

Gas Station Theatre Redevelopment

Introduction

The Project

Osborne Village is home to the Gas Station Theatre and Osborne Village Cultural Centre (referred to in this document as the GST/OVCC), which is the focus of our project. The GST/OVCC is a Village institution, playing host to comedy, music and theatre productions and festivals. Our task, as students in the city planning department at the University of Manitoba was to look at ways in which the programming could be expanded to create a more viable and exciting organization, and the site could be redeveloped.

Image Credit: Atlis Geomatics, Winnipeg.

Osborne Village History

Located just south of Winnipeg's downtown, Osborne Village is the city's oldest suburb. It joined the city in 1882, as part of the Fort Rouge ward. The early 1900s saw the development of houses, apartment blocks, commercial buildings, banks and churches. The Osborne Street Bridge, the gateway to the neighbourhood, was built in 1882. Osborne Street was home to Winnipeg's first electric streetcar line and is now a major thoroughfare and transportation hub (Osborne Village Character Inventory Study, 2002).

Neighborhood Context

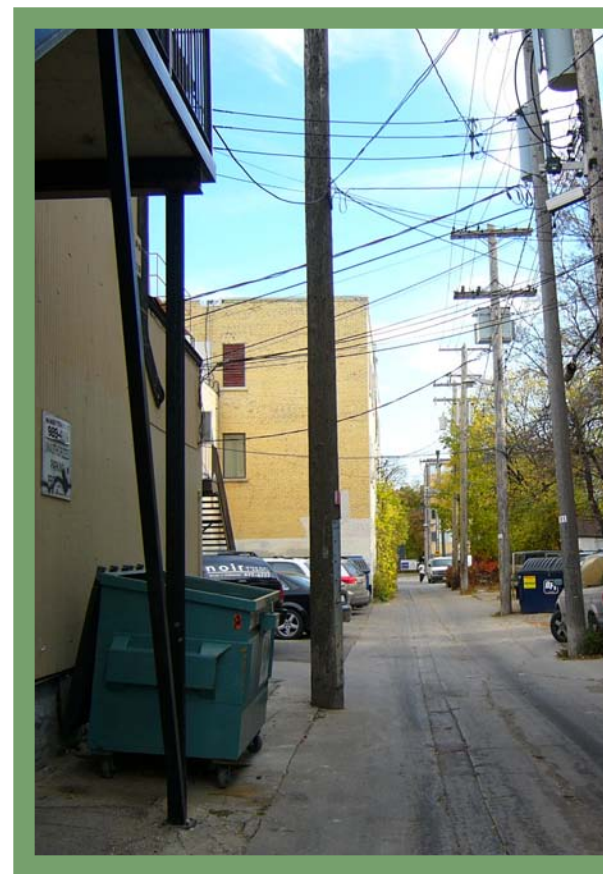


Image Credit: Richard Mahe



Image Credits: Karin Kliever



Map of Winnipeg showing Osborne Village outlined in green.

Image Credit: Osborne Village Character Study 2001

Osborne Village Today

Seniors, university students, young professionals and empty nesters all call Osborne Village home. In terms of **age distribution** Osborne Village has a significantly higher percentage of senior residents and young adults (age 20-34) compared to the city of Winnipeg.

The Built Environment

The area's housing stock is equally diverse. The northern part of the Village is dominated by high-rise apartment blocks which run along the Assiniboine River. Smaller, more affordable units and subsidized housing can be found as you head southward.

Located east and west of Osborne Street are large two and three-storey homes mixed in with smaller houses and high-end multi-family dwellings. In terms of **dwelling type** and tenure, almost 60% of the housing stock in the Village is made up of apartments, and close to 80% of the Village's residents rent their homes.

The compact form of buildings in Osborne Village makes it a walkable area, and the variety of architectural types attracts many visitors. Many of the Village's residents get around either on foot or by public transit (Osborne Village Neighborhood Plan, 2006).

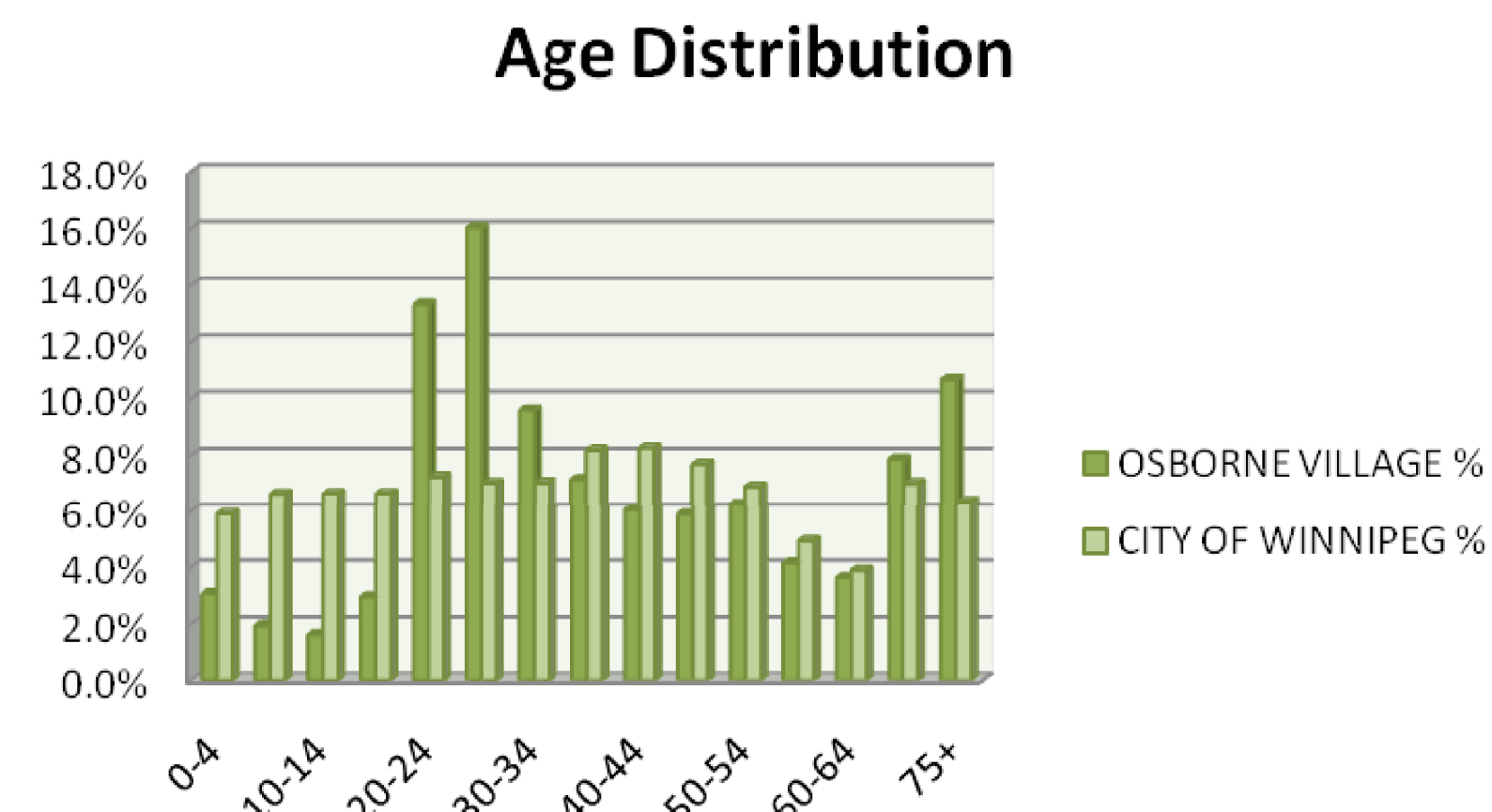
Economic Activity

River Avenue and Stradbrook Avenue are the two main east-west arteries in the Village but much of the commercial action takes place along Osborne Street. Over one-half of the neighbourhood's businesses are made up of restaurants, fashion boutiques and specialty stores like art galleries. Most of these are members of the Osborne Village Business Improvement Zone (BIZ). The mix of merchants helps draw people from other parts of the Winnipeg to the neighbourhood.

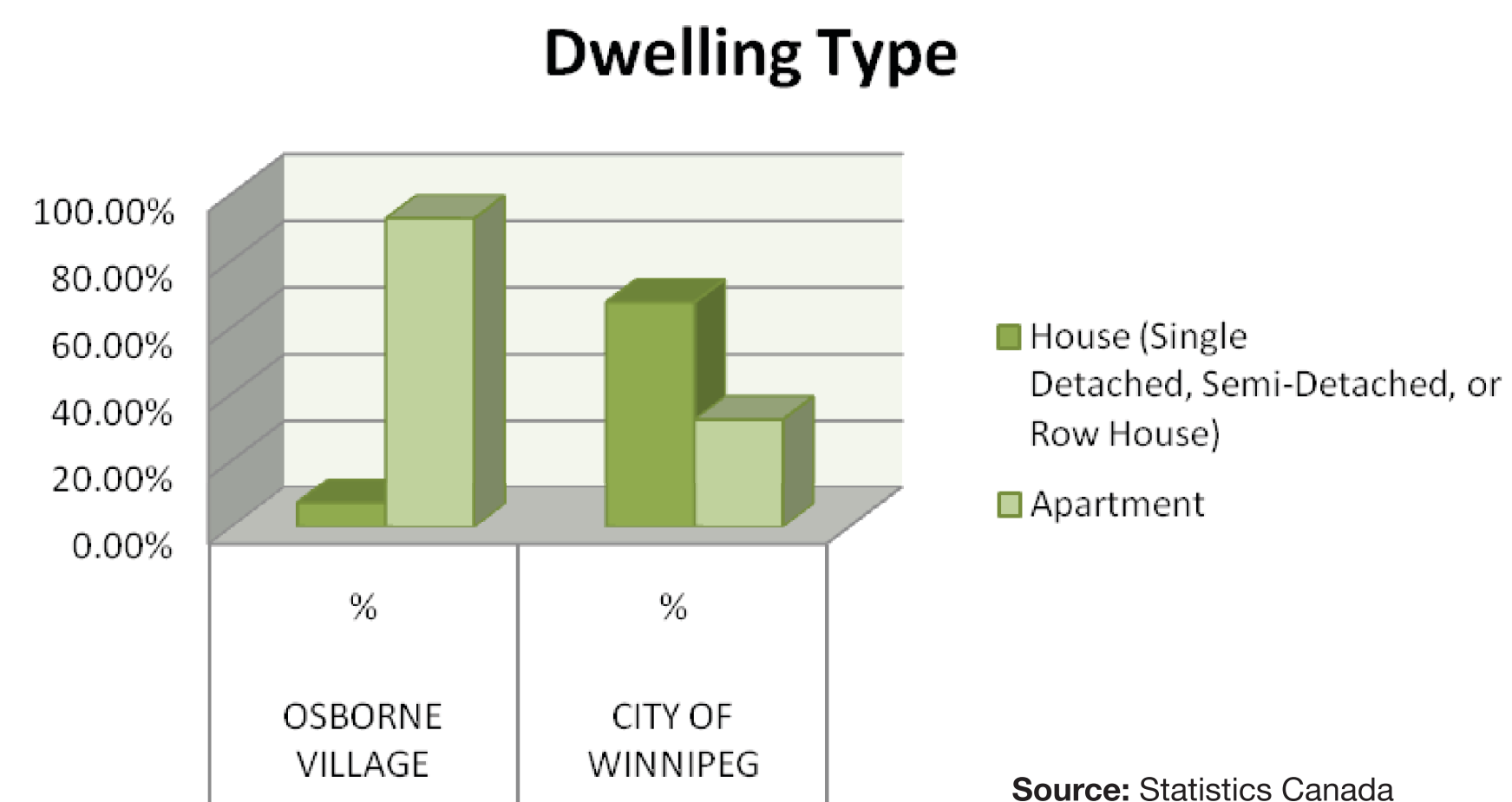


Figure Ground Map: The GST/OVCC (shown in **green**) lies at the northern end of the vibrant Osborne Village commercial district (shown in **red**).

Image Credit: Chris Baker



Source: Statistics Canada



Source: Statistics Canada



GST/OVCC

The GST/OVCC site includes a 232-seat venue with a large stage and state-of-the-art lighting and sound equipment. It is rented over 200 nights a year to groups such as universities and dance companies. It also sponsors CBC's Winnipeg Comedy Festival. The lobby of the theatre is used as an art gallery, with exhibitions often featuring the work of local artists.

The theatre is located on the northeast corner of River Avenue and Osborne Street, a main intersection in the Village. There are several businesses located near this corner, including two coffee shops, a grocery store and a few restaurants. The entrance and sign for the GST/OVCC are located on River Avenue and are not visible from Osborne Street. Currently, part of the GST/OVCC's property is being rented out to a franchise (Subway) which pays \$40,000 a year in rent and covers other expenses such as property taxes.

Board members indicated that they would like to incorporate programming that would draw people to the GST/OVCC on a regular basis, turning it into a destination point for local residents as well as visitors to the area. They also placed an emphasis on supporting emerging artists and of forming and continuing partnerships with other organizations in the city.



Aerial photo of Osborne Village with the Gas Station Theatre shown in orange. Current site zoning is C1.5 Commercial District.
Image Credit: City of Winnipeg

Process

Research for this project involved a number of different stages, each of which built on the previous. The first stage was a group project that documented neighbourhood observations and impressions. The next stage involved a more comprehensive analysis, where we looked at Osborne Village's demographics, built form, economic activity and social infrastructure.

The third stage involved researching community arts organizations to gather programming precedents that informed our proposals for the GST/OVCC. Throughout this process, we had two meetings with board members of the Gas Station Theatre at which we shared our projects. These meetings also provided us with valuable information about the organization and its future direction, and helped us with the creation of our proposals for redevelopment at the GST/OVCC.

Each of the class' three groups developed a proposal based on a specific scenario. One of the tools we used was the SWOT analysis, which helped us clarify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the GST/OVCC. Proposals were informed by this process, as well as from the precedents we documented.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

- Established name recognition;
- Prime location: the Osborne neighbourhood is a popular location in Winnipeg, and the River/Osborne corner itself has heavy foot and commuter traffic. The bus stop is also a major hub of activity.
- Current partnerships with universities, dance and arts community, and connections with visual artists;
- Manageable financial situation: building ownership, surplus in 05/06, core funding and continued rental of restaurant and theatre spaces; and
- Active board of directors.

Weaknesses:

- Theatre not visible from Osborne Street;
- Perception that neighbourhood may not be "safe";
- Environmental constraints - gas tanks still located underneath the site;
- Few employees;
- Unclear organizational vision and direction; and
- Seemingly limited ties to the Osborne Village community.

Opportunities:

- Outdoor patio spaces can be better utilized;
- Potential to gain control of extra property that faces Osborne;
- Potential for new partnerships with organizations and businesses in Osborne and wider city.

Threats:

- Loss of funding, staff and/or board (leadership);
- Perception that neighbourhood may not be "safe"; and
- Failure of potential initiatives and therefore a potential risk of closure.



Poor Visibility: Northeast corner of River and Osborne. The GST/OVCC's entrance is not very prominent.
Image Credit: Dave Kuxhaus

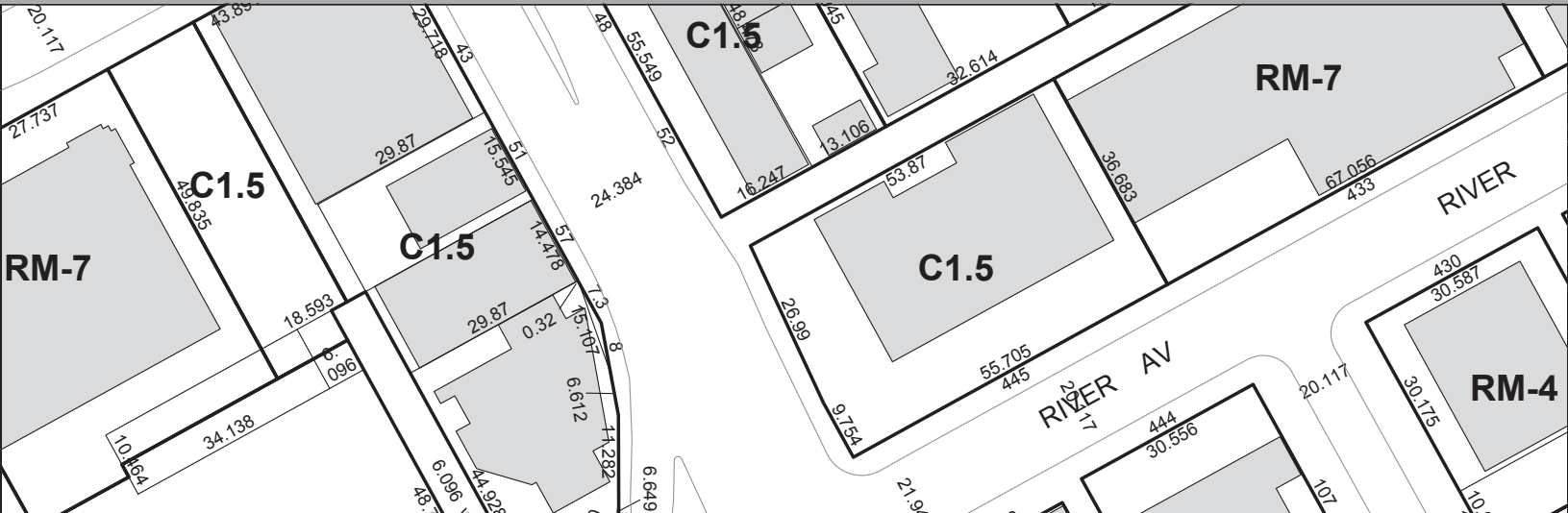


Patio Potential: The current patio space facing River Avenue is underutilized.
Image Credit: Dave Kuxhaus



Rental Space: The Gas Station Theatre's current tenant is not as reflective of an arts and cultural focus as it could be.
Image Credit: Dave Kuxhaus

Zoning Considerations



Zoning map showing current zoning of the GST/OVCC site.
Image Credit: City of Winnipeg

Currently, The Gas Station Theatre/Osborne Village Cultural Centre is legislated as a C1.5 Commercial District – meaning that the property is geared towards commercial development with a neighbourhood orientation. Redevelopment could require re-zoning because zoning bylaws have recently undergone changes (http://www.winnipeg.ca/ppd/bylaws/6400_94/bl_6400.htm).

OVCC and Site

Gas Station Theatre

Goal:
To become a city-wide destination that promotes arts, cultural, social, and recreational interests for both residents of the Osborne Village Neighbourhood, as well as the wider arts and cultural community in Winnipeg...

Objectives:

- Support emerging and established artists;
- Form/formalize relationships with existing arts groups, schools, and post secondary schools and explore partnerships pertaining to arts programming, volunteer opportunities, etc;
- Offer recreational activity and programming possibilities (in addition to arts and cultural events) for the residents in the Osborne Village area; and
- Improve access to site.

Rationale:

The outlined goals, objectives, and strategies emerged from our SWOT analysis and precedent studies. The following short and long term re-development plans highlight the uniqueness of Osborne Village and the GST/OVCC’s location. Strategies based on perceived needs regarding the aging population, those in the 20-34 age range, and those living in multi-family dwellings.

The GST/OVCC site is a prime location because the River/Osborne corner is a hub of activity that sees a lot of motorized traffic. In addition, people can access nine different bus routes that connect to all areas of the city, and according to *The Osborne Village Neighbourhood Plan*, 44,000 vehicles drive through Osborne Village every day. Although the River/Osborne junction is located towards the northern end of the Village, it remains very connected with the shopping district to the south.

“city-wide destination”

“...promotes arts [and] culture”



A prominent stand-alone sign on the corner of River and Osborne will give the GST/OVCC a strong presence in the community.

Image Credit: www2.seeglasgow.com



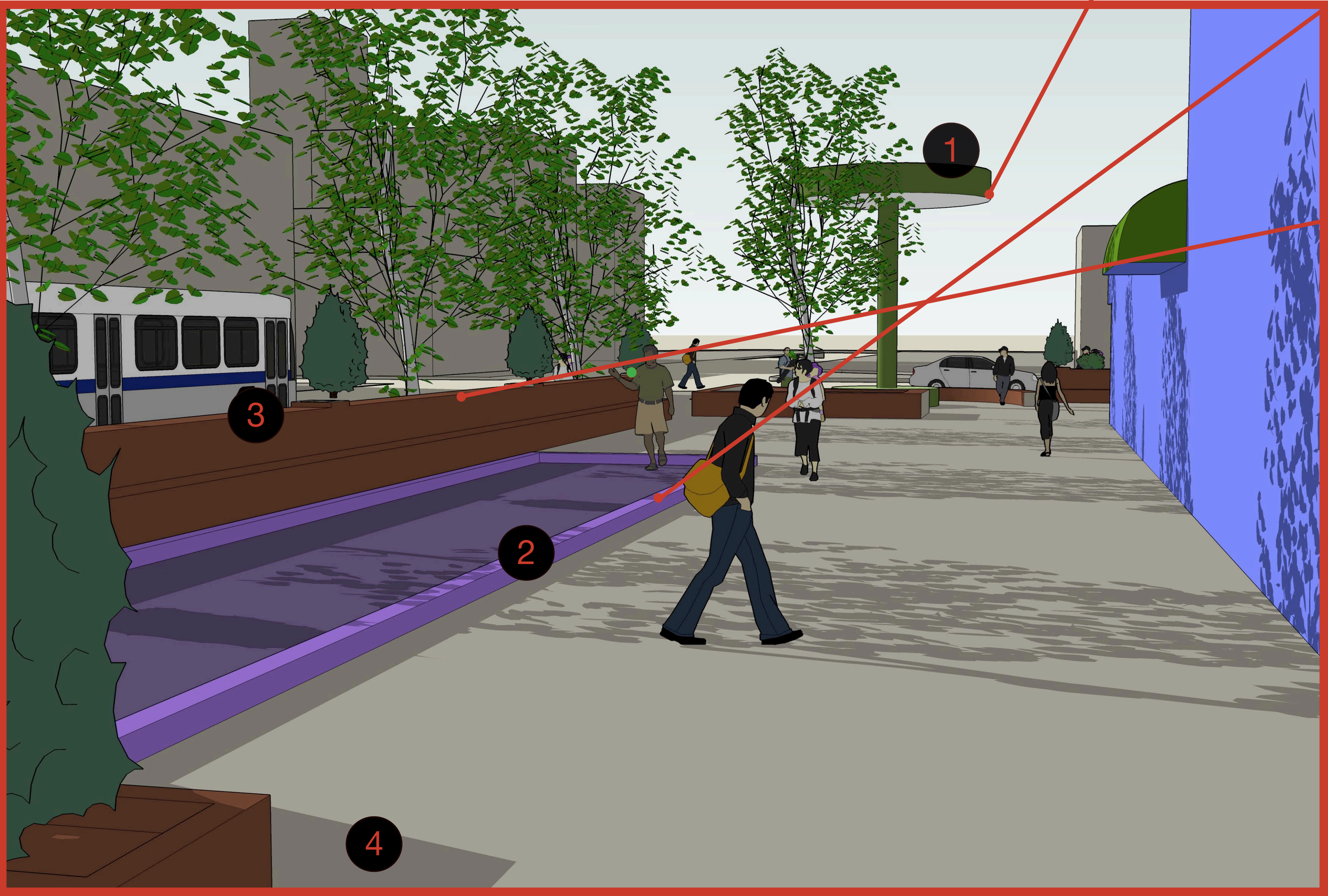
A bocce court provides a welcoming space for neighborhood residents and encourages activity on the site.

Image Credit: www.flickr.com



Creative use of planters make edges and boundaries aesthetically pleasing.

Image Credit: www.aminglingoftastes.com



Short term changes to current GST site: numbers correspond to strategies listed on right.

Short Term Strategies:

Physical

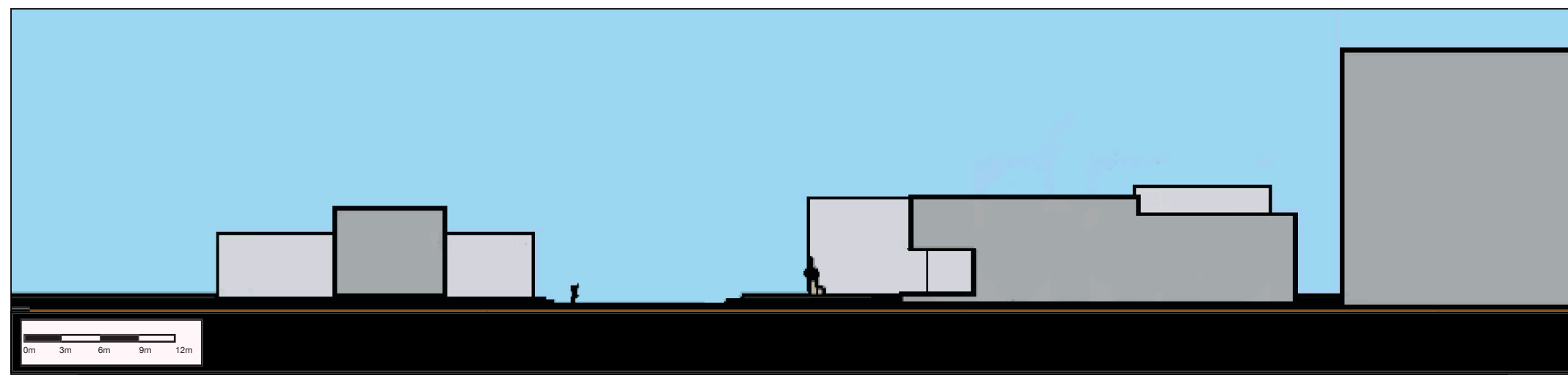
- 1 Improve signage, making GST visible from the street.
- 2 Renovate patio area: level grade and build bocce court for recreational purposes.
- 3 Replace fence with boundaries that provide seating.
- 4 Increase access points to encourage foot traffic.

Programming

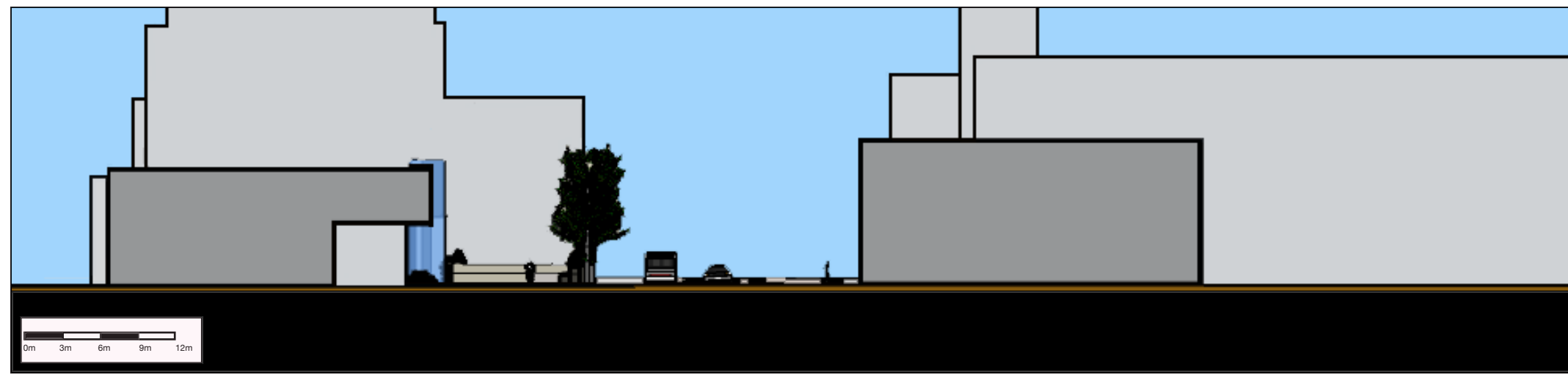
5. Continue to promote theatre as rental space.
6. Establish artists’ resource space to provide funding/ marketing information.
7. Increase programming: hold regular open mic nights with comedy, poetry and/or LGBT themes. Explore options for mobile workshops at schools (taught by hired artists) or volunteer-for-credit programs.
8. Survey and respond to residents and arts community to determine future programming needs.
9. Improve community connections (theatre pass options, newsletter, enhance website, provide theatre access to local art galleries and community groups at a discounted rate).

Proposals

Gas Station Theatre



Section 1: Osborne Street looking north. Additional stories add increased corner presence and provides visual continuity with other buildings surrounding the River/Osborne intersection.



Section 2: River Avenue looking east. New signage and larger corner entrance will ensure noticeability and increase perception of accessibility.

“Wider arts and cultural community...”



Windows along the southern wall of the building take advantage of the good sun exposure and allow passersby to be engaged with what is happening inside.

Image Credit: www.flickr.com



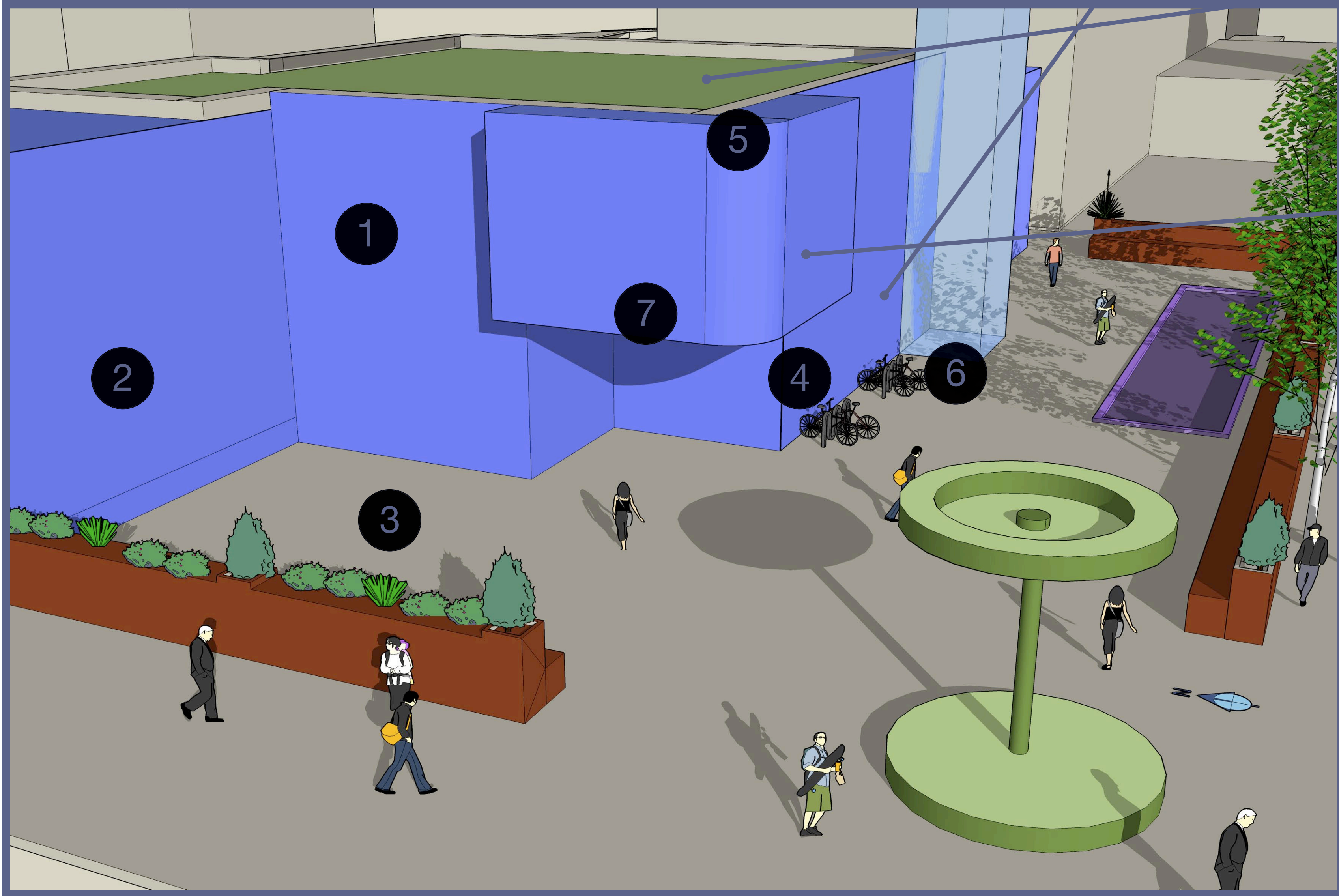
Rooftop gardens offer green space in a dense urban area.

Image Credit: www.foodshare.net



A prominent corner entrance will give the GST/OVCC a stronger presence in the community.

Image Credit: ww1.prweb.com



Long term changes to current GST site: A rooftop garden and an eatery with outdoor seating area.

Long Term Strategies:

Physical

1. Build three floors of office and/or studio space.
2. Replace existing tenant with café catering to arts community and local residents.
3. Develop outdoor patio adjacent to cafe to increase revenue and foot traffic.
4. Increase exhibition space for art showings and performances.
5. Build a rooftop garden that serves neighbourhood apartment dwellers (potential for innovations in rainwater retention, greywater incorporation into washroom facilities, etc).
6. Enhance southern exposure with windows to increase rental appeal.
7. Continue to work on signage improvements, ensuring GST/OVCC’s visibility. Orient entrance towards River Avenue and Osborne Street.

Programming

8. Continue to explore funding sources and expand programming according to short term strategies.

Programming Precedents

Vancouver Arts Club Theatre:

- Offers several theatre programs geared towards youth
- Operates the highly profitable Backstage Lounge on premises



Vancouver Arts Club Theatre
Image: www.flickr.com

Klondike Institute of Arts and Culture:

- Offers professional development
- Runs own art gallery and has an artist in residence
- Youth Art Enrichment Program (allows for 30-36 highschool students to participate in a four-day workshop with professional artists)



KIAC
Image: www.kiac.org

Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company:

- Ensemble Theatre Arts Program (two-year training program to prepare emerging artists for a career in the performing arts)
- Performance Playhouse (summer camp for youth)



SNTC
Image: www.sntc.ca

Great Canadian Theatre Company:

- Production Mentorship Program (offers performance groups subsidized access to theatre. Groups can receive mentorship in dramaturgy, direction, marketing, grantwriting and production management)



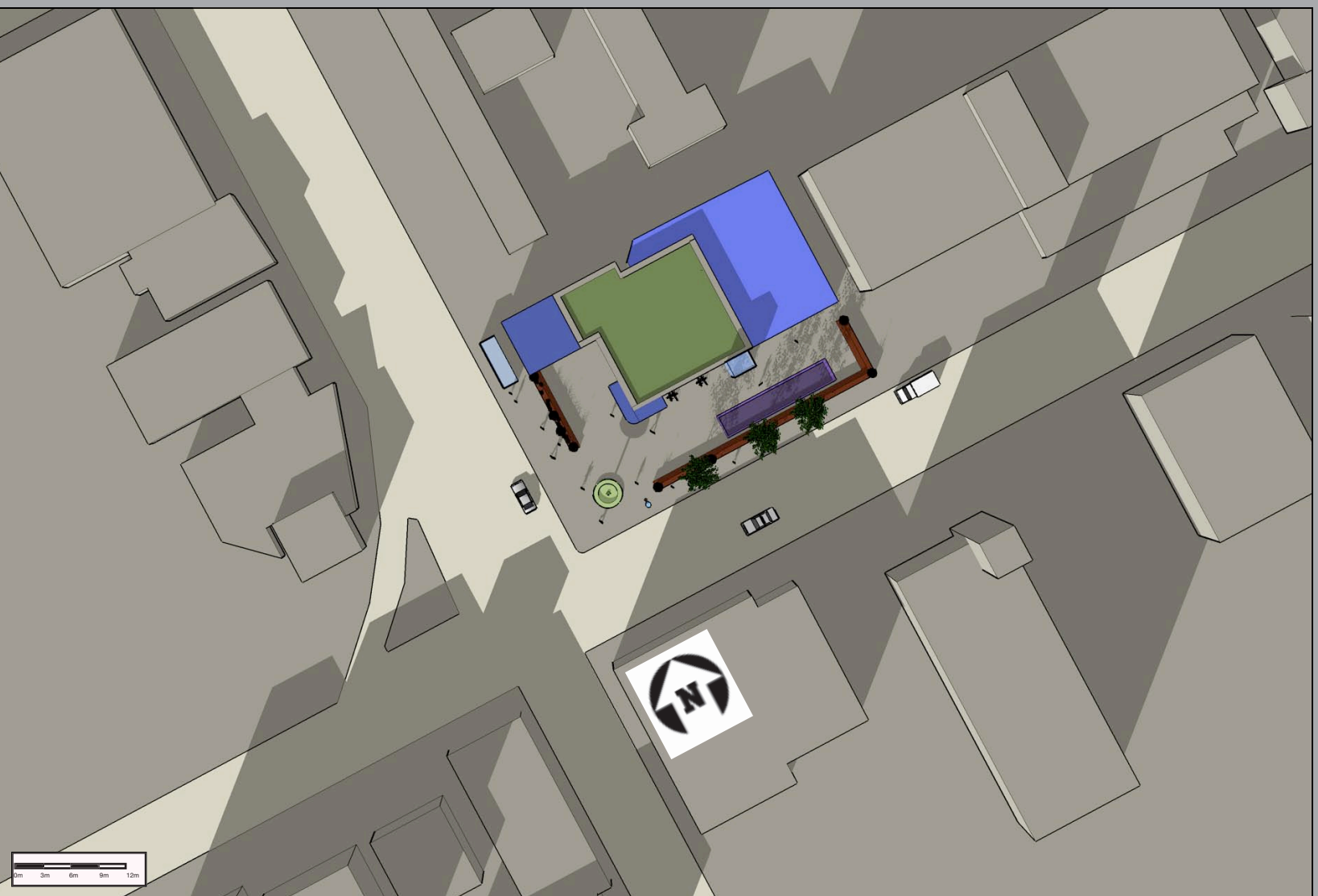
Great Canadian Theatre Co.
Image: www.gctc.ca

Walker’s Point Center for the Arts:

- Travelling arts workshop and art gallery



Walker’s Point
Image: www.wpc-milwaukee.org



Aerial view of Osborne Village with the GST/OVCC highlighted in blue.

Proposals

Gas Station Theatre