



Merchants Corner Incorporated Annual General Meeting

Annual Report April 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021

Submitted by MCI Board and Staff

Word from the Chair – Robert Neufeld:

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. MCI has begun to focus on operations and programming.

I would like to thank the MCI Board of Directors for their hard work meeting monthly to keep our vision and plans alive. Many thanks to the Community Coordinator Shannon Bunn and Community Connector Roberta Greyeyes for their hard work this year.

In 2020-2021, the Board and staff met monthly. We are very grateful to the Winnipeg Foundation for the community coordination and connection grant they gave us. The grant helped fund our Community Coordinator and Connector positions for this year. The Board and staff focus this year has been the following:

- Complete a 3-year strategic plan with the Board of Directors (in progress)
- Obtain Charitable Status for Merchants Corner Inc (in progress)
- Coordinate the roll out of Perfect Place Catering and Café Social Enterprise (ongoing)
- Market Merchants Corner and create strong working relationships (limited due to Covid-19)
- Ensure residential suites are at capacity all year long (limited due to Covid-19)
- Strengthen connector relationships with anchor tenants and residents (on going)

Many thanks to our partners/tenants: The Urban and Inner-City Studies Program (UIC), Community Education Development Association (CEDA), Perfect Place Café and Catering (PPCC), 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 are thankful to our developer the University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation (UWCRC) for helping complete the construction of the Selkirk Avenue (South Side of the project). 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 programming as we move through and past the challenges of this past year.

Report from MCI Directors - Julie Kettle and Nicole Lamy

We are honoured and excited to join the MCI community as Co-Directors. Thank you to the MCI staff and Board members, building partners, residential tenants, and community members for welcoming us and for your ongoing hard work.

MCI Community Coordination and Connection Project Purpose:

The Merchants Corner Incorporated Community Coordination and Connection Project was created to achieve the final transition from capital development to community operations. MCI hired two positions (Community Coordinator and Community Connector) to launch MCI into the community education and gathering hub that it was always intended to be. The goals for these positions were to enact the recommendations from the 2017 Community Consultation Report.

Implementation:

The Community Coordinator was hired to coordinate the completion of a 3-year strategic plan with the MCI Board of Directors. This strategic plan outlines MCI's vision, mission, long term impact, values, goals, objectives, and strategic priorities. Additionally, the Community Coordinator facilitated the integration of Perfect Place Café social enterprise into the MCI building; promoted MCI to the larger Winnipeg community; cultivated strong working relationships with MCI tenants (both commercial and residential) and various Winnipeg-based organizations; and hired a Community Connector to liaise with guests, provide security, and monitor the MCI building.

Working in collaboration with Winnipeg Housing Renewal Corporation building maintenance staff, the Community Connector effectively ensured the ongoing safety, security, and helpful presence of MCI to tenants and the general public. Given the realities of COVID-19 and corresponding impact on holistic health and well-being, MCI successfully began its transition from a capital project to an operational organization.

Community Involvement:

The MCI community gathered for various events: Perfect Place Grand Opening (January 2020), Mural Project Unveiling (April 2020), Community Classroom Renaming in honour of Elder Kathy Mallett (November 2020), and MCI Christmas Gathering (December 2020). Additionally, the Community Coordinator and Community Connector worked collaboratively with North End Community Renewal Corporation to gather and distribute holiday hampers to residential tenants of MCI. These events instilled shared experiences of pride, hope and dedication to the ongoing work of MCI.

Project Impact:

As a result of the community consultation and strategic planning project, MCI developed a strong, clear vision and 3-year strategic plan to guide our organization, empower our community, and cultivate organizational sustainability. Through the community consultation process, MCI

identified critical issues related to MCI's vision, resources, community, and housing. A framework for planning was outlined to address these issues, improve operations to better serve our community, and establish MCI's vision, mission, long-term impact, and goals. MCI established two strategic priorities that will guide the next 3 years: to enhance MCI's organizational capacity and to enhance MCI's community presence and profile.

Through this project, MCI was able to employ Indigenous individuals from the North End neighbourhood in the Community Coordinator and Connector roles. Moreover, MCI developed a strong COVID-19 response plan to provide security, safety and support for all residential and commercial tenants.

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. Through our community driven programming, MCI has partnered with NECRC for the Annual North End Hamper initiative. MCI acted as a central location for community members to register for a hamper, as well a distribution center for pick-up of the hampers. Recipients included MC Housing residents, students who attended programming at MCI, and the wider North End community. 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.