

Dickinson Square Strategic Plan



Who We Are

Watson's Mill Manotick Inc. (WMMI) is a private, not-for-profit organization and registered charity. Originally founded with the purpose of preserving Watson's Mill, WMMI now oversees the preservation and management of three heritage buildings in Dickinson Square – Watson's Mill, Dickinson House, and the Carriage Shed. Dickinson Square shares a remarkable past rooted in industrial ingenuity and the foundation of the community of Manotick.

Watson's Mill is an 1860s water-powered grist and flour mill. Commercial operations at the mill ceased in 1963, and the building first opened as a museum in 1974. Today, the mill stone and original equipment continue to grind flour, providing a unique immersive experience for visitors of all ages. Dickinson House, built in 1867, originally served as office space for the mill, a general store, and a post office, before becoming a home to Moss Kent Dickinson, one of the Mill's original founders. For nearly 100 years, Dickinson House was home to the Mill owners and their families. It is now open to the public as a heritage house museum, taking visitors back to life in the 1870s. The historic Carriage Shed building, which would have been used to house horses and wagons during the early operations at Watson's Mill, now houses a thriving Used Book Store and WMMI's administrative offices.

WMMI is governed by a robust and interdisciplinary Board of Directors and is staffed year-round by three full-time employees. We also rely on a dedicated and enthusiastic group of volunteers who are integral to the successful operations and delivery of programming across the site. Each year, we welcome over 30,000 visitors to our site, and to the village of Manotick.

Mission

To preserve and provide a thriving and inclusive museum space where people come together through innovative and meaningful educational experiences, events, and programming centered on the history of Dickinson Square.

Vision

Dickinson Square is a heritage destination and vibrant community hub, celebrating and preserving Manotick's roots in agriculture and industry.

Values

As an organization, we value:

- **Authenticity** – upholding authenticity and best practices in preserving and conserving the collection, heritage buildings, and the stories we tell.
- **Visitor Experience** – offering high quality, consistent visitor experiences that are engaging and resonate with a variety of audiences.

- **Open and Inclusive Environments** – a genuine respect for visitors to our site, our place in the community, our volunteers, partners, and staff members. We strive to foster an open and inclusive environment where all feel welcome.
- **Community Partnerships** – strong relationships with our community, and a commitment to continuously seek out new opportunities for collaboration.

Priorities

Through this strategic period, WMMI Board and Staff will prioritize the following three areas of work:

- **Preservation of Dickinson Square**
- **Visitor Experience**
- **Building Awareness**

These are discussed in more detail below.

Preservation of Dickinson Square

Objective: To strengthen the preservation of Dickinson Square, its collections, and its stories.

- Ensure the long-term viability of Dickinson Square as an exceptional heritage destination. Uphold the values of authenticity and integrity in all decisions and practices regarding the preservation and conservation of our heritage assets.
- Prioritize bringing collection practices up to a professional standard and integrating the collections held across the site.
- Refine and share stories with historical integrity and contemporary relevance. Embrace and promote local history by making connections in ways that are accessible and meaningful to all visitors.

Visitor Experiences

Objective: To enhance visitor experiences and solidify our place as a cultural community hub in Manotick.

- Provide a high-quality, consistent visitor experience. Create a cohesive narrative across the site, facilitated through historical interpretation, programming, and events that resonate with and serve the needs of our community.
- Honour our responsibility in maintaining the value of Dickinson Square as part of Manotick's history, as well as its links to the broader Ottawa region. Actively seek out new partnerships to collaborate, share knowledge, and reach new audiences.
- Revitalize the membership program to create more robust, engaging, and valued opportunities for individuals, families, volunteers, and companies to be involved in the site.

Building Awareness

Objective: Build upon our organizational capacity to increase awareness of Dickinson Square and ensure ongoing sustainability for the site.

- Maintain best practices for governance and operations of the site. Diversify and stabilize financial resources to aid in development projects.
- Develop a marketing plan to increase awareness of the site, reach new residents in the community, reach other new audiences, and effectively promote activities and events.
- Prioritize growing organizational capacity through sound human resource practices, policy review, and professional development.
- Undertake strategic restoration and development projects that will provide more accessible programs, collections, and community spaces at Dickinson Square.

Road Map

This roadmap is not meant to be a set-in stone list of deadlines to be achieved. Instead, it is meant to act as a guideline and will be reviewed and updated frequently throughout the strategic period. It will remain flexible to organizational circumstances and capacity.

Year 1

Year One will largely be a year of exploration, defining and identifying different tactics for achieving each priority.

Preservation of Dickinson Square

- Explore requirements and identify specific needs for creating a dedicated collections storage and management space.
- Work towards completing the artifact documentation and review of transfer with the Rideau Township Historical Society (RTHS).
- Emphasize urgent facilities needs with the City of Ottawa: rodent infestation, inadequate washroom facilities, accessibility, and safety concerns specifically.
- Solidify plans with City of Ottawa regarding necessary work at Dickinson House (i.e., UV filter installation, foundation work, lighting, etc.).

Visitor Experiences

- Explore requirements and identify specific needs for creating a dedicated community programming space.
- Explore requirements and identify specific needs for a new site-wide interpretive plan. Seek out submissions from consultants to help facilitate this plan.
- Explore requirements and identify specific needs for improved exhibition space across the site.
- Complete website and social media integration for Watson's Mill and Dickinson House.

Building Awareness

- Explore requirements and identify specific needs for extending operations to year-round services.
- Explore opportunities for corporate sponsorships and more grass-roots fundraising activities.
- Fill current vacancies on WMMI Board of Directors.
- Revitalize the Membership Program.

Year 2

Year Two will build upon earlier exploration and result in the creation of more concrete workplans and activities.

Preservation of Dickinson Square

- Complete the artifact documentation and review of transfer with RTHS. Complete official transfer of ownership for identified objects in the collection.
- Identify conservation needs for objects held in the collection. Seek out support from a Conservator to help assess any treatment needs.
- Complete installation of UV filters at Dickinson House; confirm plans for foundation work, lighting upgrades.
- Continue to diversify funding through various departments and levels of government.

Visitor Experiences

- Complete a new interpretive strategy for Dickinson Square, including specific interpretive plans for each of the historic buildings.
- Complete a review of existing programming through the lens of the new interpretive strategy; identify programs that can be updated, or new programs that align with the new strategy.
- Complete a reassessment of exhibition plans through the lens of the new interpretive strategy.
- Explore requirements and identify specific needs for building the *Lost Carriage Shed*.

Building Awareness

- Explore requirements and identify needs for rebranded corporate identity and marketing plan. Seek out submissions from consultants to help facilitate this activity.
- Develop a sponsorship plan and seek out corporate support for signature events.
- Develop an annual fundraising campaign.
- Consider extending season incrementally by offering more programs/events during the “off season” if possible.

Year 3

Preservation of Dickinson Square

- Identify conservation needs for objects held in the collection. Seek out support from a Conservator to help assess any treatment needs.
- Complete foundation work and lighting upgrades at Dickinson House.
- Confirm plans for further restoration work for Watson’s Mill machinery and Dickinson House floor plan restoration projects.
- Continue to diversify funding through various departments and levels of government.

Visitor Experiences

- Implementation of new interpretive strategy and specific interpretive plans for Watson’s Mill and Dickinson House.
- Development of new programs and updated existing programs completed, better alignment to new interpretive strategy.

- Implementation of exhibition plan to coordinate with new interpretive strategy for each building.
- Develop a full proposal for the reconstruction of the *Lost Carriage Shed*; prepare requests for support and funding and begin coordinated fundraising efforts. Space allocation to include considerations for community space, collections space, administrative space, and other facilities needs.

Building Awareness

- Develop a new corporate identify and brand guideline with support from Marketing and Communications professionals.
- Launch sponsorship program.
- Launch annual fundraising campaign and/or event.
- Develop a plan for facilities and human resources needs to be able to extend the traditional operating season.