



## Merchants Corner Annual Report 2021-2022

### **From the Board Co-Chairs:**

Ten years ago, Merchants Corner Inc. (MCI) held consultations which brought the North End community together to create Merchants Corner. Through these consultations a vision was created to co-locate education, housing, safety, culture and meeting place for good food and connection.

In 2020-2021, the Board and staff met monthly and focussed on:

- Implementing Merchants Corner 3-Year Strategic Plan
- Overseeing the new Co-Director positions
- Strengthening Merchants Corner operations
- Growing Board membership, capacity and operations

Many thanks to our partners/tenants: The Urban and Inner-City Studies Program (UIC), Community Education Development Association (CEDA), Perfect Place Café and Catering (PPC), administrative Partner North End Community Renewal Corporation (NECRC), University of Winnipeg Student Association (UWSA), folks who have used our facilities, and our residential tenants. We also thank our building manager Winnipeg Housing and Rehabilitation Corporation (WHRC) for maintaining and managing our building.

On behalf of the Board and staff, we thank the community for their support. We trust our staff, anchor education tenants, students and visitors will soon be able to return to normal programing as we move through and past the challenges of this past year.

### **From the Co-Directors:**

In 2021, Merchants Corner developed and approved Merchants Corner 3-Year Strategic Plan. The plan outlines to key objectives: to enhance organizational capacity and to enhance community presence and profile. Over the past fiscal year, Merchants Corner Board members, staff and volunteers have worked together to achieve these objectives and further the mission of Merchants Corner. We are proud of what we have accomplished this year and look forward to doing more!

## **ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY**

### **Board Development**

- Recruited 6 new Board members from a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, skills and life stories
- Established Housing, HR/Policy, and Finance Committees and are in process of revising/approving committee Terms of Reference
- Executive Committee met monthly with Co-Directors to provide guidance, support and organizational oversight for the Co-Directors work
- Organized and developed Board documents for Merchants Corner website
- Developed Director Expectations Policy outlining expectations for membership

## Building Operations

- Installed fence in basement for safety and security purposes
- Installed emergency lockdown buttons at front desk for security and safety purposes
- Established regular, quarterly meetings with building partners
- Developed and implemented COVID-safety procedures for the building
- Finalized Perfect Place Café lease
- Procured sharps containers for the North and South buildings
- Organized regular building cleaning and administration of cleaning
- Oversaw the repair/recovery after November break-in
- Supported Perfect Place Café by providing administrative support, COVID-relief opportunities, and rent reductions
- Finalized the Shared Use Agreement with building partners
- Currently overseeing the renovation, repair and administration of Merchants Corner post-fire in June 2022

## Finances

- Completed engagement review for 2020-2021
- All corporate taxes have been filed and are up to date
- Re-established Manitoba Corporation Status and ensured all filings are up to date
- Organized Merchants Corner banking account administration to include new signing authorities, online banking options, procured Merchants Corner credit cards
- Organized Merchants Corner Canada Revenue Agency account to include updated Board membership and contact information
- Drafted Merchants Corner Charitable Status Application (yet to be submitted)
- Developed new financial reporting processes and presentation
- Developed 2022-2023 budget



## **Fund Development**

- Successfully fundraised over \$70,000 for Merchants Corner operations (including summer internships and event sponsorships)
- Re-established connections with previous funders
  - o Developed proposals for future funding, met with foundation/organizational representatives to share the work and vision for Merchants Corner
  - o Provided tours of Merchants Corner to potential funding partners

## **Organizational Development**

- Finalized and approved Merchants Corner 3-Year Strategic Plan
- Built internal office, purchase computers, printer,
- Set-up email accounts, Zoom etc.
- Oversaw staffing shifts to better serve the Merchants Corner community
  - o Trained and developed UW UIC student internship placement that involved a housing database project to measure social impact in the community
- Developed a Memorandum of Understanding between North End Community Renewal Corporation and Merchants Corner to help grow relationship and administrative collaboration
- Transitioned Merchants Corner from NECRC to new administrative hosts Community Education Development Association (CEDA)
  - o Developed Closing of Services agreement and process with NECRC
  - o Developed Memorandum of Understanding for administrative partnership with CEDA



## **ENHANCE COMMUNITY PRESENCE AND PROFILE**

### **Community Engagement**

- Participated in Community Walk for Indigenous Women and Girls in Sports
- Participated in Indigenous Vision for the North End Smudge the North End
- Hosted regular building partner social hours
- Hosted Lighting Up the Avenue and had over 100 people through our doors for music, craft kits and snacks

- Distributed food hampers to Merchants Corner tenants and community members in December 2021
- Hosted Aboriginal Seniors Resource Centre weekly events, Indigenous Film Festival, North End Community Renewal Corporation planning meetings, UW UIC events, and more!
- Hosted Elders Teachings and Sharing Circle with Knowledge Keepers Heather Huston
- Staff received naloxone training from Main Street Project
- Began work with North End Internet Connectivity Project to explore providing free internet for tenants
- Presented on Merchants Corner at Okimaw Nations Conference with CCEDNet on “Best Community Development Practices”
- Helped organize and represent Merchants Corner at GiZhe Waa Ti Sii Win Conference, hosted by End Homelessness Initiative
- Participated in Selkirk Street Festival in June 2022; hosted button making event for individuals and families
- Helped host Arts and Crafts Sale with Perfect Place Café in April 2022
- Organized community garden build, built 6 garden boxes and revitalized community garden space at Selkirk Community Garden (552 Selkirk Avenue)



## Housing

- Started discussions on potential new processes and procedures with WHRC for more effective building management-on-going
- Established regular meetings with WHRC to address building issues and tenant concerns.
- Researched and networked with various property management providers to learn about different strategies and approaches to effective property management
- Revised the tenant application requirements to create less barriers to accessing Merchants Corner housing
- Increased housing occupancy—as of July 1, Merchants Corner is completely full

- Merchants Corner Housing Project- hired Urban and Inner-City Studies work placement student from May-August to conduct interviews with residential tenants about their experiences to help address social impact.

### **Marketing/Communications**

- Facilitated development of new Merchants Corner logo and branding
- Developed and launched Merchants Corner website
  - o Researched and worked on increasing Merchants Corner search engine optimization
- Developed Merchants Corner Monthly, a monthly newsletter on the various people, stories and happenings of Merchants Corner
- Accessed Merchants Corner social media accounts and re-engaged community members through online and social media presence

<h3><b>MAJOR ISSUES/CHALLENGES</b></h3>
---

- The biggest structural challenge to Merchants Corner is not having charitable status
  - o Difficulty fundraising without charitable status
  - o Dependency on administrative hosts
- Merchants Corner fire in June 2022
  - o Closed commercial operations in the building from June 2022 to present
  - o Significant renovations/repairs required
  - o Closure of Perfect Place Café and Catering



### **Merchants Corner Incorporated Building Tenancy**

**University of Winnipeg - Urban and Inner-City Studies Program (UIC)** offers courses during the day Monday to Friday 8:30 am to 4:00 pm, and on Saturdays 8:30 am to 12:00 pm. In 2010, UIC established its program in the north end with an intention to increase enrollment for individuals who

have never considered attending a post-secondary institute. To ensure student success UIC has developed a unique program model which includes limiting class sizes (maximum 25 students), providing extra student support systems, and implementing a curriculum with a strong Indigenous character. Enrollment has steadily grown since 2010; approximately 40% of students

are Indigenous and/or have grown up in the North End. In addition, many of the UIC students and graduates have taken on active leadership roles in their community.

**Community Education Development Agency, CEDA-Pathways to Education** offers free, after school tutoring and mentoring programs during the evening from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm. CEDA's program model is designed to help students grades 8 through 12 reach their fullest potential through academic achievement, high school graduation, and post-secondary opportunities. CEDA currently serves the following areas: Lord Selkirk Park, Dufferin, William Whyte, and North Point Douglas. Their partner schools include Children of the Earth, R. B Russell, St. Johns, Tec Voc, Niji Mahkwa, David Livingston, William Whyte, and Isaac Newton. In addition to their after-school program CEDA provides free summer school throughout the month of July for students who require it.

**Merchants Corner Housing (MCH), which is managed by Winnipeg Housing and Rehabilitation Corporation**, features 30 units of affordable housing for students and their families. MCH consists of 2 complexes located at 540 Pritchard Avenue and 541 Selkirk Avenue. Each complex houses 1, 2 and 3 bedroom suites, and 1 unit that is Wheelchair-accessible. The vision for MCH is to address the housing needs within Winnipeg, and to make housing available to students attending classes in Merchants Corner, community members who are accessing support services in the area, youth aging out of care, and finally students from other educational institutes in need of housing.

The **University of Winnipeg Student Association (UWSA)** has an office in the building.

**Perfect Place Café & Catering** is owned and operated by two local Indigenous community members Erica Contois and Destiny Michell. Since the launch of the cafe, it has brought new energy to the community and has become the new space for gatherings and meetings for students, community groups, and other local businesses. The Café has continually adapted to Covid-19 restrictions to ensure the safety of their patrons.

### **Community Use**

MCI has worked with other organizations to deliver their programming, activities and services in line with our project charter. The community room, seminar room and common space are regularly scheduled for meetings, events, classes, workshops and other activities. The shared use of the building has raised awareness of Merchants Corner, brought more community members into the complex and help them feel welcome and comfortable at Merchants Corner.