

TEAM WEST 8 WINS COMPETITION FOR URBAN PARK AND TRANSFORMATION OF FORMER MILITARY TERRAIN IN MONTPELLIER, FRANCE

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On the 10th of July H  l  ne Mandroux, Mayor of Montpellier announced that West 8 in collaboration with Montpellier architects, Boyer-Percheron-Assus, is the winner of the urban design competition for the conversion of the former School of Infantry site (EAI) (35 ha) in the city of Montpellier. Team West 8 beat fellow competitors BIG Agency and Bau-B. West 8's proposal emphasizes rejuvenation of the pre-existing condition to "subtly transform the site from one state to another, without upsetting the heritage" explains Micha  l Delafosse, Deputy Mayor and urbanism delegate. The proposed redevelopment of the EAI into a new district will be presented to the public in September. Development of the neighborhood will be led by Thierry Laget from SAAM (Development Company of the city of Montpellier).

In 2010, the troops of the EAI retreated from their city base. While this created considerable economic trauma for the city, over a thousand jobs were lost, it also became a great opportunity to redesign 35 hectares of open space in an otherwise dense urban sector, located less than a mile from the historic center of Montpellier.

Team West 8's envisions a sustainable neighborhood (featuring soft travel, underground parking, water management and energy efficient buildings), with diverse architecture and an environmentally enhanced park - 2,000 new trees will be planted three dramatic watermills installed.

Instead of building all of the proposed 4000 homes at once, Team West 8 proposed that the construction of 2300-3000 homes will be phased gradually over the next 15 years. The mixed housing typologies include: collective / individual and inter-generational, with one third of social housing and a third in helped accession, says the City.

Opening on Avenue de Toulouse

The site opens up the Avenue de Toulouse (avenue de Toulouse) to Bugarel Street (rue Bugarel) "by re-appropriating 20 openings in the historical city wall and making them entrance points" said Michael Delafosse. The area will be very sustainable. "Buildings that produce more than they consume, strict water management, central soft mobility and biomass cogeneration are the key sustainability features", he added.

The Selection Process

Unlike traditional urban design competitions which rely heavily on a pre-selected jury, the Development Company of the City of Montpellier (SAAM) chose to incorporate an original mode of citizen consultation into their selection process.

Developed by the Res Publica agency, this approach seeks to involve all segments of the city's population, by drawing on electoral lists. All residents were invited to the consultation phase. A personalized letter was sent to 10,500 people, who were randomly selected from the electoral lists, (addition weighting was given to people under 40, who are traditionally more difficult to mobilize). Communication was made with people who participated in the public meetings, the voluntary sector at the municipal level (beyond the neighborhood associations): environment, culture, travel

etc and even involved the younger generation (from 12 to 25) from schools in the district. Thus every inhabitant of the city of Montpellier was sought to enrich the competitive dialogue given by the three competitors. Multiple debates were held to confront the three different points of view and discuss the values and aims of the presented proposals.

An Echo of the Esplanade

The landscaping of the Montcalm park include planting of 2000 trees which forms a kind of "urban broccoli". The goal is to provide shade for park users in all seasons, and offer different landscapes. 'The Montcalm park makeover' will echo the central esplanade of Montpellier and will be accessible to all. It is multifunctional: people can come here to walk, read, relax, play sports, (fitness trail), or work remotely with their laptop or tablet.

more information: [Reconversion EAI, former School of the Infantry](#)