

# Neighbourhood Analysis

## Gas Station Theatre

### Context and History

Osborne Village is one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Winnipeg, as well as one of the most densely populated in Western Canada. Located just south of the downtown, it is bordered by the Assiniboine River to the north, Donald Street to the east, Wellington Crescent to the west, and the Osborne underpass to the south.

In the 1870s, Osborne Village was developed as a suburb of St. Boniface, called St. Boniface West. The construction of electric street car lines along River Avenue and across the Osborne Street Bridge led to the development of single family homes and apartments, along with some mixed use buildings along Osborne Street. By 1917, seventeen apartment buildings existed within the boundaries of the neighbourhood. During the 1950s and 60s, many of the mansions on Roslyn Road were demolished in order to construct the high-rise apartment buildings that exist today. In 1968 the neighbourhood officially became Osborne Village. The neighbourhood's commercial core was perceived to be unstable at this time, with many bohemian shops opening and closing along Osborne Street. During the 1970s entrepreneurs moved into the village, grounding the Osborne Street commercial core. Condominium construction and trendy retail stores characterized development in the village during the 1980s and 90s.



Right: Map of Winnipeg with Osborne Village highlighted. Adapted from the *Osborne Village Character Inventory Study* (2001).  
Left: A map depicting the boundaries of Osborne Village. Adapted from the *Osborne Village Neighbourhood Plan* (2006).

### Osborne Street Urban Form

Osborne Street is a destination place, a busy arterial road, and a walkable neighbourhood main street. It is a dense commercial district, with over fifty businesses located between Gertrude Avenue and River Avenue. Osborne Street is defined in the *Osborne Village Neighbourhood Plan* as a character commercial block. A unique streetscape can be attributed to the density of businesses, the narrow street, and the architecture.

Although Osborne Street is used as a thoroughfare by vehicle traffic connecting to downtown, it is a relatively narrow road, with only four traffic lanes and two lanes of parking. While not as convenient for car traffic, this relatively narrow form has contributed to its character as a walkable main street. In contrast, Donald Street is less pedestrian friendly as a busy arterial road with six traffic lanes.

The presence of heritage buildings such as the McKim Building and the Old Bank of Montreal convey a sense of history through architecture. Typically, Osborne Street buildings are multi-storey and set close to the sidewalk, creating an inviting environment for pedestrians. Parking lots are located behind the buildings, which further orients the streetscape to a pedestrian scale.

However, there are areas along Osborne Street that aren't built to a pedestrian scale. These locations, such as the Confusion Corner shopping area and the Toronto Dominion Bank strip mall, create visual incongruities along the street.



Photo: Chris Baker  
The Roslyn Court Apartments, built in 1910.



Photo: Vicky Reaney  
Fort Rouge Co-op Day-care is cooperatively run and can accommodate approximately 36 children.



Photo: Chris Baker  
High-rise apartments overlooking the Assiniboine River.



Photo: Vicky Reaney  
A meeting place in Osborne Village.



Photo: Vicky Reaney  
Looking north on Osborne Street.



Photo: Karin Kliewer  
Looking south at the corner of River Avenue and Osborne Street.



Photo: Karin Kliewer  
The TD Bank Building is setback further than the surrounding buildings.



Photo: Karin Kliewer  
The spire of Augustine United Church, a landmark in Osborne Village.

### Osborne Village Lynch Map

A Lynch map is a tool used to illustrate the way the people relate to, or 'read' a neighbourhood. This Lynch map of Osborne Village (below) identifies neighbourhood boundaries, major vehicular and pedestrian paths, landmarks, areas of concentrated commercial activity, and areas of concentrated social activity. A **node** is an area that acts as a junction, such as a major intersection, or concentration of activity, such as a public square. There are both pedestrian and transportation nodes within Osborne Village, concentrated around Osborne Street, at the corners of Stradbrook Avenue, River Avenue, and Confusion Corner. A **landmark** also acts as a defining physical feature within a neighbourhood. Important landmarks in the neighbourhood include churches, such as Fort Rouge United Church, as well as historic buildings, such as the McKim Building. The map depicts a concentration of distinctive features at the intersection of River Avenue and Osborne Street, where the Gas Station Theatre is located. The intersection is a node for pedestrian traffic, as well as public transit. The presence of two cafés makes it a meeting place for people within Osborne Village. Two landmarks, Augustine United Church and the Safeway complex, are also located at the intersection.

- Legend**
- Paths
  - Edges
  - ★ Landmarks
  - Commercial District
  - Social Infrastructure
  - Major Nodes



Lynch Map depicting major features of Osborne Village.

### Social Infrastructure

Social infrastructure is defined as the "interdependent mix of places, spaces, programs and networks at all levels" (Hanvey 2004). Social infrastructure can also be understood as the social networks and processes that produce community values and enhance quality of life.

There are nine places of worship that exist within the boundaries of Osborne Village, representing many denominations, such as United, Anglican, Catholic, Ba'hai and Mennonite. These places of worship also provide a variety of community services, and are meeting places for community groups.

A number of social services are located in the neighbourhood that cater to city-wide populations with social, health or employment needs. The Laurel Centre provides counseling services to women who have experienced sexual abuse. The Stradbrook Senior Centre acts as a recreational centre and meeting place for seniors. The Osborne Village Resource Centre provides employment counseling and internet access to the community. Augustine United Church offers an ecumenical support group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and two-spirited members.

Osborne Village has one elementary school and two daycares but no high schools or post-secondary institutions. Some adult education courses are offered through the River Osborne Community Centre.

With the exception of Fort Rouge Recreational Centre, cultural and recreational facilities are largely provided through the private sector, such as private galleries, yoga studios, bars, and restaurants.

# A Place for the Community

## Gas Station Theatre



The Gas Station Theatre leases its space to performing arts groups in Winnipeg approximately two hundred nights a year. Recently the Board of Directors of the Osborne Village Cultural Centre - the owners of the site - have undertaken some soul-searching to determine whether the Theatre should remain a rental venue or also develop a stronger role in the community.

The Theatre is situated on one of the most prominent corners in Winnipeg, in Osborne Village - the **most densely populated neighbourhood in the city**. It rests in the heart of what is a uniquely vibrant area with an established arts and culture infrastructure. However, the Theatre has a relatively **low physical and social profile** in the neighbourhood.

This issue is evident to the Board and has been influential in their decision to review the Theatre's future possibilities.

We - a group of students in the Master of City Planning program at the University of Manitoba - have been asked to assist the Board in exploring new possibilities for the Gas Station Theatre site.

We began by studying the Osborne Village Neighbourhood Plan and Plan Winnipeg 2020 Vision, then completed a **neighbourhood analysis**, and reviewed a selection of **successful arts and cultural centres** across North America to learn about their strengths and weaknesses.

This **proposal** for the Gas Station Theatre takes demographic, social, physical and other factors into account within the Osborne Village context. It maintains much of the existing form of the building while **expanding the Theatre's partnership with the community**, to make the Theatre an inclusive space for a wide variety of community members. By creating welcoming outdoor spaces, and increasing partnerships with city and neighbourhood organisations, **the Gas Station Theatre can become a resource for the whole community**.

The Gas Station Theatre will become a participatory community theatre and cultural centre by building partnerships with organizations and individuals in Osborne Village and Winnipeg through outreach, involvement, and education.



Photos: Andrew Ross

Above: Large youth and senior demographics in the Village may be untapped sources of volunteers.

Photos: Andrew Ross

Above: Nearby organizations. Is space and resource support for new programming available?

### Strengths

- Central, well-connected location
- Proximity to social infrastructure
- Preliminary connections with community groups
- Flexibility of upcoming tenant lease expiry

### Weaknesses

- Limiting configuration of interior and exterior space
- Inadequate staff and volunteer resources
- Limited of community awareness and engagement

### Opportunities

- High neighbourhood & city profile
- Large arts & cultural base in Winnipeg
- Various government funding possibilities
- Potential volunteer base - local senior and youth demographics

### Threats

- Challenge of negotiating complex partnerships
- Cost of environmental site remediation
- Uncertainty of finances



Vendors and artisans could help community members meet some of their social needs and encourage positive use of this outdoor space.



Photo: Thomas Young

Above: Street performers often inject vibrancy into public places. The southwest corner of the site could accommodate this.



Photo: Jared Smith



Long term proposal - River Avenue and Osborne Street looking North. This cross section shows the interaction between the site and Osborne Street

# Community Partnerships

Gas Station Theatre

## Building Partnerships

The Gas Station Theatre is well placed to become a partnership and networking centre for Osborne Village and Winnipeg organizations. By engaging the broader community in planning programs and goals, it could become a participatory hub for theatre and the arts in Winnipeg.

Here are some ideas for how to build partnerships for the Gas Station Theatre:

- Hire staff and/or recruit volunteers to develop partnerships with **neighbourhood and city organizations** (e.g. seniors' centres; youth/young family organizations; cultural organizations; advocacy groups; arts organizations, etc)
- Have **semi-annual meetings** with partner organizations and the community to assess potential needs, and to develop programming and advertising goals;
- Increase the **volunteer** capacity of the Theatre (e.g. in maintaining the planters, program development and leadership, etc);
- Develop and establish **community-led** programming, (e.g. theatre classes, community theatre, summer camps);
- Investigate **space sharing** with partner organizations; and
- Provide opportunities for emerging artists to showcase their talents.

Part of developing this community would be the creation of a **welcoming and inviting atmosphere**, for all people. To achieve this, the Gas Station Theatre could

- Welcome **multi-lingual** programming;
- Provide interpretation services for meetings;
- Develop an **anti-oppression** policy, including anti-racism training, for the use/operation of the Gas Station Theatre; and
- Ensure the board and staff are representative of a wide variety of groups.

Finally, to share this exciting new work with the wider community, the Gas Station Theatre could:

- Develop **promotions** in partnership with Osborne Village businesses (e.g. ticket deals, etc); and
- Develop a **communications and marketing plan**, including an events brochure and regular website updates.

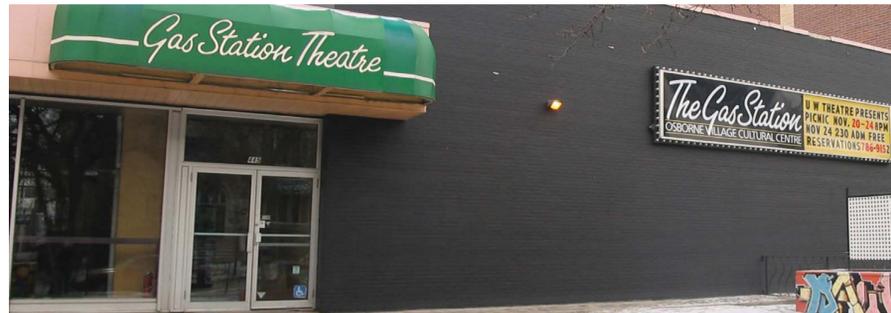


Photo: Sarah Cooper

## Inspiration from other places

There are community cultural centres all across North America that depend on community participation to create and carry out programs. Here are four examples:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>a. Klondike Institute of Arts and Culture</b><br/>Dawson City, Yukon <a href="http://www.kiac.org">www.kiac.org</a><br/>KIAC offers a variety of community, continuing education, and professional development programs and events in arts education. KIAC hosts two annual art festivals, and runs the ODD Gallery, which features regional, national, and international artists.</p> | <p><b>b. Tia Chucha's Centro Cultural</b><br/>Los Angeles, California <a href="http://www.tiachucha.com">www.tiachucha.com</a><br/>Tia Chucha's Centro Cultural is a learning and cultural arts centre and bookstore. It offers workshops, a performance space, internet access and a space for dialogue and networking. The bookstore provides resources on social commentary issues.</p> |
| <p><b>c. Vancouver Arts Club Theatre Company</b><br/>Vancouver, BC <a href="http://www.artclub.com">www.artclub.com</a><br/>The Arts Club Theatre is a production company that supports local and upcoming artists by premiering new productions, classics, musicals and cabarets. They reach out to their community with youth programs.</p>  | <p><b>d. Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company</b><br/>Saskatoon, Saskatchewan <a href="http://www.sntc.ca">www.sntc.ca</a><br/>SNTC creates, develops and produces artistic presentations by Aboriginal artists. Programs include cultural and artistic skills development programs, a summer camp, an after-school performing arts program, and workshops for aspiring artists.</p>        |



a. Photo: [www.kiac.org](http://www.kiac.org) b. Photo: [www.tiachucha.com](http://www.tiachucha.com) c. Photo: [www.artclub.com](http://www.artclub.com) d. Photo: [www.sntc.ca](http://www.sntc.ca)



Photo: Vicky Reaney



Photo: David Kuxhaus

Business and community partnership opportunities for the Gas Station Theatre?

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Photo: Karin Kliever



Photo: Andrew Ross



Photo: Karin Kliever

Osborne Village has many opportunities for both formal and informal partnerships.

## Ecological Sustainability

Concern for the **environment** is growing as people become more aware of global warming, pollution, and other environmental issues. The Gas Station Theatre could easily incorporate 'green' aspects into its programming and buildings.

To increase the ecological sustainability of the Gas Station Theatre's organization and programming, it could, in the short term:

- Develop a socially and environmentally responsible **purchasing policy** for products and supplies; and
- Provide resources (flyers, information, workshops) on ecological sustainability topics.

In the long term, the Gas Station Theatre could:

- **Remove the gas tanks**, to remove a major source of contamination;
- Increase amount of **green space** in Osborne Village through native plantings on its site;
- Landscape to increase shade and ground permeability;
- Use power from **alternative energy** sources; and
- **Reduce water use** through water conservation, e.g. with composting toilets.



Photos: Evan Leeson



Photos: Beatrice Murch

Using energy from alternative sources, and "greening" the patio and sidewalk around the Gas Station Theatre are two ideas to increase the Theatre's ecological sustainability.



Making Osborne Village a greener place.

# Design for Community

## Gas Station Theatre



Short term: Creating a welcoming open space along Osborne Street for community engagement.

### Short Term Design

To create an open, flexible community space with a lot of potential for movement, many changes have been proposed. The **fences** are removed to allow movement through the space, and to create a permeable boundary between the Gas Station Theatre and the neighbourhood.

The bear has been removed from the circle to create a space for **buskers** or street performers. The River and Osborne Corner is already a high traffic transit node, drawing many people to the corner at all times of day. The redesigned space draws on this, and showcases community talent.

**The Osborne Street side**, now an open space, can be used for **markets**, or community events. A **ground map** featuring Osborne Village and neighbourhood highlights encourages people to enter and interact with the space as well as with each other.

**The River Avenue side** is a quiet and intimate space. **Lights** in the planters and throughout the trees make this an attractive and unique spot in the evening. A **removable stage** allows the space to be used for concerts or other community events.

From all directions the Gas Station Theatre is more visible through larger and more prominent **signs**. The roof-mounted sign is visible to traffic coming and going over the Osborne Bridge while the sign over the entrance attracts pedestrians and is visible to traffic on River Avenue.

The building itself will be more vibrant and recognizable, exhibiting artistic character through bold, bright **colours**. The use of moveable **furniture** will add to the flexible and community friendly space.



Long term: A café invites people into the Gas Station Theatre space, and landscaping increases the greenery in Osborne Village.



Top Left: A surface map of Osborne Village will encourage people to interact with the space as well as providing opportunities for casual encounters between community members.

Right: A cafe will provide a welcoming space, revenue generation, and a place to showcase local art.

Photo: Orange County Great Park Corporation



Bottom Left: Changes in surface treatment, be it material, colour, pattern, or texture can delineate the space without creating physical or visual boundaries.

Photo: Keith Collie: Green Places

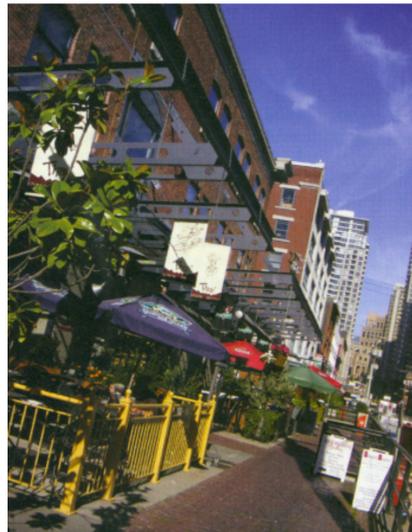


Photo: VIA Architecture: Urban Land

### Long Term Design

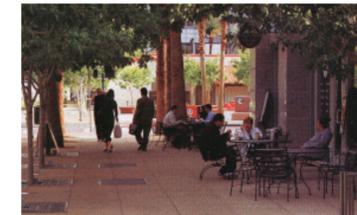
The Osborne Street side of the building is extended to provide more space for a café showcasing local art. Patio doors can be opened in the summer to create an open air café. The ground is leveled, and a slightly raised **patio** serves as an outdoor space for the café. The patio is fully accessible by a **ramp** and from inside the café.

All planters are removed from the site to create a more open space. The **circle** remains for buskers and street performers. Without fences or planters, the space is delineated by **surface treatment**, so ground colour and pattern indicate the different spaces of sidewalk and patio, while remaining accessible to people with different mobility and visual needs.

On the River Avenue side, a border of **trees** and permanent **chess tables** create a boulevard atmosphere. With the set up of **movable fences** and a stage, this space can be transformed into a semi-private area for use by community groups, for concerts, or for events such as the Comedy Festival.

The new **Gas Station Theatre Sign** will be more visible and create brand recognition for the site. Building on the existing circle at the corner of River and Osborne, the sign will be a circle at the corner of the building. With a '**marquee**' style, it will be highly visible, classically theatre, and informative of upcoming events.

The **bus shelter**, a gathering area for people moving through, and looking into, the corner, is incorporated into the site design. The **circle**, featured in both the busker area and the Gas Station Theatre sign itself, forms the basis of the bus shelter design. This is another venue for advertisement and brand recognition for the theatre. The uniqueness of the bus shelter itself will draw people to the space. Built on both the Gas Station Theatre site and the city sidewalk, it is a physical sign of the partnerships valued by the Theatre.



Top Left: With a line of trees and permanent chess tables, River Avenue will have a flowing, boulevard atmosphere.

Photo: Sawa group: Landscape Architecture



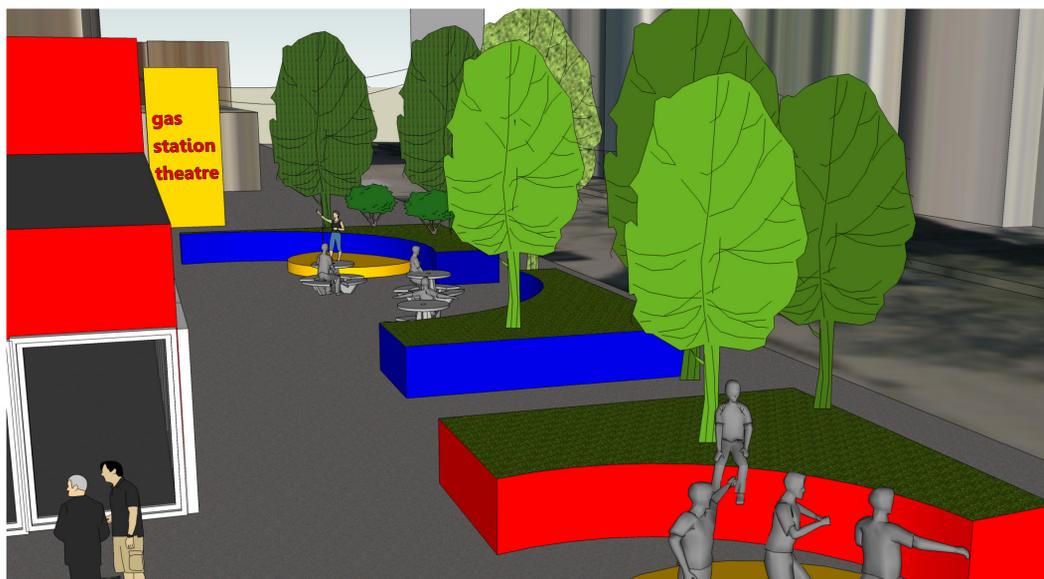
Right: Large, marquee style sign with create greater recognition while advertising upcoming events.

Photo: unplanning.blogspot.com



Bottom Left: The flexible outdoor space can be used for many community events, such as concerts or festivals.

Photo: www.flickr.com



Short term: The River Avenue frontage provides a more welcoming, but intimate, space for concerts.



Long term: The River Avenue frontage is more open, with tables for gathering during the day, and removable fencing for events.