

Dickinson Square and the Manotick Mill Quarter Heritage District

Vision:

To become *“the Village Square of South Ottawa”*;

- which citizens and visitors alike can enjoy year-round the natural surroundings and historic ambiance;
- where they can partake of diverse cultural activities that are educational as well as entertaining;
- where they have the opportunity to shop in an array of equally interesting businesses in this unique atmosphere;
- where the activity level will be kept high through ever-changing programs of community organizations from across South Ottawa – some permanent, and others transient users – that will share the Mill Quarter’s multi-use spaces and outdoor areas with commercial enterprises;
- where all activities will be coordinated and promoted by a small central management, while accessing shared state-of-the-art presentation and meeting facilities.

Rationale:

- *Dickinson Square and the greater Mill Quarter is a unique asset for the City of Ottawa: a collection of largely intact heritage buildings around a green space beside a World Heritage Waterway and close to major transportation arteries.*
- It is located in the Village of Manotick, geographically central to South Ottawa, historically the social and commercial centre for the area and one of the fastest growing urban areas in Canada, soon to house a quarter of Ottawa’s population.
- Although local communities comprising South Ottawa have a number of small public facilities, there remains a growing need for larger and more specialized spaces, which would be more efficiently developed as centralized joint user spaces.
- The preservation and redevelopment of the Square and the Mill Quarter are supported by a growing amalgamation of community-based groups prepared to coordinate their needs – and those of the business community – for the benefit of all, and respectful of the difficulties of these tough economic times.
- The Square, begun during the 1860s, named after an important business leader of Ottawa’s early history and the site of the start of John A. Macdonald’s first election campaign, would be a notable project for the 150th anniversary of Confederation, with a strong local Ottawa connection.

Concept:

- *A mixed-use approach, combining mutually supportive non-profit and for-profit operations, to be determined by market analysis and business plans.*

- A year-round destination with both indoor and outdoor offerings; the project will emphasize multi-functionality to maximize returns for cost.
- Modernized, cost-efficient green facilities that retain heritage character, achieving both heritage preservation and enhancing customer ambiance.
- Dickinson Square would be envisioned as the draw and anchor for the larger Mill Quarter Heritage District.
- Besides the historic buildings around the Square (Dickinson House and Carriage Shed, Watson's Mill, Ayers Bldg. and Weaver House), the concept would include using space within both Knox Presbyterian and St. James Anglican churches, as well as gardens and interpretive plaques around the Square and into the Mill Quarter Heritage District, and across the river into A. Y. Jackson Park;
- The Clapp and Holloway properties are believed to be suitable for a substantial mixed use and commercial building.
- The Mill Quarter would be managed by a non-profit umbrella organization working on behalf of all users of the Square and surrounding properties, reporting to the City.

Financial:

- Capital costs would be covered by user group applications to an array of government grants and contributions programs, as well as private sector fund-raising in the community.
- User fees and/or revenue sharing from public programming and rents from organizations and businesses occupying the buildings will cover operating costs.
- Staffing of programs would be the responsibility of the user groups.
- Staff of the management body would be limited to an events coordinator and marketer.

Next Steps:

1) Market Analysis:

- a. Research the needs of three distinct groups and their probability to locate activities to Dickinson Square: **non-profit groups** beyond Manotick; **commercial operations** that would benefit from being close to the traffic flow of people accessing the cultural heritage activities at the square; and **government programs** needing space to deliver their public services.
- b. Project visitor attendance at the plethora of programming to be offered.
- c. Project the synergistic effects of diverse programs/services located in one area.
- d. Conduct a fund-raising forecast to evaluate support for capital needs and the potential to attract a private sector champion to chair a campaign.
- e. Project operating revenue as well as expenses.

2) Functional Program:

- a. Propose the most effective use of the buildings and outdoor areas that maximizes usefulness to all users while minimizing cost.

- b. Take into consideration the Square's integration with the surrounding Mill Quarter Heritage District.
 - c. Provide capital budget and related operating costs.
- 3) *Business Plan:*
- a. Development of a self-sufficiency business plan, key to which will be creating a flexible concept that has operating costs tied to the ebb and flow of revenue generated by user groups and visitors.
- 4) *Communications Program:*
- a. Provide public updates on the project and feedback, once a development plan has been created, but before finalization.
 - b. Create a promotional plan for programming at the Mill Quarter, as well as for attracting commercial users.

Notes:

- Current *Dickinson Square Heritage Management Inc.* members:
 - Watson's Mill Inc.
 - Manotick Arts Association
 - Rideau-Osgoode Support Services
 - Knox Presbyterian Church
 - Rideau Township Historical Society
 - Manotick Horticultural Association
 - Manotick Business Improvement Association
 - Kiwanis Club
 - 1st Manotick Scouts
 - Manotick Action Group
 - Manotick Messenger
 - St. James Anglican Church
 - Manotick Village and Community Association
- *"Vision-Programming" examples:*
 - heritage, art and cultural exhibits (perhaps occasionally small shows from the major downtown museums);
 - street theatre as well as plays and music or dance presentations (all genres) in a 125/200 seat auditorium (sharing back-stage facilities with an adjacent outdoor stage or band shell during good weather);
 - same venue could be used for business and educational seminars/workshops, civic meetings;
 - weekend farmer markets alternating with garden and hobbyist shows;
 - antiques or home-made goods sales.
- *Rationale:* The proposed development is meant in no way to compete with existing heritage or community organizations. Rather, it is meant to provide everyone with a space that permits them to have events beyond their own present facility capacities (space or equipment), and to access professional program guidance and marketing expertise on the Mill Quarter's management staff they

otherwise cannot afford. Sharing a communal space keeps financial risk low, allowing both non-profit and for-profit organizations to experiment. It is hoped this program development opportunity will permit them to access new and larger markets that will raise their profile, revenue and donors or volunteers.

- **Concept:** It is important to integrate non-profits and for-profits interests, as offering a diversity of cultural attractions as well as relevant commercial enterprises has been shown to be a key element in creating a “destination” and achieving the necessary traffic to make viable both sides.
- **Financial:** For capital needs, non-profits have the potential to apply for one-time capital support from senior levels of government, which the private sector does not. A City-backed, cooperative project serving such a wide audience and a multiplicity of non-profits would have a very good chance of attracting significant grants. That in turn aids in obtaining private sector support.

Operationally, the assumption is that present government grants to non-profit cultural groups will neither increase nor decrease. Each organization maintains their own operations, simply shifting a portion of their activities to the Mill Quarter when they need a larger space and/or more sophisticated equipment to conduct a particular program. It is more cost-effective for them to “rent” such a space for a limited time than build their own.

The non-profit organizations also benefit from greater market exposure. The Mill Quarter, by having regular and changing activities, will have a reputation of a destination, backed up with ongoing promotional resources of its staff. This “momentum” as an attractive destination site for the public will assist the ongoing marketing operation for the benefit of all users. The constant activity will draw visitors to the Square for the benefit of commercial enterprise as well, making it an attractive place for business to set up, and improve rent revenue.

It is recognized that the growth in population in South Ottawa will lead to the need for the City to locate more services in this area. Manotick is a geographically-central location. It would be logical to locate city services in a place where people are going for other reasons. Rent from these activities would assist in offsetting the Mill Quarter’s operating expenses, just as the City does with the Shenkman Arts Centre.

- **Market Analysis:** This is crucial to verify the presumptions made in this document. However, market research studies show the concept of joint, diversified, shared spaces such as proposed at Dickinson Square and the Manotick Mill Heritage District to be viable (*look at the Distillery District in Toronto as an example*).

Additionally, a fund-raising analysis is a prudent step. With one of the highest per capita wealth in Ottawa, the area around Manotick should be supportive of this

type of a mixed-use concept in their neighborhood. Private fund-raising, though, will not be restricted to just Manotick.

- ***Functional Program:*** Prior study of local non-profits needs produced more than enough demand to fill the buildings around Dickinson Square, not including the 3,500 sq. ft. identified by the Rideau-Osgoode Support Services as additional to their current operation. Other South Ottawa groups have similar unfulfilled requirements. The issue for these organizations is their capacity to fund these aspirations. Support for cooperative projects as proposed here is a cost-effective way for governments to assist non-profits. Non-profits in turn must consider options for keeping operating cost low while seeking to increase self-generated revenue. Using centralized specialized services is one way. Sharing the Mill Quarter with the private sector is another.

The development of a purpose-built facility on the Clapp-Holloway properties is seen as a major new potential structure, an option not available during prior planning for Dickinson Square (before the City purchased those two properties as part of the larger purchase of other Square property). The Weaver House is unsuitable for anything other than offices and storage as is but, given the large property around it, it could be expanded behind its façade to meet modern needs.

**Submitted on April 28, 2011 to Councillor Scott Moffatt by the membership of
*Dickinson Square Heritage Management Inc. (DSHMI).***