



GREEN
MUNICIPAL
FUND

FONDS
MUNICIPAL
VERT



MUNICIPAL POWERS AND CIRCULARITY: TAPPING UNUSED POTENTIAL

Municipalities and communities have far more power than they realise to encourage circularity on construction sites.

A review of municipal jurisdictions and powers shows that, as initiatives taken across Quebec confirm, municipalities and communities have a well-stocked toolbox for promoting circularity in the construction, renovation and demolition industry. They can provide financial assistance, review taxes and pass bylaws to limit the amount of wood, gypsum and other construction waste that can be disposed of. This also encourages developers to eco-design new buildings and extend the life of existing ones. In other words, they are able to take action before the waste is generated as well as after. This is a major plus considering that they bear the burden of managing the vast majority of it.

A program of/
Un programme de la



That said, municipalities and communities must be creative in implementing such measures, in particular because the legal framework is not based on a circular approach. In fact, the concept of “life cycle” is totally absent from Quebec’s laws and regulations regarding municipalities. At least, in black and white. For example, did you know that Candiac, in Quebec’s Montérégie region, has a demolition bylaw, *Règlement 5010 de démolition*, requiring that an analysis be conducted that takes environmental sustainability criteria into account before demolition work on a building can start?

Clearly, the regulatory possibilities in municipalities and communities in Quebec and elsewhere are not well known. However, law firm Cain Lamarre has identified about ten that can be used to promote material circularity in the construction, renovation and demolition industries. The team behind the project considered their inventory to be incomplete. That is why it approached the municipalities and communities involved in the first Circular Cities and Regions Initiative, of which the Federation of Canadian Municipalities is a partner. The goal was to provide a more accurate take on the situation.



STILL A LONG WAY TO GO

Throughout 2023, members of this select group replied to a survey on circularity strategies for construction, renovation and demolition and were interviewed on the subject. “These municipalities and communities were already familiar with circular economy issues,” says Karine Boies, a partner at Cain Lamarre. “So they were the perfect choice for our survey.” A workshop was held with them in early 2024 to draw up a list of measures that could be implemented at the municipal level.

The first part of this co-creation process confirmed that municipalities and communities are underutilizing the possibilities available to them to divert construction site waste from landfill sites. This is particularly the case with demolition bylaws, which do not encourage deconstruction and which in fact never mention it. Another example is that

while each municipality and community has a management plan for construction, renovation and demolition waste, none stops to consider how the amount of waste generated can be reduced.

The project also identified a whole series of impediments to circularity on construction sites. “Elected officials are misinformed about the tools municipalities and communities have at their disposal to encourage circularity in the industry,” says Karine Boies. “What’s more, planning and environmental departments in municipal governments often fail to talk to each other, which leads people to work in isolation rather than leverage internal synergies.” Difficulties in finding local reuse, recycling and repurposing opportunities for materials and failure to separate at source were also cited as definite challenges.

NUMEROUS WAYS TO TAKE ACTION

At the workshop, participating municipalities and communities drew up a list of priority measures to promote circularity in the industry. For example, municipalities and communities can immediately:

- impose a waste management fee when applications for building, renovation or deconstruction permits are submitted and partially or fully reimburse them depending on the recovery rate demonstrated at project end;
- provide for penalties in the form of rate increases, and where possible discourage construction, renovation and deconstruction waste from being sent to landfill sites;
- institutionalize the deconstruction principle for all municipal buildings by including it in the city's public policies; and
- introduce occupancy and maintenance bylaws aimed at extending the lifespan of buildings by encouraging their owners to maintain them to a minimum level.

The legislative and regulatory environment has evolved since this project was completed. "By April 1, 2026, every municipality and community must have passed a building maintenance and occupancy bylaw," says Boies. "This means that proper building maintenance will soon be the norm rather than the exception."

In general, it would be a good idea to set up pilot projects to assess how feasible or valuable the new approaches are. Having new municipal and regional road maps should provide a framework for pilot projects and encourage implementation of key measures in the mid term. "This is a strategy to move us into action mode," she says. "It has the advantage of making municipal authorities aware of the benefits of promoting the circular economy on construction sites and thus reducing landfill."



USEFUL RESOURCES

Circular Economy Roadmaps

Several Quebec municipalities and communities have adopted circular economy roadmaps to structure and guide their efforts towards a sustainable transition. These strategic plans serve as levers for implementing pilot projects, raising awareness among stakeholders and reducing landfill by promoting the reuse and recovery of resources. Here are a few inspiring examples:

City of Montréal: Consult the roadmap (https://portail-m4s.s3.montreal.ca/pdf/1503-01-economie-circulaire-document_85x11_v5.pdf) (Only available in French)

Montréal: Consult the roadmap (<https://monteregeeconomique.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Feuille-de-route-monteregee-en-economie-circulaire.pdf>) (Only available in French)

Laurentides: Consult the roadmap (<https://synergielaurentides.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Strategie-et-Feuille-de-route-EC.pdf>) (Only available in French)

Metropolitan Community of Québec: Consult the roadmap (https://cmquebec.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2024-10_CMQuebec_Strategie-economie-circulaire_page-simple.pdf) (Only available in French)

Recyc-Québec also offers a Circular Economy Regional Roadmap Kit, a key resource to support communities in their efforts. Consult the kit. (<https://www.recyc-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/guide-methodologique-fdr-ec-english.pdf>)

These tools and examples show how strategic planning can pave the way for concrete circular economy initiatives.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS AND LIST OF POSSIBLE LEVERS FOR MUNICIPALITIES (ONLY AVAILABLE IN FRENCH)

Use construction and demolition permits as a lever for circularity

- 2 **1A** Require applicants to demonstrate the necessity of demolition in the permit application process
- 4 **1B** Impose a waste management deposit when applying for a permit, refunded partially or fully based on the demonstrated recovery rate at the end of the project. Implement a verification mechanism (through inspection or analysis of submitted reports)
- 4 **1C** Impose recovery or recycling rates for C&D (Construction and Demolition) waste during deconstruction
- 2 **1D** Apply a different fee for permit applicants based on whether a waste management plan (WMP) is in place for the project
- 1 **1E** Apply Recovery or reuse criteria in permit applications
- 1F** When applying for a permit, prohibit certain non-recyclable or non-reusable materials, or impose a fee on these products
- 1 **1G** When applying for a permit, require the use of recyclable and reusable materials (or proof that none are available) or materials with recycled content

< Extract from the workshop on working with cities

