



The little
building
that could!

ENSPiRE
INSPIRATIONS

THE REINVENTION OF 500 PORTAGE AVENUE

HOW BOMA ENSPIRE EMPOWERED A FOCUSED PLAN FOR RENEWAL AND SUSTAINABILITY

Danielle Wright thinks of 500 Portage Ave as “the little building that could.” A 101,000 square-foot, eight-storey walk-up built in 1979, the downtown Winnipeg building houses a diverse mix of office, service and retail tenants. Danielle became property manager in December 2023 after Northview Residential acquired it.

“There had been several ownership changes and some periods of neglect,” she explains, “and we wanted to restore the building to its original glory and bring it up to today’s standards.”

Situated across from the University of Winnipeg’s beautiful main campus, the building is attached to a 16-storey residential tower that shares an outdoor pool and a parkade. The main floor is primarily retail and restaurants, with offices and services above.



Danielle Wright

Commercial Property
Manager, MB Operations
Northview Residential REIT

A 2024 audit uncovered opportunities to improve the building's sustainability performance by reducing water use and installing more energy-efficient lighting, windows and HVAC systems. The audit revealed consumption patterns, areas of waste and opportunities to align the building's operations with Northview's sustainability goals.

The Northview team joined BOMA Enspire in 2025, securing funding through the BPE initiative Energy Managers/Retrofit coordinators activity. Funded under Natural Resources Canada's Deep Retrofit Accelerator Initiative, the program provides tools, resources and guidance to improve performance in mid-tier commercial buildings like 500 Portage Ave.

“With the Enspire funding, we’ve been chipping away at what needs to be done,” says Danielle, adding that the community has stepped up to help as well.

Recently, Northview's electrical contractor, Static Electric, came upon a large supply of LED lights that another building no longer needed; these have now been installed at 500 Portage Ave. A new building operation system monitors air intake, circulation and temperatures and can efficiently adjust to Winnipeg's temperature extremes.

Tenant education and engagement are a big part of the strategy. Danielle relishes the opportunity to work with tenants and encourage them to see sustainability as a shared responsibility. For example, Danielle persuaded a restaurant tenant to stop running a constant stream of water through its wok system. Occupancy sensors in washrooms now turn out the lights when no movement is detected. New water monitoring sensors alert building management to high-water usage and potential leaks. An innovative new floor matting system cleans visitors' shoes as

they walk through the building, reducing the time required to clean. Cardboard can now be recycled, and a new composting program is in the works.

Together with aesthetic changes like new asphalt, new corten steel planters and bright, energy-efficient lighting in common areas, the improvements have made a big difference to the building's reputation and demand for space.

“Enspire gave us the chance to step back and look at our operations holistically,” says Danielle. “By identifying strengths, gaps and achievable improvements, we made a roadmap to our long-term sustainability goals. It has also been a way to connect with other building owners with similar challenges. When individual buildings take action, it creates a ripple effect that helps us all.”

What's next for 500 Portage Avenue? Window upgrades are being considered, a complete energy audit and energy management program are planned, and work is underway for a BOMA BEST certification next year.



“The building has come a long way from when we bought it,” she says. “We’re going to keep the momentum going.”