

A Long and Winding Road

The Path from 330 Gage Street to 2481 Kingsway Drive

This chronicle of the Grand River Bridge Club's search for a new home picks up where [this history](#) of the club's first six years on Gage Street left off. It outlines the long and winding road followed by the club in its search for better premises – a process that took almost three years and included more than six months in temporary premises and three moves.

THE SEARCH

The club's lease (at Gage Street) was for five years (until February 2017) with an option to renew for a further three years. Initially, the club's founders thought they would probably want to exercise the renewal option at the five-year point, but the club was much more successful than expected – outgrowing its playing and parking capacity by the fourth year.

Aware of the probability of extensive renovation costs in new premises, the Board of Directors had pursued very conservative fiscal policies, over the years socking away most of each year's surpluses for a rainy day.

Early in 2016, the Board of Directors struck a four-person search committee: Chair: Stephen Carpenter, Ted Boyd, Jim Dalgliesh, and Dave Shortt. The committee selected Rebecca Rawlings of CMA Realty as its real estate agent.

The committee began to look for a location that would meet the following criteria.

- Minimum of 3,500 square feet
- Parking for 50 cars
- Central location
- Affordable rent
- Ten-year lease with options to renew

- Located in a “non-neighbourhood” plaza (due to municipal zoning by-laws)

At first, the search committee had no idea how elusive a suitable location would turn out to be. Over the next three years, the committee would look at over 60 locations, making an offer or a non-binding letter of intent on nine of them. Each attempt entailed at least two site visits, a floor plan, renovation estimates, and discussions about the suitability of the site.

Attempt #1

In late March 2016, a property at 547-549 Lancaster Street owned by the Kaizen Judo and Fitness Club came open. This property was for sale, as opposed to for rent. The price before negotiation was \$1,125,000, and an anonymous donor came forward with an offer to help with the purchase. After considerable discussion, the club’s Board of Directors decided that the club was not in a position to take on such a commitment and that the committee should continue to look.

In the summer of 2016, the search committee approached the Gage Street landlord about extending the club’s lease for three years. The landlord reluctantly (because the other tenants were complaining about parking) agreed to renew the club’s lease – but for one year only.

Attempt #2

After serious discussions about locations in the Frederick Street Mall and 300 Victoria Street Plaza, the committee learned of a property that had become surplus to MTD Products at 61 Kent Street and was available to lease. After some negotiations, the property was found to meet the club’s needs and an offer to lease was presented in late August 2016. Unfortunately, after very long hesitation, MTD Products decided to reject the club’s offer because it wasn’t prepared to sign a 10-year lease.

Attempt #3

In March 2017, the search committee signed an offer to lease for a section of the former M&T Insta-Print building at 907 Frederick Street – 3,800 square feet with adequate parking. Although the club was speedy in its offer, it was beaten out by another tenant, and, after reviewing a secondary location in the same building, the committee decided it was not appropriate for the club.

Attempt #4

In April 2017, the Hazelglen Plaza at 101 Hazel Glen Street changed hands, and the search committee entered into discussions with the new landlord about the space that was occupied by Hack's Bar, 4,800 square feet with copious parking. The landlord, however, was reluctant to commit until he got clarity on what the other plaza tenants were going to do, and he never really got around to responding to the club's non-binding letter of intent. Some six months later, the committee tried to breathe new life into this option, but the landlord continued to vacillate.

Attempt #5

In June 2017, a ground-floor location at 800 King Street East beside YMCA Immigrant Services became available. The committee sent a non-binding letter of intent. Parking was problematic, because the lot was in a busy area beside a hospital and entailed a 100-yard walk. The committee eventually decided not to pursue this option.

Attempt #6

In September 2017, Jack and Lori Cole drew the club's attention to a property at 842 Victoria Street. The search committee signed an offer to lease, but at the last minute the landlord got worried that the club would devour too many of his parking spaces. Ultimately, despite lengthy and frustrating negotiations, the deal fell through.

By now, the Gage Street landlord was renting to the club on a month-by-month basis on the understanding that a new location was being sought aggressively.

Attempt #7

In January 2018, the club signed an offer to lease on premises in a plaza at 808 Courtland, formerly a car repair shop that had excellent parking, a wonderful playing area, and located near the LRT and the best little chip stand in Kitchener. The landlord was congenial, but the search committee was worried that he might sell the property to a developer with no commitment to honour our lease since it was close to an LRT stop. The club's offer to lease included restrictions on the landlord's ability to sell, and subsequent negotiations became contentious on price and the proposed restrictions, and eventually broke down.

The Gage Street landlord gave the club notice of eviction on April 1, 2018, effective July 1, 2018. The search committee reluctantly agreed to consider non-Kitchener locations to expedite the club's relocation.

Attempt #8

In March 2018, the committee signed an offer to lease on a Waterloo property at 620 Davenport Road, near Conestoga Mall. It had good parking, adequate space, and access via the expressway and the LRT. The closer the club got to a deal, however, the more problems surfaced. For one thing, landlord got more and more nervous about parking and decided to limit the club's parking to 30 spaces. And for another, the renovations were projected to cost \$250,000 – far more than the club could afford. The clock was ticking.

On April 26, 2018, Stephen ran into Malkin Dare and told her about new problems with the Davenport Road property. Malkin passed this information on to her husband Bryan Dare, who had just learned that Dare Foods was going to be looking for a renter for about 5000 feet of its administrative building at 2481 Kingsway Drive in Kitchener. In a dinner time conversation with Stephen that night, Bryan offered the space to the bridge club. Within the hour, Stephen called Jim, who had just given the signed Davenport Road lease to the club's real estate agent for onward transmission to the landlord. Fortunately, the signed lease had not yet been conveyed to the landlord, and the club's agent was asked to hang on to it for the time being.

Circumstances meant that the search committee couldn't view the Kingsway Drive location for most of a week, but the club agreed to wait, taking a chance on its suitability, despite the risk of losing the Davenport Road location and finding the club on the street on June 30.

Attempt #9

The search committee eventually met with the Dare chairman and toured the prospective premises, finding them more than adequate. There were 40 parking spaces, the rent was palatable (the same as the Davenport Road location), there was more than enough playing space and a separate teaching room, and the renovations were projected to cost less than \$100,000. Best of all, Dare was prepared to provide the club with a temporary location in one of its warehouses, at 55 Franklin Street, from July 1 onwards. The Board of Directors signed a lease with alacrity.

THE MOVES

Move #1

A crowd of volunteers, thoroughly organized by Bill McDonald, moved the club out of the Gage Street location and into the Franklin Street location on Saturday, June 30, 2018 – one day before Eviction Day. Operations resumed at 55 Franklin without a hiccup on Monday, July 2.

The plan had been that the club would stay at Franklin Street until the Dare administrative staff had moved out of 2481 Kingsway Drive and the renovations to the club's new space had been completed. However, "the best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley" and this plan was thwarted by three unforeseen problems.

- *First, the renovations at Dare's new home in Cambridge took much longer than anticipated and so the Dare administrative staff didn't move out until early November.*
- *Second, the renovations in the club's permanent location at 2481 Kingsway Drive were slowed by the fire marshall's unexpectedly-stringent requirements and the discovery of a pipe lined with asbestos.*
- *Third, Dare Foods sold its warehouse at 55 Franklin, meaning that the bridge club had to vacate by the end of November, 2018.*

Move #2

Dare Foods generously offered the club a space in its basement at 2481 Kingsway Drive for the month of December. A joint meeting of the club's Board of Directors and its Management Team discussed the option of temporarily closing its doors or moving to another temporary location and unanimously agreed to make the move. Once again led by the super-organized Bill McDonald, an army of volunteers moved everything over on Saturday, November 24, 2018. The new temporary space was very popular with the club's players, and operations resumed effortlessly.

But there was small cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, on the horizon. The problem was that the club's temporary basement premises were rented out to Penske Corporation effective January 1, 2019 – and renovations to the club's

permanent premises on the main floor would not be finished in time. Fortunately, Penske was willing to let the club stay in its basement location until the renovations were finished, despite the considerable inconvenience to Penske.

Move #3

The contractors completed their renovations to the club's permanent space on Friday, January 11, and the club received its occupancy permit on Wednesday, January 16. The final move took place on Thursday, January 17. Once again, an army of volunteers moved everything up from the basement and then organized, sorted, fixed, installed, cleaned, and hung, positioned or stored the amazing amount of stuff our club has accumulated over the years, while Tom Ramsay's final lesson in the downstairs dealing room proceeded. The following morning, Cindy Mahn taught 27 students a lesson on Jacoby 2NT in the new teaching room, while in the afternoon the club's first game in its new location attracted 13½ tables.

Acknowledgements

It would be impossible to thank everyone who contributed to this project, as there were literally hundreds of volunteers and helpers, not to mention the donors who contributed almost \$30,000 to the project, but the following people (in no particular order) made substantial contributions that have not yet been acknowledged.

- Rebecca Rawlings, the club's real estate agent, who spent hundreds of hours arranging all the deals that fell through. Even though the final lease was not handled by Rebecca, the Board voted to pay her a fee consistent with going rates for her work.
- Dave Shortt who helped with the club's offers to lease and leases and worked with city staff on by-laws and other municipal requirements.
- Stephen Carpenter who led the search committee and worked with the contractor on the renovations to 2481 Kingsway Drive, saving the club considerable time and money.
- Jim Dalglish who provided steady and unflappable leadership throughout.
- Ted Boyd, who as a member of the search committee visited most of the 60 possible locations, was the club's painting czar, and wrote this chronicle.