TRANSFORMATION:
THE STORY OF CREATING
EVERGREEN BRICK WORKS
In 2002, Evergreen, a national environmental charity, began its long journey of revitalizing the Don Valley Brick Works—a century-old factory that produced the bricks that built Toronto. When it closed down in the late 1980s, all that was left was a damaged ecosystem, crumbling buildings and contaminated soil.

Today, Evergreen Brick Works is an international showcase for green design and urban innovation.

Evergreen Brick Works is Canada’s first large-scale community environmental centre: it is a dynamic venue for exploring ideas and leading-edge green technologies, and a vibrant public space where visitors can engage in a broad suite of hands-on environmental programming.

This is the story how this project evolved from bold vision to reality, and of all the lessons we learned along the way.

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Evergreen Brick Works: A Work in Progress
Location, Location, Location
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There is No Substitute for Great Thinking and Hard Work
And Then One Day, You’re Open
Growing Pains: Who Will Drive the Zamboni?

Passion and Vision
Mission Focus
Trust Your Gut and Push for What You Believe In
Walk the Talk
Share Leadership
Organizational Culture
Listen, a Lot, Particularly When During the Formative Stage
Know When to Pause and When to Act
Be Open to Emerging Ideas
Perseverance and the Point of No Return
Establish a Process but be Nimble and Responsive
And Always, Always, Protect the Good
LOOK

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Evergreen Brick Works: A Work in Progress

This is the story of how a creative idea took on a life of its own—from native plant nursery, to brownfield redevelopment, to community environmental centre, to an international centre for green cities. It is a narrative of how the project came to be told through the voices of some of the central players who helped make it possible. It is an effort to capture what we experienced along the way; to learn from these experiences and to share them with others who are exploring innovative ideas for making the world a better place.

The idea of “transformation” speaks both to transforming the physical space of the Don Valley Brick Works and to the organizational transformation that Evergreen needed to undertake to get there. And it also speaks to the broader notion of how Evergreen Brick Works seeks to change our relationship with the natural world so that we can create a sustainable future.

We looked to other social innovators, who offered their own lessons learned from their innovative projects, and you will find these insights throughout the document. You can also find this story in video form online at evergreen.ca, featuring some of the key players who helped to realize Evergreen Brick Works. From the staff, board members and project advisors, to leading funders, government officials and lawyers, many people share their insights and help shape this reflection.

Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world.

– JOEL A. BARKER

At its core, Evergreen Brick Works is a place to inspire and support sustainability. It is a place to demonstrate and share best practices for creating healthier communities and improving environmental health, while supporting a burgeoning green economy. It is a work-in-progress, and we expect it always will be, because that’s what progress is: change and evolution.

The world needs this kind of place—a place to understand what impact we’re having on the rest of the environment.

– DAVID HOUSE, SITE DEVELOPMENT ADVISOR
Evergreen’s work is inspired by the belief that a close relationship with nature, both personally and collectively, is essential to making the kind of shift that is needed to conserve our planet and sustain ourselves. That is why we focus our efforts on cities and towns, where more than 80 percent of Canadians live.

Our core mission to inspire, educate and enable action to green cities is at the heart of everything we do. For 20 years, Evergreen has been providing Canadians with the tools, inspiration and know-how to take action to bring nature back to our cities. Our work is driven by the belief that to effect lasting, meaningful change, individuals and communities alike must adopt new attitudes and behaviours. From our origins in tree-plantings and school ground greening to the launch of Evergreen Brick Works, we work to create a healthier planet by nurturing cultural and ecological diversity, and creating a green economy based on innovation in concert with nature.

**Location, Location, Location**

“Everything that Evergreen had done for the last 20 years was moving toward this moment. And this magic building was right there waiting for them.”

— DAVID YOUNG, PHILANTHROPIST

In 2002, Evergreen seeded what we thought was an interesting idea: launch a native plant nursery that would provide youth with employment and skills-development opportunities, propagate native plants that would support the delivery of our mission and generate a financial return that would support our charitable mandate. It was to be a “triple-bottom-line” enterprise that would provide environmental, social and economic returns.

Great idea, we thought. But where would we do it? David Stonehouse, then an Evergreen project manager, suggested off-hand that we consider a derelict industrial property nestled in the heart of Toronto’s Don Valley—an abandoned brick factory called the Don Valley Brick Works. At the time, David was new to our staff, but had spent the previous decade leading the Task Force to Bring Back the Don, a citizen-government coalition focused on restoring Toronto’s Lower Don River watershed, which had suffered from over 200 years of industrialization and neglect. David was familiar with efforts among government agencies and citizen groups to restore the site as part of watershed-wide regeneration efforts.

With that, a great idea found a great location. We felt unstoppable, excited by the tremendous potential. Evergreen Brick Works is as much a reflection of Evergreen’s mission as a reflection of the site itself. The match was synergistic. The Brick Works is a magical place, steeped in history and ecology, located a stone’s throw from downtown Toronto and adjacent to Canada’s most populous, and economically and culturally diverse neighbourhoods. We felt we could greatly expand the reach of our mission by providing a large-scale venue that would connect local communities with nature.

“There’s nothing more powerful than a good location to drive an opportunity. At the Centre for Social Innovation, we had an opportunity to grow. We’d been looking at real estate, but we turned down at least a half dozen locations. We finally found an incredible, beautiful old building right on the subway line in the heart of the Annex neighbourhood. It had to happen. There’s no way I could have been able to attract the investment that I did into our social enterprise with a crappy building in a crappy location.”

— TONYA SURMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION
We opened the Green Barn in a mixed-income neighbourhood where we could start to engage the middle and upper class and get them involved in the good food revolution—where we could make sure that lower income community members were at the table as well. Without that location as a platform, we wouldn’t be able to have our ‘Grow for The Stop’ veggies in a number of supermarkets, or turn our greenhouse into a restaurant, or launch this catering program. Without the Green Barn, I don’t think we could replicate our model in other cities, which is our way of taking our approach to food into other communities and develop the learning at work. I think that the Green Barn was an extraordinarily important piece in ‘building out’ our story.

– NICK SAUL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE STOP COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE

Innovation through Times of Change

The idea for Evergreen Brick Works emerged as part of Evergreen’s efforts to create a greater impact. We were rising from a wave of major growth and looking for new, innovative ways to engage more people in urban sustainability issues, to raise the profile of our mission and move our work into the mainstream. Creating a tangible place to showcase our work felt like the right strategic move as a means for enabling greater systems level change.

Diversifying and strengthening Evergreen’s revenue model—in this case through new social enterprise activities—was also a must if we were to continue to grow. In particular, we were looking to establish a more stable, predictable revenue base, different from the program-to-program format of traditional grants. And, very importantly, we were looking for a project that would galvanize the interests and energy of staff. “It began with this notion that Evergreen could begin to develop some social enterprise dimensions of our work with revenue-generating activities,” says Geoff Cape, Evergreen’s executive director. “We’ve had a history of entrepreneurship, so it didn’t seem like a big step for us to go there.” This spirit of entrepreneurship was central not only to the genesis of the original social enterprise idea, but was also a key driver necessary for sustaining the increasing scale and complexity of the project and the related organizational growth during the eight years it took to move Evergreen Brick Works from concept to reality.

A business plan competition offered by philanthropist Bill Young, founder of Social Capital Partners gave us a forum to present our original idea for a “triple-bottom-line” native plant nursery providing employment and skills development for marginalized populations, propagating native plants to green the urban landscape and generating revenue to support Evergreen’s programs. Bill was offering $1 million to the winner to support the implementation of a significant social enterprise initiative. Evergreen didn’t win Bill’s competition, but he liked our idea well enough to give us an impromptu second place prize of $50,000, essentially seed funding to help us refine our business plan and keep the ball rolling. This funding was a turning point for Evergreen, and it was this initial investment that was leveraged into a $55-million capital undertaking and, eight years later, the opening of Evergreen Brick Works.

Social Capital Partners was created to help finance social enterprises, both for-profit and not-for-profit, and is currently providing financing to franchise businesses that will hire people who would traditionally face barriers to employment. “This work requires taking the long-term view and proving the business case for our employment model,” explains Bill. “Ultimately, we need to make it easy for people to do the right thing. We want to change the way society is thinking.”
Social Enterprise

From charitable, not-for-profit organizations to social-based businesses that sell goods or services, social enterprises span the full spectrum of the marketplace. Each enterprise has a blended return on investment: financial, social, environmental and cultural. In the case of not-for-profit organizations, the bottom line is also blended, with earned-revenue strategies combining with traditional philanthropic or fundraising efforts to deliver mission-based work. Social enterprise is an emerging opportunity, as charitable leaders become entrepreneurs and as businesses look to do something good while turning a profit. It is also not without its challenges, however, in such areas as public perception and awareness, as well as potential for "mission drift" and lack of available financing mechanisms.


The Don Valley Brick Works: Rich in History, Fertile Ground for Rediscovery

When Evergreen’s eyes fell upon it in 2002, the crumbling Don Valley Brick Works was a shell of its former city-building purpose, an industrial brownfield that had been abandoned for 20 years. Sitting on 16.4-hectares of land in Toronto’s Don Valley, surrounded by an extensive ravine network, highways and residential neighbourhoods, the Brick Works is a site that has always known change and evolution.

For 100 years, the site functioned as one of Canada’s pre-eminent brick works factories, at its peak producing over 43 million bricks annually. Following Toronto’s Great Fire of 1904, bricks from the Brick Works literally rebuilt the city, including many of Toronto’s landmark buildings, such as Casa Loma stables, Old City Hall, parts of Queen's Park, Osgoode Hall and the Royal Ontario Museum. Over the years, the Don Valley Brick Works also contributed to many nationally significant buildings, including Winnipeg’s Timothy Eaton Building, Montreal’s Acadia Apartments and Moncton’s Timothy Eaton Building.

Decades of excavation for clay and shale exposed several layers of fossils that were instrumental in proving theories of glacial climate change. This geological significance was the impetus for the Province of Ontario designating the site as an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest, and in 2002, the site's buildings were designated by the City of Toronto under the Ontario Heritage Act. These designations became crucial to the future preservation of the site.

By the mid-1980s, the quarry was almost fully depleted. It no longer made business sense to operate the factory. Plus, in the 100 years that the Don Valley Brick Works operated, the city had grown up around the site. Urban pressures combined with growing public awareness of the need to conserve valley lands brought into sharp focus the validity of an active mining operation in the heart of Canada’s largest metropolitan area. The owners offered to sell the land to the City of Toronto for $4 million for conservation purposes given its location in the ravine lands and the floodplain of the Lower Don River. While the City was pondering the offer, a development company bought it for $4,001,000. The developer then went to work to get the site rezoned from industrial to residential for a condominium development. However, they were met with fierce public opposition.

An informal coalition of citizens called Friends of the Valley pressed for expropriation of the Brick Works by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA). In the end, they won. The Ontario Municipal Board supported the expropriation on the grounds that the site was scientifically designated and of international geological significance. It was a costly transaction, though. “It turned out to be the most complicated expropriation hearing in the history of the province,” says Glenn Garwood, the city project manager on the Brick Works file. It ultimately cost the Government of Ontario roughly $24 million to acquire the property.

After the expropriation in the mid-1980s, Brampton Brick leased the site and operated a retail outlet there until 1989. There were a number of plans floated for the Brick Works, including an ambitious multi-million-dollar public garden and natural heritage centre, but these unravelled in the recession of the early 1990s. Some public and philanthropic funds did flow to the site, however. The City of Toronto and the TRCA filled in the quarry and created a wetland and meadow habitat— the Weston Family Quarry Garden, an important natural area in the broader Don watershed regeneration strategy. Two of the 16 buildings were restored and some stabilization work was undertaken, but the bulk of the industrial pad and buildings were fenced off from further use, waiting until someone found the answer to their future.
LAUNCH

- Pitching City Hall
- To the Right Idea and the Right Location, Add the Right Partners
- Share the Vision: Know When to Ask for Help
- Community Engagement
- Good Ideas will Find Support
I think that it’s completely unique that the City of Toronto offered a 30-something entrepreneur, I would argue, the most important project in Toronto. What are the chances of anything in Paris or London or New York ever being given to anybody, or even to a committee? The City, in the end, gave it to a young, tree-hugging, 30-something kid with a vision. Well that’s amazing.

– DAVID YOUNG, PHILANTHROPIST

“Pitching City Hall

In early 2002, Evergreen presented its first business plan for “Evergreen Gardens at the Brick Works” to Glenn Garwood, project manager with the City of Toronto’s Culture Division. Glenn was interested. Since most of the site had been abandoned, urban explorers, party animals and graffiti artists had made the crumbling buildings into their playground. According to Glenn, it was time for action. “This was not a do-nothing scenario,” he says, “All it would take is one or two kids to fall off a roof, and see how much trouble you’re in then.”

The place was calling out for its next life, but due to a complicated political situation, zoning issues and the economic climate, no one was able to lead the charge. The answer was far from obvious. “I was in a bind,” said Glenn. “I couldn’t legally pitch the site to the private sector, because it had been expropriated from the private sector. So I could only pitch to governments and non-profits. Well, who had the kind of money to revitalize a site? And then along comes Evergreen. They’ve got an idea.”

Evergreen’s idea—to establish a native plant nursery that provided skills and a job training—spoke to the public mandate of the site, to its ecological significance, and to its economic realities. Not only did the concept have a built-in business model, but Evergreen was also committing to bring the necessary capital dollars to the table to make it happen. We had Glenn’s attention, and so an ally within City Hall. But there were many hurdles between Glenn’s initial interest and the City and the TRCA handing over the keys.

In summer 2003, the City issued a “Request for Proposals for the Adaptive Reuse of the Heritage Buildings at The Don Valley Brick Works.” The qualified candidate needed to demonstrate a plan for the site that would respect its geological, ecological and industrial heritage significance, provide related public programming and be financially self-sufficient. In addition, the City wanted a proponent that would oversee the redevelopment and integration of all 16 buildings—not the original two or three buildings that had initially attracted Evergreen’s attention. In Glenn’s words, we couldn’t “cherry pick” only the buildings we wanted—we had to take them all. This mandate of the City greatly...
expanded Evergreen’s vision for what this project could be. While we felt our idea for a native plant nursery and related ecological programming could easily fill a couple of buildings, what would we do with the rest of the space?

To the Right Idea and the Right Location, Add the Right Partners

Immediately, we reached out to potential partners who could bring their ideas, expertise, networks and resources to realize the full potential of the revitalization project. First among the partners to sign up was Outward Bound Canada—immediately attracted by the opportunity to create an urban base for its experiential wilderness-focused programs and establish a large-scale climbing tower at the site. The YMCA of Greater Toronto came on board to support the youth employment programming associated with the nursery; Jamie Kennedy, renowned chef and champion of local food, agreed to help support food programming with a small-scale café on-site; the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Arts became our lead for clay-based community activities; and Bridgepoint Health, a nearby hospital and long-term care facility, along with the University of Toronto, were attracted by the opportunity for holistic healing programs that integrate nature with preventative health knowledge and long-term healing. Not all of these partners lasted through the final plans, but their enthusiasm in the early days certainly helped the project come to life.

With these key players on side, suddenly the magnitude of redeveloping the whole site did not seem as daunting. The partners helped establish the capacity and credibility of the project. More profoundly, bringing in partners was key to transforming our idea from an enterprising native plant nursery to a large-scale “Community Environmental Centre” that would explore all aspects of urban sustainability—from growing food close to home to creating nature-based learning spaces in the heart of the Canada’s largest urban centre. It was tremendously exciting. We now had a richer, more complex and robust concept, but one that was more challenging to define. However, with letters of interest from this core base of partners, we were ready to move forward, and our proposal to the City was approved. With access to the site now within our reach, the fundraising, planning and development could begin in earnest. But how to begin?

Visionary Leadership and Sharing the Vision

“Don’t ever assume that the very smartest person for the issue that you have will turn you down if you actually ask for help.”

— GEORGE DARK, PARTNER AT URBAN STRATEGIES INC; CHAIR, EVERGREEN BOARD OF DIRECTORS; AND CO-CHAIR, EVERGREEN BRICK WORKS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Evergreen Brick Works was an idea that others could relate to, add to and make their own. We knew we didn’t have all the answers. This was a big idea and we’d need a lot of help to get it off the ground.

We started with our immediate networks. “From the beginning we felt there was great expertise on the Board,” says Chair George Dark. “And our Board had a lot of friends that could help. So we started the Evergreen BrickWorks steering committee with some highly skilled people on it.”

One of these people was Tom Scoon, a real estate developer who had redeveloped Toronto’s heritage Carpet Factory buildings in the mid-1990s. “The team was fantastic. I think they were all pretty good listeners,” says Tom. “Some had great experience in planning and municipal matters, some had great experience in construction and so on, and so it rounded out beautifully. And when we didn’t feel we had the right expertise, we went out and got it. I think the committee knew its limitations.”

Significant help also came from Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP who provided pro bono legal services through Pro Bono Law Ontario. “When we took on the project, we knew there was a lease to be negotiated,” says Kim Harle, a partner at the firm and the leader on the Brick Works file. “We do leases all the time, so we thought how hard could it be? At that point, in 2004, it was difficult to imagine the ultimate scope of our involvement and how quickly it evolved.” What seemed like a standard legal requirement expanded into a project requiring dozens of lawyers helping over several years. Soon they were calling on other experts—in diverse areas ranging from municipal zoning to environmental regulations to intellectual property. “Any organization that takes on a project of this size, scale and visibility really needs to connect with people who have the various skill sets. And from a legal perspective that meant that they really needed a full-service law firm,” says Harle.
With a combination of leadership and ideas and listening to others, it just blossomed.

– Tom Scoon, Brick Works Advisory Committee

Although everyone had their own attraction and passion to the project, this sense of collaboration was palpable. “Everybody bought into the vision,” says Cameron Charlebois, VP of Canada Lands Corporation for Quebec and Chair of the Brick Works Advisory committee. “It’s an exciting project. Even if you don’t get the more philosophical picture, you get it. And it’s fun to do that stuff. To make it both a cultural site and an environmental site in the name of sustainable cities was quite visionary.”

But holding the project together was the vision and a collaborative approach to leadership. “To keep the momentum up for a long process that’s going to take years, you really have to have inspired leadership,” says Glenn Garwood. “Because if you get caught in the weeds and disheartened and lose site of the vision, it will probably fall apart.” Also critical to the project’s success was a supportive Board. “To my mind, it was a dream Board,” says Glenn. “They were committed. They were real contributors. They all shared the vision.”

The idea of rehabilitating the site was also exciting to the technical and design teams as well, who approached it the same way you would approach designing a village. “The design of this place is a microcosm of designing a city,” says architect Joe Lobko, a partner at du Toit Allsop Hillier, who has worked on other adaptive-reuse projects. “You need to get a large team with many different perspectives, but who will work together well.”

While contributions from multiple partners was key to this team-based, collaborative project, an engaged and supportive staff was the grease that kept the wheels turning. Evergreen staff were committed to establishing a project that spoke to Toronto’s past and whose transformation represented—both physically and symbolically—the means to a greener future. Distributing leadership in a project with as many tentacles as Evergreen Brick Works was necessary for managing workload and also served to motivate staff with new opportunities to learn, develop skills and expand their networks. Hiring from within and using internal staff on the project was also a strategic decision to build a sense of coherence. “Involving staff as drivers of the project as opposed to hiring external consultants was the right idea,” says Geoff. “All hands on deck” became a common refrain, particularly as we entered the final stages of construction and opening. This internal capacity and willingness to reach beyond traditional comfort zones was the project’s core foundational element, without which tensions would have been higher and already constrained budgets exceeded.

That said, there were tensions. Staff who had been with Evergreen prior to the launch of the project often felt that their work was lower priority and not receiving the attention or acknowledgement it deserved as the organizational leadership was consumed with bringing Evergreen Brick Works to life. While the intent was that this project would ultimately help increase Evergreen’s networks, diverting of funders from core program activities to the capital project was a concern. Ambiguity and uncertainty during the long conceptual, design and construction journey created stresses, while communication channels at times became blocked, uncertain or non-existent. Project team leaders provided informal “lunch and learns” at key moments in the process to solicit staff input and feedback. Staff participation at project team meetings served as conduits back to their teams to keep staff in the loop.

Numerous committees were established that allowed staff to contribute to the design process, such as the children’s nature playground, the mudroom, classrooms, site-wide landscape plans, greenhouse features, garden beds, interpretation and branding. Staff worked closely to create new programs that bridged our history of community-based experiential environmental programs, with the needs and opportunities to fill Evergreen Brick Works with new programs. This creative thinking and proactive input from staff was critical in building the necessary bridges between where we had been and where we were going as an organization. And it was also a key factor in making those inevitable “all hands on deck” moments successful through a shared sense of ownership and responsibility.

Eva’s Print Shop
As a social enterprise in support of their youth employment offerings, the senior management of Eva’s Phoenix understood they needed some key organizational ingredients to make it happen. “The
Community Engagement

In the early phase of site redevelopment, Evergreen undertook a considerable public consultation process, speaking with environmental groups, the heritage community and people in surrounding neighbourhoods. Many of these stakeholders had been involved in previous chapters of the site’s history, helping with its expropriation and protection in the 1980s, raising funds that helped create the Weston Quarry Garden, and restoring some of the industrial property in the early 1990s. We also reached out to the general public through open houses and site tours.

Bringing the broader community into the planning phase was a vital part of the project’s success because it ensured our plans became a true expression of what the people of Toronto wanted. “It helped that our ideas were consistent with what had previously been imagined for the site,” says David Stonehouse, general manager of Evergreen Brick Works. “A place to celebrate nature and get people involved in stewardship and the city.”

Consistent patterns in public feedback began to emerge. We heard concerns about protecting the natural environment from the hundreds of thousands of visitors Evergreen would be attracting, of not “Disney-fying” a heritage asset by making it an attraction, of potential noise and light pollution from Evergreen’s activities, overflow parking on neighbouring side streets, and the great big issue of accessing the hard-to-reach site. Many people pointed out the irony of having to use cars to reach an environmental site. These issues became key drivers in designing the site.

Leading the public engagement process was a new role for Evergreen, and we were surprised to learn that in some circles we were now the “bad guy.” Parties with whom we had shared the table now sat across from us, scrutinizing our plans, questioning our motives and environmental impact. While our core base of community relationships and the public goodwill for Evergreen’s mission certainly helped start many conversations from a positive standpoint, we could not rest on these relationships alone. Listening was the key. We also commissioned further studies, such as an assessment of the environmental impact of increased visitation to the quarry garden and meadow. Following up on public input and showing how ideas had been incorporated—and if not, why not—kept us on our toes. We worked hard to gain public support and approval, which was essential for the project’s long-term success. Public opposition had stopped the site’s redevelopment once in the 1980s. We could not afford a repeat performance.

For the most part, Evergreen received strong public support. Even naysayers gave their cautious support, acknowledging that something needed to be done before the site decayed beyond repair or a late-night partier did serious damage to the site or themselves.

Good Ideas Will Find Support

No normal person would have backed this project because it was just not doable.

— DAVID YOUNG, PHILANTHROPIST

A big, powerful project requires people with experience, creativity and connections. The first people to come on board were the Young family. “Bill Young with Social Capital Partners put in the first $50,000, which basically seeded the $55-million capital campaign,” recalls Seana Irvine, Evergreen’s chief operating officer. “That $50,000 was pivotal. We couldn’t have gotten going without it.”

Finding funders who were willing to take a risk in enterprising non-profits, particularly ones with little prior social-enterprise experience—and also in our case, no capital campaign or construction experience—is critical. For many funders, social enterprise and funding enterprising non-profits is new terrain. Evergreen Brick Works was still
being defined as we launched our capital campaign, and we had to continually respond to our growing understanding of the site’s physical conditions, the changing role of program partners, the budget and Evergreen’s own organizational understanding of what the project was and what it meant to us. All of this made conversations with funders all the more interesting. If we lacked clarity, we admitted it, but we never lacked clarity on the bigger idea and the vision. Some funders were immediately galvanized by the vision, others emerged as the parts took on more definition and they could see their interests better represented within the whole.

Making things more complicated, we were asking people to invest in a project for which Evergreen did not have ownership. There was nothing to secure pledges against. We needed funders willing to take a chance on Evergreen and the promise of Evergreen Brick Works. As Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman and Michael Patton state in their book, *Getting to Maybe*, social innovation needs funders who are willing to do the following: “Support those who question and inquire, not just those who have answers. … Support those who try to act in the context of the long view. Pay attention to the questions being asked, not just the outcomes promised when you make funding decisions.”

An exceptional gift of $3 million from David and Robin Young set the entire project in motion. David Young, a philanthropist and entrepreneurial businessman, was passionate about the site from the first moment he saw it while walking his dog through the ravines. He calls it destiny. “I thought, ‘This is extraordinary. Somebody’s got to do something with it.’” He says he immediately saw the diamond in the rough. “To me it was self-evident. Toronto is nature in the city. So this was obviously the most important project in Toronto. It is more than our Central Park; it’s an expression of what the city is.” David was willing to commit significantly to a project secured against a 10-page Memorandum of Understanding with the City and some impressive design renderings.

These funds were critical for raising $10 million from the Province of Ontario in spring of 2004, and in no time Evergreen was back knocking on City Hall’s doors asking to advance from the MOU and into full lease negotiations. Other fundraising successes followed, including a $20-million contribution from the federal government and numerous private pledges that (at time of writing in fall 2011) have totalled approximately $20 million.

Any fundraiser understands the adage that people give to people. Relationships are integral. When Evergreen launched the capital campaign, we did not have the base of donors
required to raise $55 million. But we did have a good core base of long-term donors from both the philanthropic and corporate sectors and we started there. A capital campaign cabinet was struck and friends asked friends who asked friends. We sought leaders and champions in the philanthropic and corporate community, those who could show leadership with their own gifts and who had the networks to raise the funds. Many of these networks were new to Evergreen and neither staff nor our Board were experienced in raising the multi-millions required. Our campaign cabinet had some exceptionally committed members who rallied for the project and for whom we would certainly not have raised the $50 million to date. A strong campaign cabinet was a vital ingredient to our success. In turn, staff worked strategically to seize key moments with the public, engage the media to build profile, and demonstrate and share successes to build relationships.

As the project became more defined and construction began to make it real, pledges from the private sector increased. Our campaign weathered the major global recession of 2008. We sought external consultants to open more doors, help refine the strategy and our fundraising materials. Fundraising was, and still is, a long, hard road. Good ideas, good support, a unique site and charismatic leadership will take you a long way when fundraising, but they won’t take you all the way. Despite the ongoing fundraising challenges, Evergreen has made it thus far on some basic, positive thinking, building relationships and galvanizing momentum.

“If your thinking is sound, if you’ve vetted it, if you’ve embraced other people’s opinions and believe in your idea, the money will follow.”

– Evergreen Brick Works Advisory Committee member Tom Scoon
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Discipline and Focus
There is No Substitute for Great Thinking and Hard Work
And Then One Day, You’re Open
Growing Pains: Who Will Drive the Zamboni?
You can keep pedaling for a long time, but sometimes you just need to push.

— SEANA IRVINE, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, EVERGREEN

### Site Animation: Making it Real

Taking on a bold new project begins with a first step. As the momentum builds, a path starts to emerge. Sometimes you know where you are stepping and other times you just have to close your eyes and make the leap.

For a period of time, as the project moved through the design and planning stages and with fundraising set in motion, the programming itself was in a holding pattern. To get past the inertia, Evergreen began hosting activities at the site. “We had to start showing people this was real,” says Seana Irvine, who led the program development for Evergreen Brick Works. “You can plan yourself into oblivion, but it’s important to know when to act. We had to get ourselves in the public eye. After four years of talking behind the scenes, building a network, raising funds, working through approvals and advancing the designs, the buzz on the street about Evergreen Brick Works, in the words of our fundraising consultant, was that it was ‘the best project that never happened.’”

In 2007, Evergreen launched some pilot activities with the potential for high visibility—a farmers’ market and a native plant sale. “The leap into the farmers’ market was simply a leap. It wasn’t a planned or highly refined strategic move,” says Geoff Cape. The idea was to let people begin to experience for themselves what the site had to offer, and to test some program ideas, such as heritage festivals, hosting visiting summer camps and leading walks and talks. The odds for hosting a viable farmers’ market were not necessarily in Evergreen’s favour. “The head of Farmers’ Markets Ontario told us it would never work,” says Geoff. “They said it was the wrong location and that we had no experience.” This may have been true, but nonetheless we felt it was time to act.

“We pulled the plant nursery and farmers’ market together in six weeks,” says Seana. “We brought in an experienced farmers’ market manager—an energetic woman named Elizabeth Harris who had the experience and the networks we needed for a quick start. Then we called on our friends for favours and pulled all hands on deck. We were down there painting at midnight, and doing all that kind of stuff that creates a fun but frantic energy.”

Ried Hoffman, the founder of LinkedIn, said that a real entrepreneur is someone who just takes the leap. He said ‘You throw yourself off a cliff and assemble an airplane on the way down. I feel like that every bloody day.’

This kind of fearlessness is what makes creative projects happen. According to David House, who was hired by Evergreen to lead the development of the site, this bold quality sets social innovators like Evergreen apart. “Evergreenerers have two really prominent skill sets,” he
Engineers without Borders does something really cool. They release a failure report. They have begun to understand the value of reflecting on their failures. You used to be punished for adverse events, but now people actually publicize it and try to learn from it.

— ALLYSON HEWITT, ADVISOR, SOCIAL INNOVATION AND DIRECTOR, SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP MARS

In this case, Evergreen made a safe landing. On the day of the first farmers’ market, the vendors sold out within a couple of hours. And the customers kept coming. By the end of the first season, the Evergreen Brick Works’ farmers’ market was ranked #1 on the National Post’s top 30 things to do in Toronto that summer.

Getting the site on the public’s radar was a key move, says David House. “It was a burned-out combination of industrial buildings with nothing going for it, not even a particularly good parking lot. But Evergreen put a farmers’ market in every Saturday morning and we had 2,000 to 3,000 people coming between 8am and 1pm. That put this place on the map. Without it, I think it would have been a much harder sell to the financial sources and levels of government and all those players who helped do it.”

### Discipline and Focus

You have to do what is expected of you by the larger world. You may be a non-profit but you will be cut no slack for that.

— GEORGE DARK, PARTNER AT URBAN STRATEGIES; CHAIR, EVERGREEN BOARD OF DIRECTORS; AND CO-CHAIR, EVERGREEN BRICK WORKS ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

Transitioning from the scrappy, DIY, grassroots non-profit world into the great big land of real estate development was no easy task. Glenn Garwood remembers early meetings with Evergreen: “In their eyes we could just talk about a one-page agreement and get on with it. That is the heart of naivety.” By the end, a team of 85 lawyers with specialties ranging from zoning to finance to environment played a huge part. Evergreen’s team of consultants included over 20 different specialty groups. With so many voices in the fray, and with more money at stake, decisions became difficult and priorities often shifted. We had to play by someone else’s rules while managing with scarce resources and keeping the vision alive. This required incredible focus and discipline.

Through the design and construction process, a new world of disciplined project management emerged for Evergreen. “One of the things I’ve learned is that most people don’t establish their own deadlines,” says David Stonehouse. “They’re waiting for someone to step in and say, ‘Here’s a target. It may be unrealistic, but we’ve got to go for it.’ I’m always amazed at how people, professionals even, will just meander along without adherence to a time-specific agenda unless you set one for them and make it a common goal.”

Bureaucracy was real and time consuming. Among our greatest challenges was working through the approvals with municipal and provincial levels of government. More perplexing, there was no precedent for Evergreen Brick Works. This project was not your typical private-public partnership. Not only was Evergreen an atypical developer, but the site, which sits in a floodplain and is protected from development, was also atypical. It is also a provincially designated heritage site with international geological significance and had been expropriated for conservation purposes. Combine these factors with Evergreen’s own ambitions to create one of the greenest campuses in North America, and it all made for a lengthy process and many, many meetings with numerous bureaucrats from all four levels of government. Many departments were involved, including Heritage Protection Services, culture departments, environmental assessment, parks and planning, infrastructure and building departments.

Among Evergreen’s greatest challenges was working with the City’s legal department. Tensions often ran high. It was clear there was no template to follow for any of it, even with experienced professionals on the project. Not
only had Evergreen not done this before—no one had. According to lawyer Kim Harle, “This was quite different from the typical commercial transactions that we work on. It was a ‘new school’ project, and we were dealing with counter parties who were working in an ‘old-school’ environment. And there was a lot of work and coaxing and bridging and interpreting with Evergreen to bring people over.” To help break the tension, Glenn Garwood recalls encouraging parties to take the larger view. “Step back for a second,” he remembers saying at meetings. “Where is the public interest? The public interest is not leaving this site stuck and derelict.” This required the recognition of each party as a contributor stakeholder in a larger process of many related parties with one endgame.

- There is No Substitute for Great Thinking and Hard Work

“Anybody contemplating a project like this needs to be told upfront, it will take a decade. Are you prepared to do that?”
— GLENN GARWOOD, FORMER PROJECT MANAGER CITY OF TORONTO

From initial concepts to opening day, Evergreen invested eight years in transforming the Brick Works. “Nobody knew it was going to take eight years,” says Seana. Nobody internally maybe, but the external supporters were ready for the long haul.

“Projects of this complexity and magnitude take a decade from conception to completion. They all do,” says Glenn. “And I didn’t say that to Evergreen at first, because I didn’t want to crush their spirit. But it soon became apparent to them that this was not a quick turn-around; that they had to redouble their focus and redouble their efforts.”

Evergreen’s efforts were substantial for the duration of the project, and the organization learned a lot about project and financial management. “At no point in the process do you just stand back and let the professionals get it done,” says Cameron Charlebois. “Everything has to be readjusted, value engineered, changed again.” The level of Evergreen’s engagement remained high during construction and right into operations. “If an organization doesn’t have that capacity, I wouldn’t suggest trying it at all,” he says.

“Never, ever, ever, ever run out of money.”
— DAVID HOUSE, DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE, EVERGREEN BRICK WORKS

Throughout the pressures and pulls inherent in the process, it was important for Evergreen to stay focused on its mission. This came at a certain price. David House remembers the radiator debacle: “This building is equipped with a radiator device that is made in Austria. It was not available in Canada until we found it and until Evergreen
decided they wanted to use it. And by the time we made that decision, we had to re-engineer essentially the entire heating system for the building. And then we had to install devices that had essentially never been installed in Canada before. And make them all work. That would never happen in a commercial development world. But there’s a strong view by Evergreen staff—that these devices are better and are more efficient, and need to be more commonly available. This is the opportunity to start that process." So systemic change might take more time and money and frustration and aggravation, but there is no other way to do it.

Evergreen’s project management, by necessity, extended into much more stringent financial modeling and analysis, and initial financing from the Royal Bank of Canada made construction possible. “You’ve got to start paying your bills,” says Tom Scoon. “You can’t easily stop construction. It gets too expensive to restart it—both in time and money.” David House agrees: “One of the other great skills that Evergreen brings is finding the right people. Evergreen’s CFO Amy Stein brought serious financial modeling, from a control-based accounting perspective. And having those skills is almost more important than having all of the design and construction skills and all that kind of technical knowledge.” To help manage costs and the construction process, David House served as Evergreen’s “developer advocate.” Among David’s many recommendations, building contingency for things you cannot anticipate and bringing in a very good cost estimator, who reports just to you as client, will help keep costs in check.

Do you want toilets that flush or do you want solar panels in the shape of a fish?

— SEANA IRVINE, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, EVERGREEN

Once into construction, Evergreen had to stop changing its mind, and this wasn’t easy. “We had spent the first few years working through concepts, renderings and options, adding new staff and consultants as needed. But once the ground was broken the stakes were a lot higher, and costs began to escalate by unprecedented degrees. We needed more focus and decisive leadership than ever before,” says Seana Irvine. This felt like a shift from the high degree of creativity and flexibility that had brought the project to this stage. As cost pressures grew, ambitions and budget were reconciled and the team was faced with tough decisions. Certain elements of the project had to be let go, to be revisited possibly in future phases.

While Evergreen had kept its core group of program partners involved through the planning phase and many had participated in early site programming, locking down details for construction meant revisiting their plans and determining if they were still ready and willing to commit. It had been five years since the original program thinking and partnerships had been struck. Five years is a long time in the life of an organization or a small business. For some, their organization’s priorities had shifted and the project no longer made sense for them strategically. Some groups did not have the ability to raise the dollars to commit, while for others, the internal champion for the project had moved on. Those who were able to officially sign up had the most invested financially and strategically in making the Brick Works part of their organization’s DNA. As with becoming a developer, becoming a landlord to program partners was also new territory for Evergreen. Staff were brought in with the skill to negotiate leasing terms, while program staff focused on program collaborations to support site animation.

Despite the challenges and the long haul, Evergreen tried to remain conscious of the little victories along the way. It was important to recognize that incremental progress is still progress. It is this notion of “relentless incrementalism” that got the project to the finish line. “Literally, the whole process was a matter of inches and millimetres, and hours and minutes,” says David House. “So it was more demanding than I would have imagined. And it is a better learning curve than you could ever participate in anywhere else.”

Although the duration was long, deadlines were still tight. Time was on everybody’s mind. “September 2010 was a fascinating month for us because the staff moved into their new offices, we opened the site to the public and we weren’t at all finished with the construction,” says David Stonehouse. “The glass for the donor wall exhibit was installed the morning of the opening from five in the morning until five at night. I mean, we were escorting the tools of the trades out one door as the public was coming in another door and into the cocktail reception.”
“Big projects running down to the wire are common—whether it is a big bank deal or a construction project,” says lawyer Kim Harle. “Often these things are really down to the eleventh hour. Sometimes that’s just what it takes to get it done.”

And Then One Day, You’re Open

The new facility we built at Christie and St. Clair, the Green Barns, put us in a new world. All of a sudden it was like we had an overnight success—that took 13 years to happen.

– Nick Saul, Executive Director, The Stop Community Food Centre

One day, you wake up and your design and construction project is complete. And in a sense, that is when the real work begins. As we got closer to opening day, we came to understand that a much different kind of organization had emerged through the process of creating Evergreen Brick Works. For one thing, we were bigger. Over the eight years of creating Evergreen Brick Works, Evergreen had grown four-fold, from about 25 staff to over 100, and from an annual budget of approximately $3 million to over $10 million. More staff, more money, a physical plant and our growing profile introduced a new lexicon of risk management, project management, accountability.

“There is something I call the hippie shit attitude that goes ‘don’t worry—it will all work out.’ And I think that’s why in some circles the not-for-profit world has been regarded as less than efficient,” says David House.

Growing Pains – Who Will Drive the Zamboni?

Our opening was a success. Programs were launched and the public was coming to Evergreen Brick Works. But internally, we were scrambling to keep pace with the growth, adding new processes and systems to streamline activities and appreciating the importance of risk, and project and human resource management. With construction complete and our doors open, the new responsibility of filling the buildings with creative, evolving programs became our new reality. A seven-day-a-week, four-season operation with
new staff doing new kinds of jobs represented a big shift from our 20 years of a small, but growing, office culture. When organizations get more successful, the stakes become higher. “For Evergreen, it really changed our culture,” says Seana Irvine. “Until about the last year I never talked about risk. It was more about ‘ok, how do we do this?’”

“There is a new risk management framework that’s been thrust upon us over the last five to ten years,” says David Stonehouse. “Everything’s seen in terms of risk. But it’s a useful framework in the sense that it forces you to take certain things seriously.” Risk is a constant balancing act. “If we had been more cautious in our risk management, this project would not exist,” says Geoff Cape. “What we can’t do is lose the essence of the organization that made success so far possible. In other words, we have to hold on to what we’re great at. We can’t let risk management get in the way of thinking big and taking leaps.”

In other words, risk management cannot stifle the organization’s creative soul. The trick, say social entrepreneurs, is not to lose the core of what made the organization great in the first place, that spirit of determination, DIY attitude and passion that commits them to their cause in the first place. “Evergreen staff were ready to put on their hard hats and construction boots if they needed to go to the new office before it was built,” says David House. “That’s cool.”

understood the need to continue to harness the strengths of our staff and remain adaptable to the opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration, even if these were not always clear from a procedural standpoint.

“If you run a bank I think you need defined roles. I think one of the things that attracted me to Evergreen is that you do not get pigeon-holed here,” says George Dark. “There’s a lot of multi-tasking going on here, because people are allowed to have different opportunities and they are allowed to grow into them. They are allowed to take on and not fail, but take on and see how far you can actually take something forward. I run a private sector practice with 80 people. We’d never been allowed to do that. I think it’s part of the great survival culture that exists here. Because there is a lot of cross-pollination going on. The world needs more cross-pollination. And this is living proof of people doing that.”

Growth is hard. Turns out I’m not much of a manager. You have a social entrepreneur who’s doing the thing and who can make that happen, and is passionate and engaged about it and then all of a sudden you have to worry about HR performance evaluations, and it’s like WOW this is hard stuff..... All of a sudden hierarchy emerged in our organization and I’m like what the hell is this, that’s not us. That doesn’t reflect our values.

– TONYA SURMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

To adapt to the new responsibilities, we added new roles in senior management and business development and went through various structural iterations. But implicitly we
LEARN

- Passion and Vision
- Mission Focus
- Trust Your Gut and Push for What You Believe In
- Walk the Talk
- Share Leadership
- Organizational Culture
- Listen, a Lot, Particularly When During the Formative Stage

- Know When to Pause and When to Act
- Be Open to Emerging Ideas
- Perseverance and the Point of No Return
- Establish a Process but be Nimble and Responsive
- And Always, Always, Protect the Good
In the fall of 2011, Evergreen Brick Works celebrated its first-year anniversary. We continue to make progress, involving more people from various walks of life, hosting international sustainability forums, launching new activities that speak to the site’s potential to serve as a living laboratory for green cities, and our business plan is bearing fruit. The fundraising challenges continue, and likely always will. Herewith, a distillation of some of the key lessons learned as we enter the second decade of Evergreen Brick Works.

1. **Passion and vision:**
   Evergreen staff were committed to the idea of transforming an abandoned industrial site into Evergreen Brick Works, but the real magic was that we had discovered a galvanizing idea that drew more supporters than naysayers. We followed the natural momentum of the idea throughout the entire project. The idea itself gave us energy, attracted key collaborators and inspired our community. The idea powered the project.

2. **Mission:**
   Know your mission. Surround yourself with people who will keep reminding you of it through thick and thin. Understand the sense of calling that motivates staff and volunteers alike. At each major stage of the project’s development, we asked how certain decisions would support or take us off mission. Sometimes that meant saying no to good ideas and opportunities. We dealt with a lot of professionals who had a name and a stake in the project too. The balance between flexing to fit into the real world and to stay true to the organization’s mission was a tough act. “We did it by both very emergent and adaptable behaviour but at the same time, some very tight and tough management of what was going to happen,” says Cameron Charlebois.

3. **Trust your gut and push for what you believe in:**
   It took Evergreen some time to get our confidence at the beginning. We had to listen to a lot of opinions and advice. We were humbled by how much we didn’t know. But we knew that we had to steer the course. “One of the good roles that the Evergreen folk play is that they have strong opinions and they don’t give up,” says David House. “They cause things to happen that the commercial world would rule out and overlook.”

4. **Walk the talk:**
   We were creating a physical space that would become the embodiment of Evergreen’s mission. This meant the project itself had to reframe the problem of ecological destruction and tackle social and environmental challenges along the way. We needed to come up with new ways of supporting a sustainable future, including fostering the collaborations needed to achieve this future. Our values were embedded in all aspects of the project—from art in architecture to LEED Platinum certification to creating flexible spaces to accommodate future use. This authentic approach was the key to rallying supporters, testing ideas and transforming them into reality.

5. **Share leadership:**
   Evergreen Brick Works was led by the executive director with the active engagement of our Board and senior advisors, who helped us navigate a path we hadn’t been down before. Without help from experts, we would have been lost. Their visionary leadership and the strong support of the capital cabinet helped shape the idea and nurture the many relationships that were necessary to make it happen. True leadership also means letting others participate in meaningful ways and this shared leadership requires self-confidence and self-awareness, and an understanding of individual strengths. Be conscious of your context, who you are working with and knowing which pieces you can let go. The bigger the project becomes, the more sharing of responsibilities and decision-making will be necessary.

6. **Organizational culture:**
   Evergreen’s culture supported creativity, idea generation and entrepreneurialism, which was exactly what we needed for a project like this. Any organization taking on a big, transformative project must approach ideas by asking “yes, but how?” A little naivety and hubris doesn’t hurt either. If someone had told us at the outset that it would
take eight years and cost over $55 million, we would have doubted our capacity to stay in the game that long, and likely have been scared away by the magnitude of the task and budget. Sometimes not really knowing where you’re going isn’t such a bad thing. A lack of resources made us even more creative, but we had to adopt it as our ethos and push it hard into every aspect of the project.

7. Listen—a lot—particularly when in the formative stage:
We took our plans for Evergreen Brick Works to numerous parties—past and potential donors, those with a history with the site, creative thinkers—and each helped shape our idea, make it better, and bring it into greater focus. These people will also become your allies, and you will rely on them during the process. That said, use common sense and a critical mind. Not every idea thrown your way will be the right one for your organization. Don’t be afraid to say no.

8. Know when to pause and when to act:
This is a fine art that takes a combination of instinct and the willingness to fail. But it often seems that simply trying is what sets you apart. “Not very many people have visions,” says Blakes lawyer Kim Harle. “Of those who do, not very many try to implement them.” At a certain point, you just have to chase your idea down and see what happens. Use analysis to inform your decisions, but beware the trap of “analysis paralysis.”

9. Be open to emerging ideas:
Evergreen Brick Works was born during a period of organizational change and turbulence. We were transitioning into something much bigger and very different, and our staff, partners and volunteers were feeling the shift and had strong opinions about it. Innovation often happens on the margins. During times of change, you have to be open to new ideas—more open than you may otherwise naturally be.

10. Perseverance and the point of no return:
Once you’ve committed your organization to a project of the magnitude of Evergreen Brick Works, you’re in. At times, the risks of getting out outweigh the challenges of staying the course. We reached moments when it felt like we were hitting walls and starting to seriously reconsider whether the project was feasible after all. Optimism, a tolerance for risk and a basic hunger to make the project succeed got us to the finish line. If you have these conditions, perseverance and never giving up will see you through dark days.

11. Establish a process but be nimble and responsive:
We required multiple advisors and consultants to transform Evergreen Brick Works through all its stages—from initial concept to to the detailed master plan, and from construction drawings to the ultimate build-out. Any large project will require precision, persistence and acumen. Identifying and celebrating key milestones helped turn an overwhelming project into more manageable pieces. Some of these milestones were anticipated and helped guide the process. Other milestones or turn-key moments surprised us, such as how quickly we completed the first major step in fundraising. Be conscious of those moments that may make you adapt your course.

12. And always, always, protect the good:
Some change we sought, some was thrust upon us as a condition of our organizational growth. We have grown professionally through the process, but the core skills and attributes of Evergreen remain intact: collaboration, risk-taking, creativity, knowing when to ask for help, developing organizational leaders. With this foundation, learning new skills associated with running Evergreen Brick Works and continuing bring the project to scale are well within our reach.

If you or your organization can see yourself in any of these conditions, then pushing ahead with a bold, world-changing idea may just be in the cards for you.