

**To:** City of Victoria Council  
**From:** Kathryn Juricic, Fernwood Community Association Board Chair  
**Date:** February 26, 2024  
**Subject:** Transition of FCA to an Arts and Culture Organization and 1921-1923 Fernwood Rd as a Neighbourhood Scale Arts Venue  
**Ref:** <https://thefca.ca/vision/>

## Background

The Fernwood Community Association (FCA) currently operates the building at 1921-1923 Fernwood Road, hosts the Fernwood Land Use Committee, and manages over 70 community garden plots on Chambers and Gardens Streets. We are a neighbourhood based charity that seeks to enhance the quality of life in Fernwood.

The FCA does not currently offer any direct programming, however, we rent our offices, 60-person theatre and music venue, and art gallery to residents in Victoria at low rates to improve the accessibility of arts and culture (and more) in the city. We are able to do this because of the low rental rate of the building, which we lease from the City of Victoria for \$1 annually, a lease which has been in place for decades. We also have long standing leases with the Pandora Arts Collective Society and Theatre Inconnu which both operate out of our building.

In a recent strategic planning survey undertaken by the FCA to help guide the organization's future, we received a range of feedback from the people who took the time to fill out the survey. Some common themes included:

- The FCA is trying to do too much with limited resources, heavy reliance on volunteers, and not enough staff
- There is confusion between the mandate of the FCA and the mandate of Fernwood NRG
- The importance of stewarding 1921-1923 Fernwood Road as a community space in the face of a lot of change in the neighbourhood and the city
- There is a strong desire for inclusion and the use of 1921-1923 Fernwood Road for affordable and inclusive community events with a focus on arts and culture programming and affordable space for artists and arts activities
- The importance of the Community Association Land Use Committee and its role and relationship with City Hall and planning activities

In October 2023, in response to this neighbourhood survey, the FCA Board held a visioning session. Here are the visions that emerged for the organization and venue:

1. Community building through the curation of 1921-1923 Fernwood Road as a vibrant welcoming, inclusive and accessible neighbourhood hub for arts, culture and education for residents in Fernwood and throughout the city also in need of arts and culture space for

connection, creativity and community building.

2. Our work begins by stewarding 1921-1923 Fernwood Road as an arts venue with continued rental of the hall and gallery, plus programming, events, workshops, co-working spaces, artist studios and more! We imagine the energy and creativity emanating from the building out into the city with art crawls, lantern festivals, outdoor poetry readings, and much more based on the needs, desires and ambitions of creatives in the city.
3. The building and the organization that runs it must ensure its programming meets the needs of the hundreds of new residents and families that will soon move into the new Capital Regional Housing Corporation buildings on Gladstone (“the Caledonia project”), the students returning to Vic High after the renovation, and residents throughout Victoria also interested in neighbourhood-scale affordable accessible space for artists and arts programming and community building through arts, culture, and creativity.



*Full house Feb 25th at our Community Visioning Party.*

### **FCA and Fernwood NRG**

As noted above, in our survey of residents – and for decades really – the mandates of the Fernwood Community Association and the Fernwood Neighbourhood Resource Group (Fernwood NRG) have been overlapping, confusing and unclear. Our transition will help to clarify the important roles that both organizations play in the neighbourhood, as will the new proposed

mandate of our organization, which extends beyond the borders of Fernwood.

Fernwood NRG is focussed on the provision of childcare and creating a safe space for children and families in Fernwood and neighbouring communities to receive care through youth and family resource programs, shared meals, events, and more. They are currently undergoing a strategic planning process, and will continue to focus their energy on youth, family, senior and health and wellness programming.

The proposed activities of our organization will complement and not compete with the work of Fernwood NRG. We aim to provide a range of arts, culture, education and connection programming not only for Fernwood residents but also residents in other neighbourhoods that lack community gathering spaces. The two organizations will have clearly defined names, visions, and missions that will no longer confuse everyone about who is doing what! The future of 1921-1923 Fernwood Road will offer arts based programming which Fernwood NRG is moving away from while directing their efforts towards care-based resource programs.



*A community elder reviews the vision boards at our Feb 25th Community Visioning Party.*

### **Mobilizing the Plan**

Since its visioning session in October of 2023, the FCA board has been working towards this envisioned transition in name, mandate and mission. We have:

- Communicated with the neighbourhood to share this vision in our monthly newsletter and the Village Vibe.
- Held a Community Visioning Party on Sunday, February 25th – an afternoon of arts, culture and music where we share the vision we’ve developed for the organization and the building. We invited residents to submit ideas for the kind of programming they want to see in the building and asked for ideas for naming the building at 1921-1923 Fernwood Road that fits with the new vision of the building as a venue for arts, culture, creativity and connection. Many neighbours attended and signed up to become a part of this new vision.
- Met with the Compost Education Centre Executive Director to discuss the transition (subject to permission from the City) of the community garden leases held by the FCA to the Compost Education Centre. They have approval from their Board of Directors and are keen to assume responsibility for the two gardens with which the FCA currently holds licences with the City.
- Notified the gardeners at Earthbound and Fernwood Community Gardens — currently managed by the FCA — that a transition is proposed for the gardens to move under the responsibility of the Compost Education Centre.
- Met with the City’s Director of Strategic Real Estate and Manager of Real Estate Operations to discuss:
  - The lease renewal at 1921-1923 Fernwood Road, which has been on a month-to-month basis since 2021.
  - The need for 1921-1923 Fernwood Road to be incorporated into the City’s long-term capital planning process so the City and the FCA can work together to steward this important public asset for the long term after decades of relative neglect by both parties.
  - The significant increase in community use the building has seen since the FCA board was significantly refreshed a few years ago.
- Developed some conceptual arts, culture and community-building programming available to residents, subject to the availability of funding.
- Determined that a renaming of the organization is required in order to reflect the community feedback. The CRA requires that we provide three potential names for their consideration. In order of priority these include:
  1. Neighbourhood Arts Society and Collective
  2. Neighbourhood Arts Venue Society
  3. Neighbourhood Centre for the Arts Society
- Commenced the work of revising our constitution, bylaws and proposed name change — all of which will be voted on by FCA members at at Special General Meeting on Sunday, April 28th, to be hosted in the new library at Victoria High School with the Vic High R&B band performing as special guests.
- Met with our Community Association Land Use Committee (CALUC) chairs to share the future direction with them, get their input and work together. We all want to keep the CALUC as a subcommittee of the organization. They will continue to play their land-use role for the City and are engaged in neighbourhood based arts and culture activities with the creation of a mural at Gower Park funded through a My Great Neighbourhood Grant.
- Completed a Cultural Infrastructure Grant through the City of Victoria to purchase sound equipment to help increase the accessibility of the Paul Phillips Hall.

- Hired a part-time building maintenance staff person to assist with cleaning out, organizing, and renovating the communal spaces at 1921-1923 Fernwood Road. We just finished renovations on the front office and will be working to replace the floors and renovate the hall next.



*Residents read the input and ideas shared by residents at the Community Visioning Party.*

### **How the City Can Help!**

The building at 1921-1923 Fernwood Road has been the heart of the community for decades. Recently our board has worked hard to make it available for more community events, keeping it affordable and inclusive as a community and arts venue. Paul Phillips Hall is often booked every day. Currently the building is used for:

- Music shows: All ages shows with young people coming from across the city to enjoy and perform live music
- Meetings of the Community Association Land Use Committee
- Pandora Arts Collective Society, facilitated art-making experiences in a nurturing community
- Theatre Innconu, independent theatre that operates out of Paul Phillips Hall
- Theatre rehearsals and performances
- Cafe Sympatico, a monthly Central American Support Committee gathering night
- Seasonal markets and craft fairs

- Little Fernwood Gallery artist viewings, which rotate monthly allowing for substantial representation of the visual arts community.
- Music lessons
- Support groups
- Monthly local author readings
- Mama and baby yoga classes
- FernFest venue
- Private events

The building is open for community events in the evenings. However, during most daytimes, the storefront of this important public venue – on the mainstreet and central intersection of our neighbourhood – sits empty. The offices and boardroom/community room on the second floor are not being put to the best and highest use in service of a neighbourhood scale space for arts, artists, and arts and culture activities. This is true even as we're seeing affordable, accessible spaces for arts, culture and creativity under significant pressure, with artists and community members struggling as a result.

With \$40,000 on an annual basis from the City (a little under half of the operating agreement amount of a community centre) and a long-term lease for 1921-1923 Fernwood Road, the organization would be able to significantly increase the public use of this key public asset for Victoria residents in and beyond Fernwood, the latter of which are drawn to the building already with the existing programming and especially the lively all ages shows which happen on many evenings.

With hundreds of people moving into the 158 new homes for low- and moderate- income families up the road in the Capital Regional Housing Corporation's new building, with hundreds of Vic High students returning after the renovation (many of whom already love the building for its renewed focus on youth activities and all ages shows), the time is ripe for the City to make this modest investment in creating a neighbourhood scale space for community building and connection through arts and culture.



*Visitors to our open house coloured post cards of the building facade and are dropping them off to their neighbours with a QR code on the back to help share the new vision of our organization.*

With a long-term lease for 1921-1923 Fernwood Road and an annual contribution of \$40,000 with our commitments laid out in an operating agreement with the City, our organization would be able to:

- Continue all of the activities listed above
- Transition the second floor of the building to affordable artists studios
- Hire part time staff to organize daytime programming and manage building operations
- Have the building open for daytime programming on the main floor and community/board room on the second floor including activities such as<sup>1</sup>:
  - Various artistic workshops including: photography, pottery, sewing, knitting, quilting, painting, drawing, and more!
  - Musical jam nights for all varieties of musicians and singers to practice, laugh and connect
  - Art therapy for youth
  - Dedicated daytime drop in youth space for Vic High students
  - Acting, improv, comedy and theatre workshops
  - Dance classes

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<sup>1</sup> To be clear, we understand that with \$40,000 we will not be able to *offer* all of this programming. The intention is to have the space curated and available to community members across the city to host all of these activities, workshops and programming.

- Other activities, workshops, events by and for community members
- Open the first floor store front as a day-time co-working space with internet and basic office supplies (printer, scanner, etc.), or a more highly utilized space based on community needs than it is currently.
- Continue to invest in capital upgrades to an aging heritage building

We are really excited about this opportunity to provide accessible, affordable arts and culture space and programming for Victorians, at a neighbourhood scale, and we look forward to working with the City to make this vision a reality.

#### REQUESTS OF THE CITY

1. Grant \$40,000 annually to the organization:
  - a. subject to the outcome of their upcoming Special General Meeting to shift the organization's focus and charitable purposes to a neighbourhood scale arts venue focussed on delivering affordable, accessible arts, culture and creativity programming to residents.
  - b. subject to the organization signing an operating agreement that confirms their commitments, subject to the satisfaction of the City Manager.
2. Direct staff to sign a long-term lease with the organization for 1921-1923 Fernwood Road that incorporates a shared responsibility between the City and the organization for maintenance and stewardship of the building, including adding 1923 Fernwood Road to the City's capital plan.