

Making Home at 97 Victoria St. N.

A Case Study in Mass Timber, Hybrid Construction, and Community-Centered Design

Introduction: Re-imagining Shelter in a Time of Crisis

As Canadian cities face overlapping challenges of housing shortages, public health demands, and climate urgency, **Making Home at 97 Victoria St. N. (Making Home)** emerges as a powerful model for integrated, community-focused design. Located in the heart of downtown Kitchener, and directly across from an encampment, **Making Home** demonstrates how partnerships rooted in care, combined with architectural ingenuity, sustainable construction methods, and a wholistic approach, can meaningfully respond to urgent urban needs.

The bold initiative, by local non-profit The Working Centre, is being realized with the support of Perimeter Developments and designed by BNKC Architects Inc (BNKC). The project is transforming a 1927 warehouse and surrounding site into a vibrant campus of care that includes 44 units of transitional housing, a new mass timber St. John's Kitchen facility, integrated health and outreach services, and community gathering space. The approach is one that could benefit municipalities and city builders in the GTHA and beyond.



This project is more than the sum of its parts. It brings together infill development, adaptive reuse, and mass timber construction to address multiple priorities for municipalities and city builders: sustainability, speed, flexibility, dignity, and community connection.

What makes **Making Home** especially compelling is its many intersecting components:

Campus of Care: Infill development on a constrained downtown site across from an active encampment, integrates 44 units of supportive housing, on-site meal programs and a meal distribution hub, medical care, and outreach services.

Adaptive Reuse + Hybrid Structure:

Transformation of a 1927 warehouse through full renovation and an additional floor using a hybrid

of mass timber and light gauge steel for flexibility and efficiency.

Sustainable Social Infrastructure: A new wing for St. John's Kitchen, serving over 600 meals daily, is a mass timber facility and targeting net-zero carbon performance.

Collaborative Delivery: A shared effort between The Working Centre, Perimeter Development, and BNKC to shape a deeply responsive, community-first solution.

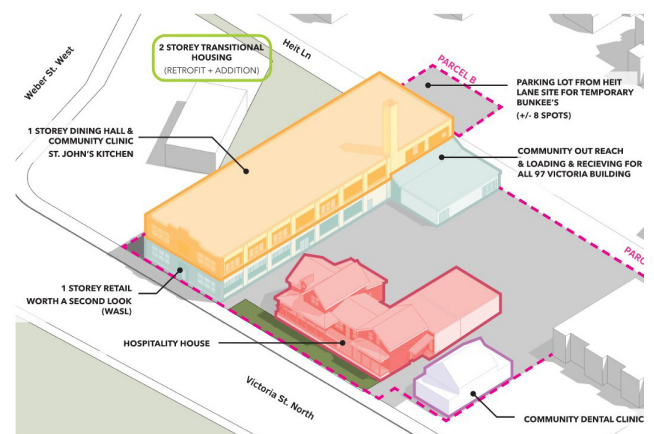
Innovative Funding: A combination of government grants and grassroots fundraising brought the project from vision to reality.

[>>Link to project overview video](#)

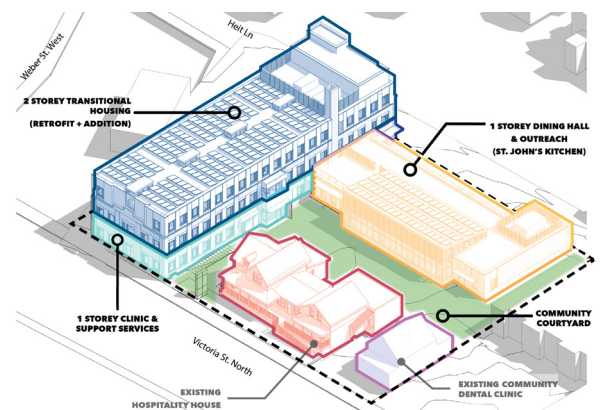
LEFT: VIEWS OF ENCAMPMENT FROM WAREHOUSE IN 2020 (TOP) AND 2024 (BOTTOM) ILLUSTRATES A GROWING CRISIS
RIGHT: PREVIOUS SITE (TOP) AND NEW CAMPUS (BOTTOM)



Previous Site



New Campus



Why Mass Timber? Why Here?

The choice to use mass timber wasn't purely about sustainability—though that was critical. It was also about speed, creating a welcoming environment, and wellness.

“We wanted to move quickly and build thoughtfully, and timber let us do both.”

— Jonathan King, BNKC Principal

The structural system for the new St. John's Kitchen building features CLT roof panels, glulam beams and columns, and NLT infill panels, offering a clean, modern aesthetic and biophilic benefits in a facility that must balance durability with dignity.

The prefabricated timber components from Element5 were **installed in just under a week** (in snow, no less!), an essential advantage for the tight urban site surrounded by encampments and busy transit lines.

Navigating Hybrid Complexity: When Mass Timber Isn't the Whole Story

The foundations of the original warehouse—also a timber building—couldn't structurally accommodate an additional mass timber floor. Instead, the team turned to a **hybrid solution of mass timber paired with steel** to construct the third-floor addition, allowing for residential units above without overloading the existing structure.

To avoid cluttering communal spaces with columns while maintaining the warmth and durability of exposed wood, the architects employed a solution of **mass timber paired with King Post truss system**, achieving long spans with minimal visual interruption.

This structural agility is part of what makes **Making Home** a powerful precedent: it demonstrates that **hybrid thinking—not purist systems—may offer the greatest flexibility and feasibility**.

[>>Link to Mass Timber installation video](#)

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LONG SPAN CLT ROOF, INSTALLING, ORIGINAL TIMBER STRUCTURE IN WAREHOUSE, INSTALLING BEAM, JOINERY DETAIL, INSTALLING ROOF CLT, ROOF DETAIL, MANUFACTURING PROCESS.



More Than Shelter: Designing for Dignity

Beyond function, materiality played a central role in **shaping the experience of residents**. Transitional housing often defaults to institutional finishes—but **Making Home** took a different approach.

“Every detail was chosen to signal: You are valued. This is your home.”

— Elie Newman, BNKC Principal-in-Charge

Exposed timber, high ceilings, and generous glazing create spaces that are warm, light-filled, and calming. Where surveillance and safety are required, **design still communicates care**.

A Net-Zero Campus of Care

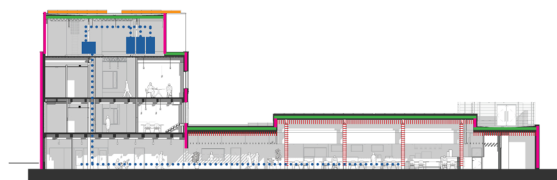
The project targets **Net Zero Carbon**, supported by a high-performance envelope (R30 walls, R40 roof, triple-glazed vinyl windows), efficient systems (air-to-water heat pumps, ERVs), and on-site photovoltaic panels.

These strategies were not only environmentally responsible—they also enabled access to **vital public funding tied to sustainability benchmarks**.



TOP: COLLABORATION SESSION, BOTTOM: SUSTAINABILITY SOLUTIONS

- Reuse of Existing
- Roof – R 40.
- Opaque Wall Assemblies R 30.
- Thermally broken curtain wall and curtain wall caps.
- Fiberglass triple glazed punched windows.
- Mass Timber CLT roof Construction for SJK.
- Glulam structure for SJK.
- NLT infill in existing mass timber of warehouse.
- Photovoltaic Panels.
- Space allocated for Future Net Zero Carbon Domestic Hot Water.
- ERV – Energy Recovery Ventilators – high efficiency.
- Air to water heat pumps-low ambient (cold climate – can go to -20)
- Preheat system – heat recovery from excess heat for domestic hot water.
- Energy efficient lighting



Collaborative Delivery: A Shared Commitment to Community

The success of **Making Home** reflects a rare alignment of values, expertise, and purpose across sectors. As a client with a long history of caring for vulnerable Kitchener Waterloo citizens, **The Working Centre**, possesses a deep understanding of community need paired with a knowledge of how to achieve admirable goals.

Perimeter Development has contributed their development, project management, and construction expertise. **BNKC Architects** has led the design process; anchoring it in dignity, flexibility, and sustainability. This spirit of shared responsibility—between non-profit, private, and design partners—has been critical to navigating the site’s challenges and fast-track delivery.

Of course, the project team consists of many more contributors, consultants and community champions. See the full project team at the end of this case study.

Public Investment Meets Grassroots Support

A project of this scale and urgency required creative, coordinated funding. As of April 2025, the team has raised approximately the **\$22 million** project cost through a mix of **government grants tied to zero-carbon targets** (12 mill) and **grassroots fundraising campaign** with over 300 local donors (10 mill). The Working Centre already owned the land, so this provided a much-needed head-start to the project.

While mass timber and high-performance design are often perceived as cost-prohibitive, **Making Home** demonstrates the opposite. **Adaptive reuse of the existing 1927 warehouse, the speed of prefabricated timber construction, and strategic material coordination** all contributed to cost management. Early alignment with sustainability goals also unlocked funding opportunities and helped avoid the environmental and financial cost of demolition—delivering both **budgetary and carbon efficiencies**.

TOP: RENDER OF ST JOHN'S KITCHEN (SJK) BOTTOM: SECTION OF SJK, THE ORIGINAL WAREHOUSE



Lessons for Municipalities and City Builders

Making Home offers a replicable template for small-scale, high-impact development:

- **Cross-sector Collaboration:** The project would not be possible without deep coordination among non-profit, development, design, and public partners
- **Mass Timber as Enabler:** Fast, clean, and community-friendly construction
- **Hybrid Strategy:** Flexibility and speed, when full timber isn't feasible
- **Human-Centered Design:** Trauma-informed material and layout choices
- **Funding Leverage:** Net-zero carbon commitments and local cooperation aligned with public and private investment
- **Infill Excellence:** Maximum program density on a constrained urban site

Still to Come...

As **Making Home** approaches completion (late Summer 2025), our project team will continue to add to these insights with **Lessons Learned** for like-minded organizations, municipalities, and city builders.

Conclusion

Making Home is more than an architectural project—it's a social, environmental, and logistical model for how cities can respond with urgency and compassion to the affordable housing crisis by combining existing resources and land with productive partnerships. Its lessons extend far beyond Kitchener, offering municipalities and city builders a compelling blueprint for impact.

Want to Learn More?

For questions or to speak with the project team, contact **Kate Watanabe** at **BNKC Architects Inc.** kwatanabe@bnkc.ca

>>[Link to project images and videos](#)

>>[Link to Fundraising Campaign](#)

PROJECT TEAM AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS AT THE GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY



Project Stats

Category	Details
Project Name(s)	Making Home at 97 Victoria St. N. / 97 Victoria
Location	97 Victoria Street North, Kitchener, Ontario
Program	44 transitional housing units, community kitchen, support services, campus courtyard, and multi-purpose community event space
Cost	Project Cost: \$22 million Hard Construction: \$17.4 million Land: The Working Centre's existing asset
Funding	Federal and Provincial Grants/ Funding: \$12 million Community Donors: \$10 million
GFA	2,730 sq m / 29,380 sq ft
Storeys	Building 1: 3-storeys Building 2: 1-storey
Funding Source	Community fundraising campaign Provincial & Federal grants
Building 1:	Adaptive reuse of 2-storey 1927 warehouse to provide housing and community services
Building 2:	New mass timber community kitchen addition targeting net-zero carbon
Mass Timber	Install Time: ~1 week Existing Warehouse Adaptive Reuse: steel structure with existing mass timber floors and purlins. Third floor steel structure and roof deck, light gauge steel wall framing, NLT infill in renovation. New Addition for SJK: Mass Timber CLT roof, Glulam structure
Sustainable Strategies	Target Net Zero Carbon: R30 walls, R40 roof, triple-glazed vinyl windows, PV panels, ERV, heat pumps, heat recovery
TEUI / TEDI / GHGI	192 / 84 / 16 kWh or kg/m ² /year (estimated)

Project Team

Role	Organization(s)
Client	The Working Centre (Joe & Stephanie Mancini)
Developer	Perimeter Development
Architect	BNKC Architects Inc.
Construction Manager	Govan Brown Building Group
Mass Timber Design Assist	Element5
Structural Engineer	MTE Consultants
Building Envelope Consultant	RDH Building Science Inc.
Sustainability Consultant	RDH Building Science Inc.
Mechanical & Electrical Engineers	DEI Consulting Engineers / Zon Engineering Inc.
Electrical Engineer	Lonergan Engineering Inc.
Civil Engineer	MTE Consultants
Building Code & Fire Protection	Vortex Fire
Vertical Transportation	Soberman Engineering Inc.
Urban Planner / Landscape Architect	GSP Group Inc.
Specifications Writer	JM/F Technical Documentation Solutions Inc.
Heritage & Archaeology	LHC
Security Consultant	The Bold Group
Hardware Consultant	Knells William Knell & Company Limited

bnkc

BNKC Architects Inc.
410-672 Dupont Street
Toronto, ON, M6G 1Z6
416.531.7717
bnkc.ca