

# Former church being turned into affordable housing

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Six years ago, St. Matthew's Anglican Church was faced with a dwindling congregation, a sprawling century-old building to maintain and the understanding the focus of its much-used structure had gradually shifted from serving God to serving the needs of the larger community.

Church leaders are frank about the crossroads they faced. When they received \$500,000 in unexpected bequests, they could have taken the money, used it for operating expenses and shuttered the place when the money was gone. Instead, they signed a 50-year lease, turning their building and \$200,000 over to a non-profit housing organization. What was once a massive church is being transformed into WestEnd Commons (WEC), an affordable rental property for area residents.

It's a more than \$6-million project, funded by three levels of government, the United Way, foundations and private donations. An active fundraising campaign is underway.

The building at 641 St. Matthews Ave. has long been about more than Anglican worship. The Neighbourhood Resource Centre, eight agencies and groups, forms its secular core. Those groups will stay in the freshly renovated lower level. The groups pay rent, low but enough to cover costs. Five worship groups meet in St. Matthew's.

Work has begun to reshape St. Matthew's into WestEnd Commons, a 25-unit housing unit. The rental apartments are intended for families and will range from one to four bedrooms. Tenants will include seniors, people with mental-health issues, new immigrants and First Nations families.

WestEnd Commons is expected to be complete and fully occupied by February 2014. It's too early to draw up a waiting list. The 2012 goal is \$1.393 million. If you want more information on the project, go to their website ([www.thewestendcommons.ca](http://www.thewestendcommons.ca)).

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