

Photo submitted

The Bata Shoe factory, pictured here in the 1940s, closed its doors after 60 years of operation, as the shoe manufacturing industry declined. The building will be turned into condominiums.

Local village a model for the world

The Batawa Development Corporation project attempts to create a sustainable living community

By Katie Alton

A small community in Quinte West is quietly becoming an international model for sustainable development. The Batawa Development Corporation has undertaken an impressive project to sustainably rejuvenate and intensify the village of Batawa.

"It will become an example in Canada of how we can create a truly sustainable rural community," says Sonja Bata, founder of the Batawa Development Corporation.

Everybody is aware of climate change," she says. "So what do you do about it? What can you, yourself, do about it?"

Bata says that redevelopment in Batawa is an educational process that will evolve over the next several years. However, she thinks it "will change our way of thinking; that we are not a throw away society, but that we think longer term."

The small village of Batawa has a rich historical background. In 1939, Thomas J. Bata immigrated to Canada from his native country, the Czech Republic. He purchased 1,500 acres of land, building the Bata Shoe factory, along with a church and housing for his immigrant workers. The factory, which eventually became one of the largest employers in Hastings County, ceased operation in 1999.

The abandoned factory still stands today, reminiscent of days gone by. In 2005, Sonja Bata, wife of Thomas J. Bata, purchased the land. With the purchase of the land came the formation of the Batawa Development Corporation and a plan to redevelop Batawa into a sustainable, energy-efficient, green community.

"It's not only the natural environment, but also that we ourselves can create the cityscapes and streetscapes where we feel happy or spacious, where we are more productive," she says.

This idea is not new for Bata. She has always believed in it and hopes that one day this dream will become a reality. She realizes the importance of sustainability in community development and prides herself in making it a reality.

"I feel very strongly that if you're doing this already, let's do it in an exceptional way," she says.

The first obstacle faced by the development corporation was to have Batawa re-designated as a growth area. While the village, at one time, had this designation, as industry slowed Batawa was taken out of the official Quinte West plan.

Batawa Development Corporation general manager, Heather Candler, explains that, "One of our first jobs was to have the community, once again, designated as a growth area, so that Quinte West would invest again in infrastructure and allow us to build in and around the existing community."

Candler says this designation would enable them "to create a much more sustainable community through its numbers."

"Simply by creating more employment, bringing a few more people to the community and creating some commercial uses, that is a much more sustainable community than 110 homes landlocked in the middle

of Quinte West with nothing to support them," she says.

In order to obtain this designation in the easiest manner possible, city planners suggested writing a special policy document that would outline the goals of the development project in the existing official plan, explains Candler. Re-designating Batawa as a special policy area essentially avoids rewriting policy for all of Quinte West, an important technicality that would allow the project to move forward.

A growth plan "identifies areas within its community that will promote growth and infrastructure," says Candler. "What that does is control the way a community grows, so that we don't have urban sprawl all over the place and that infrastructure...is used more efficiently."

As Bata and her team at the development corporation began to explore sustainable community development, they discovered the U.S. Green Building Council. The council has developed the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system encouraging the construction and subsequent rating of green building and development practices all over the world. The council has developed a comprehensive selection of LEED assessment tools.

Initially, the LEED rating system only applied to the construction of specific buildings. A pilot program was developed using the LEED system to rate entire neighbourhood development. The council strives to create a national standard for neighbourhood design, incorporating principles of smart growth, new urbanism and green building into the rating system.

"When we first heard about it, we started corresponding with the LEED people and we found out they were accepting (pilot) projects," says Bata. "So we applied and they accepted us."

The building council provides important information and advice regarding the project, she says. The importance of new and emerging technologies can be confusing, making long-term solutions difficult to find. The council is able to draw their attention to various examples, says Bata, though essentially final decisions and judgments are the responsibility of the development corporation.

The rating system requires a number of the prerequisites to be met. Once those are obtained each additional sustainable measure taken by the community is rewarded with a credit point, adding to a total score. In order to be certified, a minimum number of points must be obtained. Depending on the point total, the project may obtain silver, gold or platinum LEED certification.

The Batawa project is currently striving for the silver standard. Bata explains the council originally encouraged them to strive for the gold standard. However, many of the technologies associated with it translate into increased capital costs.

However, Candler points out that, at this stage, it is very early in the process and she and her team are still learning exactly what the standards mean.

"We're looking at what the possibilities are here within Batawa and how we can maximize what we do with those standards," she says. "There may be areas where we reach much higher than [the silver standard] and there may be areas where we're only able to achieve that, so it's still very much a work in progress."

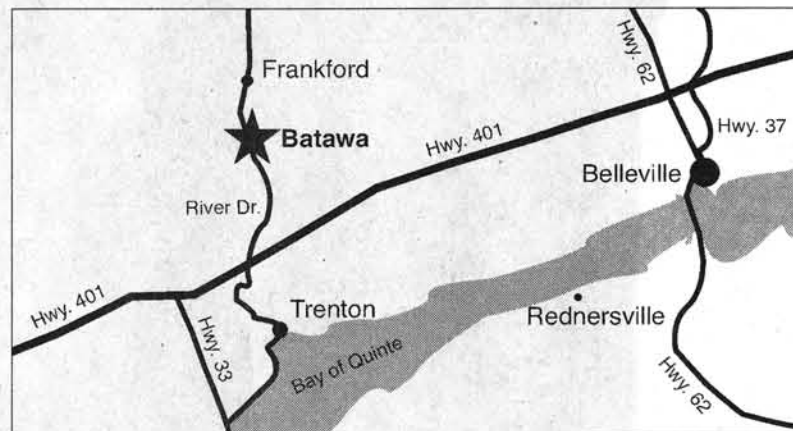
As stated in the Batawa Land Use Plan, sustainable planning practices and community design standards will be used and directed by LEED certification standards. The plan includes conversion of the Bata factory into condominiums and a new village centre with a civic square, retail spaces, offices and a medium density residential area. Live-work units are also included in the plan. These units combine residential areas and commercial spaces, increasing the diversity of communities.

Candler points to the significance of LEED certification for Batawa. "It simply recognizes us internationally as a model for how you plan a sustainable, green, energy-efficient community," she says. "This is brand new on the world stage. There's only a few hundred of these pilot projects around the world and we're one of a handful in Canada."

She is quick to point out the uniqueness of the project. The redevelopment

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Sonja Bata



Map by Katie Alton

ment plan is not simply a plan to build some houses, but rather a plan that incorporates the sustainability of the entire community, she says.

"It provides for us, in our community plan, with some strict standards that we have to follow and that has changed our community plan significantly," she says.

Various LEED principles changed the design of the entire community. Bata explains the original plan for Batawa was a huge sprawling design. However, as a result the LEED system, certain concepts became much more important including the minimization of traffic, storm water solutions and waste water treatment solutions, she says.

Candler explains that by intensifying development in one area, urban sprawl into surrounding green spaces is minimized.

According to the Land Use Plan, the provincial Ministry of Natural Resources designates the area surrounding Batawa as an Area of Natural and Significant Importance. Significant animal species, rare plants and migrating birds create uniqueness important for recreational activities, educational experiences and, perhaps, eco-tourism.

"We're keeping the development within the existing urban settlement area and making everything very walkable for people," she says. "They're not relying on their vehicles anymore, so they're walking and cycling. They can get everything they need within a very short distance, so it becomes a very self-contained community."

The first visible concept of the design plan will be the conversion of the old Bata factory into condominiums, says Candler. Initially, the factory was slated to be torn down.

"The community spoke up and said no, this is iconic in our community, this is a very important place to us," she says.

Long before the development process began, Bata held a series of town hall meetings to gauge the reaction from the community.

"We're just delighted that the people in Batawa themselves seem to be very pleased," says Bata. "From the residents, it has been extremely positive."

The development corporation is close to unveiling the condominium plans, which have been in the works for the past year and a half. Candler projects a condominium sales office will be open as early as spring 2008.

"What you're going to see is infrastructure improvements going on, businesses starting to open up, some homes starting to be built and, as a focus to it all, a spectacular conversion of this historic building," she says.

Bata and Candler are clearly excited to see the project gain momentum. The positive and enthusiastic reaction from the community has created the use of ideas to shape and evolve their design plans.

"It's been very much an open process with the community, so they've been very involved and they've been very enthusiastic," says Candler.

She created special advisory groups, so the community would have an opportunity to express their concerns and ideas.



Photo submitted

Heather Candler, general manager at the Batawa Development Corporation, is excited to create a green, energy efficient community in Batawa.

Mike Stortini, a retired Batawa resident, says the only requirements were residency and a concern for the future of the village. The process is unofficial, but creates an open forum for the residents of the community.

"It's all a part of the long-range, real grassroots, what's the community thinking, which way would the community like to see things go," he says.

He considers himself "part of the 20 per cent of the general population that agrees we have to change the way we consume resources or things will change for us."

Stortini and his wife moved to the community almost six years ago. Issues like resource depletion have concerned him for more than thirty years. He and his wife designed their own home, incorporating many of the LEEDs design techniques, though the home is not officially certified.

He strongly believes in Bata's plan for redevelopment and sees her vision as something other than the typical "scorched earth policy."

"That is why I've been active in this whole process...I see this is going to be something other than the usual, 'build for a quick cheap sale', sort of thing," he says.

Stortini points to the reuse of the Bata factory as an important part of this concept.

"I do agree with the concept that we do have to intensify the use of available land," he says.

The reuse of the factory is a great idea "because the energy required to construct that building has been spent, so it's better not to tear it down. You know: reduce, reuse, recycle," he says.

The Batawa pilot project creates important awareness about sustainable community development. Bata believes Batawa "will become an example, in Canada, of how we can build a truly sustainable, rural community."

The project is still in its infancy. The team at the Batawa Development Corporation has a long road ahead of them. Their enthusiasm and commitment towards sustainable development, combined with a supportive community, will make that road a little easier to travel.

"It's really early to say where we are, but this is our vision, this is our goal, this is what we are working towards," says Bata.

What is LEEDs certification?

The certification is based on a point system. There are certain prerequisites each pilot project must obtain. After the prerequisites are met, the project may earn additional credits. These credits contribute to the total point score and determine the silver, gold or platinum standard for the pilot project. Listed to the right are the prerequisites:

Prerequisites:

Smart Location and Linkage

1. Smart location
2. Proximity to water and wastewater infrastructure
3. Imperiled species and ecological communities
4. Wetland and water body conservation
5. Agricultural land conservation
6. Floodplain avoidance

Neighbourhood Pattern & Design

1. Open community
2. Compact development

Green Construction & Technology

1. Construction activity pollution prevention

Possible credits:

- While this list is not large, it provides a sample of possible credits.
- Diversity of housing types
 - Affordable rental housing
 - Reduced water use
 - Bicycle network
 - School proximity
 - Reduced automobile dependency
 - Conservation management of habitat or wetlands
 - Access to active spaces

- Local food production
- Building reuse and adaptive reuse
- Stormwater management
- Wastewater management
- Infrastructure energy efficiency
- Community outreach and involvement
- Innovation and exemplary performance
- Access to public spaces