PLACE OF PRIDE

Canada's First 2SLGBTQIA+ Campus

GILLIAN KOLODY (UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA)
In collaboration with
TOM JANZEN (WESTMINSTER HOUSING SOCIETY INC.)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Case-in-Point report explores the project Place of Pride, a 2SLGBTQIA+ campus in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Tom Janzen, a Board Member of Westminster Housing Society Inc. (WHS) kindly provided insights on his work for the project.

This report begins by providing a background as to why this is needed in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in Winnipeg and then offers a project overview, site context, and an overview of the partnerships involved and funding received. This report concludes with the lessons learned, which highlight the importance of 'keeping it simple,' and look at why non-profits should give careful consideration before building new.

Figure 1: Rendering of Place of Pride.

Figure 2: Place of Pride during construction.

2.0 BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The Rainbow Resource Centre (RRC) has been running in Winnipeg for 50 years and is the longest continuously operating 2SLGBTQIA+ centre in Canada. There is a need in Winnipeg for spaces that belong to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community that are inclusive of all ages and identities (Rainbow Resource Centre, 2024).

In 2018, RRC surveyed 2SLGBTQIA+ older adults in Manitoba, and it was clear that there was a great need for affordable housing geared

towards queer and transgender older adults. It is not uncommon for 2SLGBTQIA+ older adults to have to hide their identities in seniors complexes due to facing discrimination because of who they are.

Oftentimes when folks are a little bit older and they're moving into... older communities, they have to go back into the closet... They don't always have spaces that are uniquely for them and where they can be themselves and feel comfortable...That's sort of what this really unique model provides.

Mary Agnes Welch (as cited in Chang, 2024)

2020 Statistics Canada census data shows that 2SLGBTQIA+ people are at a higher risk of losing access to secure housing and more likely to be low income (Abas, 2023). Therefore, Place of Pride seeks to provide affordable housing for 2SLGBTQIA+ older adults and fill some of these gaps.

3.0 FACTS OF THE CASE

3.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

Place of Pride is a 2SLGBTQIA+ campus located at 545 Broadway in central Winnipeg, Manitoba. The 2SLGBTQIA+ campus features a four-storey mixed-used residential building with affordable units for 2SLGBTQIA+ older adults, the historic Wilson House that was built in 1905, and a forthcoming glass-walled welcome centre that will connect the other two buildings (Heritage Winnipeg, 2024; T. Janzen, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

Figure 3: Historic photo of Wilson House.

The four-storey mixed-use building has 21 residential units, with 15 one-bedroom units and 6 two-bedroom units, and the units range from 629 to 759 square feet. The ground floor of this building is a community space that acts as a supportive community hub, with programming run by RRC. The four-storey mixed-

Figure 4: Place of Pride post-construction.

Figure 5: Rendering of Place of Pride.

use building was a part of phase one of Place of Pride, with construction beginning in October 2022 and ending in August 2024.

The first tenants moved in in August 2024, and as of February 2025, only four units remain to be occupied with residents (T. Janzen, personal communication, February 6, 2025). The affordable units "meet Manitoba Housing's affordability requirements through rent supplement agreements, which subsidize rents so that non-profit housing providers can offer social housing or rent-geared-to-income units for low-income tenants" (Government of Manitoba, 2023).

Figure 6: Rendering of welcome centre.

Phase two of Place of Pride will begin as early as summer of 2025, which will include building a ceremony room, meeting rooms, and private counselling spaces in Wilson House. The glass-walled welcome centre is also part of phase two, and as aforementioned will connect Wilson House with the residential mixed-use building and host a library, art spaces, and community connection spaces. Concerning outdoor spaces, the campus will feature a garden, courtyard, and second-floor patio (Rainbow Resource Centre, n.d.).

When designing these building and spaces, NumberTEN Architectural Group looked to design a "purpose-built Queer Space," meaning a space that is consciously "inclusive, affirming, and supportive" (Heritage Winnipeg, 2024).

3.2 SITE CONTEXT

In 2017, an affordable housing project was set to be built at 198 Sherbrook Street by WHS and the West Broadway Community Organization (WBCO), but WHS decided to take a step away from the project. In 2019, WBCO approached WHS with the property at 545 Broadway, which WBCO bought in 2017 from Klinic Community Health (KCH). KCH was running their practice out of Wilson House from 1977 to 2017 (T. Janzen, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

Initially it made sense to subdivide and rezone the property, but approval processes are lengthy, time consuming, and not a guarantee. Even if WHS were to subdivide the western part of the property apart from the eastern side with Wilson House, the density maximums in the "C2" Commercial – Community Zone would not have allowed them to construct the residential unit as densely as they did.

Also, subdividing the property could have risked losing the funding from the Rapid Housing Initiative, which was the biggest funding source of the project. Ultimately, it was the convoluted ownership and leaseholder

Figure 7: Rendering of a community space in Place of Pride.

model that allowed them to avoid subdividing or rezoning the property (T. Janzen, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

3.3 PARTNERSHIP AND FUNDING OVERVIEW

As aforementioned, WBCO were the original owners of the land at 545 Broadway and approached WHS with the opportunity to build Place of Pride on that property. In 2020 and 2021, WHS applied for rounds one and two of the Rapid Housing Initiative, executing an agreement with the City of Winnipeg in November 2021.

WHS leased the whole property from WBCO, and WBCO matched them up with RRC for the project. From the beginning, there was a loose memorandum of understanding between the three parties. Eventually, WBCO sold the property to RRC, and RRC now has a sublease on the ground floor of the Place of Pride mixed-use building and on the Wilson House (T. Janzen, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

This is the first generation that fought for equality in the 1970s and '80s, and they're still facing discrimination at this stage of life. So it's our responsibility to take care of them.

Noreen Mian (as cited in Abas, 2023)

The ground floor sublease was finalized between WHS and RRC in May 2022, and as aforementioned, the Place of Pride residential building was built in August 2024 (T. Janzen, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

In addition to receiving approximately $5 million for the project from the Rapid Housing Initiative, Place of Pride received funding from many other places, including:

- Rainbow Resource Centre
- West Broadway Land Grant
- Manitoba Housing
- Reaching Home
- Winnipeg Foundation Grant
- Efficiency Manitoba
- Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation Seed Funding
- Westminster Housing Society fundraising
- Canada Life
- Power Corporation of Canada
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union
- Cambrian Credit Union

In total, the capital cost for the first phase of the project was just over $11 million (T. Janzen, personal communication, February 6, 2025; Chang, 2024; MGEU, 2024).

4.0 LESSONS LEARNED

4.1 KEEP IT SIMPLE

One of the main lessons learned from Place of Pride is the importance of keeping it simple. Although the project happened because of the strong but convoluted partnerships, it was vastly overcomplicated. The partnerships and agreements were built fully on trust with formal legal agreements happening retroactively. Due to the risk involved in a project of this nature, at times there was a bit of tension

between the partners (T. Janzen, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

Therefore, RRC and WHS are currently looking to create a jointly controlled entity that would govern and own the project and property. They are working with a consultant to look at the parties' respective contributions and come up with a recommendation on creating an entity with a new financing scheme as they move towards phase two of the project.

Another added layer of complexity when working with various partners is that non-profits each have their own mandate and therefore may not always be on the same page when working on the same project.

For example, there were some early challenges working with Reaching Home/Natamooskakowin to identify prospective tenants that met the age targets and tenant profiles being sought by WHS and RRC. Through constructive dialogue, the parties were able to find common understanding around their respective objectives and have been successful in referring applicants that align with the overall project vision (T. Janzen, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

Therefore, although all non-profits are seeking to create change for the greater good, the specific goals can differ from organization to organization.

Ultimately, Place of Pride highlights the importance of maintaining good relations with partners and funders, and formalizing agreements with partners early on. Although the project is successful, the partnership model should not be replicated in other developments due to its complexity (T. Janzen, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

I fully started living my authentic life when I was in my 50s and 60s, so having to go back into the closet and having to hide is not really a prospect that I feel good about...I've done it twice, why do I need to do it again? Things have not always been easy for me, and I know lots of others feel the same way. We'd like to live our twilight years in relative peace.

Mel Byer (as cited in Abas, 2023)

4.2 GIVE CAREFUL CONSIDERATION BEFORE BUILDING NEW

The complex nature of Place of Pride also highlights that building new may not always be the best option to provide affordable housing. For WHS to provide new housing with Place of Pride, it took them over three years to bring the apartments to market and was a high risk for WHS as a non-profit.

Instead, it would have been potentially simpler and quicker to revitalize older apartment complexes; this is something

Figure 8: Winnipeg's Pride Parade, a keystone event for Winnipeg's 2SLGBTQIA+ community

that Toronto Community Housing does quite successfully (T. Janzen, personal communication, February 6, 2025). Additionally, building new can put a lot of strain and stress on non-profit volunteers, as it is a big undertaking that takes a lot of time and energy.

5.0 FINAL THOUGHTS

Place of Pride is a 2SLGBTQIA+ campus—the first of its kind in Canada—that seeks to fill the gap of missing spaces dedicated to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in Winnipeg. This project is working to address the need for affordable and safe housing for queer and trans older adults.

Partnerships are a foundational part of why Place of Pride was realized and helped remedy some of the site-specific zoning issues that arose throughout the process.

Overall, the project was a success but had a quite convoluted process. Place of Pride highlights the importance of keeping projects simple and underlines why non-profits should give careful consideration before building new.

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FIGURES

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