



CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

PROJECT PROFILE

WestEnd Commons

Winnipeg, Manitoba



A major church conversion has saved a 100-year-old church from an uncertain future and at the same time created new affordable housing for families in Winnipeg.

Taking more than five years to be completed, St. Matthew's Anglican Church was repurposed into WestEnd Commons to include 26 affordable apartments, a 93-m² (1,000-square-foot) atrium, a fully restored commercial kitchen and a 836-m² (9,000-square-foot) neighbourhood resource centre.

Highlights

A century-old church in Winnipeg was restored to create 26 new affordable apartments for families.

Client group: Families with low incomes

Developer: St. Matthew's Non-Profit Housing Corporation Inc.

Number of units: 26 (4 one-bedroom, 15 two-bedroom, 5 three-bedroom, 2 four-bedroom; including six fully accessible suites)

Tenure: Rental

Who was involved? Government of Canada (CMHC), Province of Manitoba (Manitoba Housing), City of Winnipeg, community and corporate donations

Church services continue to be offered in the building's redesigned sanctuary.

"This community-based initiative created a sustainable, long-term solution," said Reverend Cathy Campbell of St. Matthew's Anglican Church, which developed the property. "We weren't big enough to do it ourselves. We benefited from an investment by three levels of government, and the community took ownership. It nurtures hope that ordinary people can do this with help from partners and allies."

The Affordable Housing Solution

WestEnd Commons was developed by St. Matthew's Non-Profit Housing Inc., a partnership between Grain of Wheat Church Community and St. Matthew's Anglican Church that was formed in 2009. The non-profit organization also manages the facility with a 50-year lease from St. Matthew's Church.

Prior to this project, the massive, century-old St. Matthew's Anglican Church was in critical condition. Rain was coming in, mould appeared and floors were rotting.

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Also at stake was the loss of a dynamic neighbourhood resource centre and kitchen that fed over 900 people each week. The congregation understood it was time to either renew the building or close it. But the congregation itself had dwindled from 1200 to 100, so financial and human resources were limited.

In 2005-2006, the church raised funds for minor repairs to its neighbourhood resource centre. Through this exercise, it made lasting connections with charities and learned how to move forward with the larger renovation project.

In 2007, the church conducted research and market studies to include affordable housing with the renovation, using Seed Funding from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). The church then applied to Manitoba Housing for a project development fund loan, which paid for the concept design, feasibility study, architect and legal fees.

When it turned out that the originally planned 18 apartments would not be viable, the design was altered to relocate the sanctuary and add eight more apartments. Revised plans also included wider sidewalks along the busy street, adding insulation and extra windows, and the purchase and demolition of a neighbouring rooming house on the north side to allow for more windows, green space and the HVAC vent.

CMHC Contact

Contact a representative of CMHC's Affordable Housing Centre
www.cmhc.ca/contactahc

During construction, the non-profit housing group used a project manager rather than a general contractor for flexibility, cost savings and hands-on oversight.

Opened in 2014, WestEnd Commons has two floors of apartments on the east wing and four floors on the north and south wings. Every apartment is visitable and served by an elevator at the south end; there is a walkway running from south to north and a lift between the third and fourth floor on the north wing. Each apartment is unique and the top-storey apartments have inherited the 6-m (20-foot) ceilings from the original building.

The new housing is targeted to single parents, newcomers to Canada, First Nation families and families with mental health challenges. Twenty of the 26 apartments have their rent geared to income, and six apartments are fully accessible.

On the main level, the redesigned neighbourhood resource centre operates as a social enterprise with a self-sustaining budget. It has nine offices, two small kitchens and six meeting rooms that can accommodate up to 150 people.

The project received \$1,875,000 in combined federal and provincial funding through the Canada-Manitoba Affordable Housing Initiative, as well as \$836,985 in federal funding through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. Additional funding included a provincial contribution of more than \$1.6 million. The City of Winnipeg contributed more than \$135,000 in one-time grants, as well as annual operating grants to WestEnd Commons for 10 years. St. Matthew's Non-Profit Housing Inc. contributed more than \$1.1 million through fundraising and cash equity.