Solon, the transition movement is made up of people. The projects supported by Solon are rooted in living environments at the scale of daily interactions, imagining welcoming neighborhoods for everyone. Achieving a socioecological transition is about building a more equitable and democratic society and proposing new economic and social models that are rooted in solidarity and determination.

The collective is a well-known organization in Quebec and abroad and it has become a point of reference for practitioners collaborating at the intersection of systems change, participatory city making and socioecological transition. Solon has developed strong relationships with municipal authorities and research partners who have contributed to inform and amplify the lessons learned from their mobilization efforts in the boroughs of Rosemont–La Petite-Patrie and Ahuntsic-Cartierville. Their participatory practice is reflected in [Notre voisinage](#), one of their initiatives in Ahuntsic-Cartierville that supports the emergence of resident-led projects that reshape how we live with one another. Notre voisinage is connected to [Participatory Canada](#), a pan-Canadian collaboration that is creating robust social infrastructure and bringing people together in ways that benefit each other and the Earth.

The City of Montreal and Solon signed two long-term partnerships to accompany Montreal's climate action journey. The first consists of launching a transition laboratory in the borough of Rosemont–La Petite-Patrie. The second one is focused on the development of [Montréal en commun](#), a set of innovation projects to prototype solutions that address food security, mobility and regulatory experimentation in order to improve quality of life in Montreal. To date, Solon has supported 20 projects; engaged more than 1,000 participants; involved 33 citizens in the organization's governance; and has helped form over 10 partnerships with research, local organizations and the City of Montreal.

The Centre d'étude en responsabilité sociale et écocitoyenneté (CÉRSÉ) and the UQAM research chair on ecological transition are two key research partners in organizing workshops and research activities to develop a deeper understanding of resident-led action, social change, and the tools and approaches to foster transformation. Territoires innovants en économie sociale et solidaire (TIESS) is another important research partner that collaborates with Solon in developing collective narratives of the socioecological transition and creating a vision of a desirable future and the scenarios to get there.

Although each of these neighbourhoods is unique in its approach to engaging residents, there is a common aspiration toward enabling transition pathways to lead Montreal toward a more resilient and inclusive future. The role of neighbourhood organizations in collaboration with

“Can urban living environments such as Montreal's back alleys give rise to local governance that promotes innovative approaches in the fight against climate change?”
 – [Research Chair on Ecological Transition at UQAM](#)

local authorities, residents and research groups is critical in addressing the disruptions of our time caused by climate change and the pandemic, while informing the development of tools and approaches that help communities make sense of complexity and embark on rapid and long-term transformations.

COMMON THREADS

There are several common ideas that emerge from these diverse local efforts across the Montreal ecosystem:

RECOGNIZING THE ROLE OF RESIDENTS AS DRIVERS OF TRANSITION

While climate action organizations engage at different levels and in different ways with their networks, they all recognize the importance of multisectoral collaboration and mobilization to act quickly in light of the urgency of the crisis. There is also a recognition of the important role that residents play in advancing a socioecological transition by engaging in local efforts in different ways, from supporting day-to-day operations to being part of a steering committee or attending a local consultation. To foster long-term engagement from residents, community groups create meaningful opportunities for action and inspire by example through active engagement on local priorities, such as urban planning, heat islands and mobility. Embedding listening into an organization's engagement efforts and cultivating trust are two important ingredients in building thriving relationships with residents.

ALLOCATING TIME FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Developing a coherent strategy is vital to ensuring organizational sustainability. An effective strategic planning processes helps create concrete opportunities for residents and stakeholders alike to engage, especially when residents are looking for guidance on how to support the community. Collaboration among local groups encourages the sharing of best practices, which in turn informs project implementation. Research chairs and multisectoral partnerships have an important role to play in fostering cross-pollination of learnings among community organizations but also among foundations, public agencies and the private sector.

CELEBRATING OUR CONNECTIONS WITH ONE ANOTHER

There is a clear understanding among organizations of the need for effective community engagement – both at the neighbourhood and the city scale – and a recognition of the value that diverse communities bring to the table, as they strengthen the neighbourhood's social capital. There is also an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness among climate action groups and community organizations, which creates a nurturing environment for new ideas and bold collaborations to emerge. These are the foundations for a culture of participation that enables social transformation.

Organizations rely on volunteers to support in movement-building, including around social media communications, operations and facilitation. However, it is difficult to access funding that is focused on supporting the coordination of volunteers and the management of day-to-day operations. Developing a knowledge and support sharing platform could be a meaningful way to connect organizations and volunteers in order to share offerings and celebrate acts of kindness.

RECONCILING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

The Montreal Climate Plan provides a starting point to guide collective efforts to tackle the climate crisis and embark on a socioecological transition. However, it is unclear for communities what this journey would look like and whether the Climate Plan provides the tools, resources and opportunities for collaboration that are needed for local groups to amplify their impact, develop their understanding of climate change and strengthen their mobilization efforts.

Although there is a general agreement on priority themes among climate action groups, there are different perspectives on the way in which each group is addressing them. For example, some organizations address energy transition by promoting active transportation while other groups focus on encouraging financial institutions to invest in renewable energy. This diversity of perspectives nurtures creativity and innovation. At the same time, it can be difficult to ensure alignment of collective efforts.

The engagement platform of the [Montreal Climate Partnership](#) is an example of collaboration between diverse stakeholders on local priorities. Organizations may select from recommended actions or propose actions to address climate change in the context of mobility, the built environment, community resilience, and local leadership and governance.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Establishing deep connections to place and communities is critical in strengthening resilience, fostering collaboration, and enabling social change, particularly in the midst of disruptive times. Montreal residents are already collaborating in unique ways to develop local solutions to address the climate crisis and build more equitable and vibrant neighbourhoods that promote human and ecological wellbeing.

As Montreal and cities across Canada and the world embark on developing approaches to tackle the devastating impacts of the climate crisis and the pandemic, it is critical for local governments, businesses, community organizations, researchers and residents to come together in building a common vision for equitable and resilient futures. Developing those collaborations is central to accelerate social change.

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The logo for the Government of Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a small Canadian flag icon above the letter 'a'.

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