



Remarks by Board Chair
Matt Hutten
at the
2020 Annual General Meeting, 2021 June 24

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of The Grind’s Board of Directors, I’m pleased to welcome you to our second virtual Annual General Meeting. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly has changed our lives but we manage to cope.

Shortly, you’ll be hearing from our Executive Director, Jerry Novack, who will walk you through the highlights of our 2020 fiscal year operational experience. However, as Board Chair, I’d like to provide you with a different take on the year just past by focussing on some of over-arching challenges we faced during that year and my assessment of some of the opportunities that present themselves – what I would put in the category of “must do’s”.

The Grind Pembroke continues to expand its service outreach to meet the needs of community members that are not being met by other organizations and agencies. But growth can be a double-edged sword. While program expansion can allow more client needs to be addressed, it can also tax our limited fiscal and human resources – not to mention the physical space from which programs and services are delivered. In my opinion, as well as those of my colleagues, we have reached that point.

A significant contributor to this was the unavoidable decision taken by our Board in early 2020 to officially assume responsibility for the food services operation of the Salvation Army when they suddenly abandoned the City of Pembroke in March, 2019. This decision was not our preferred outcome. Despite a valiant effort by a community committee to find a sponsor for the service as well as locate an existing functioning kitchen facility, it became apparent in the end that only two options existed – abandon an important food service that many marginalized community members relied upon to support their nutrition needs, or formalize an offer The Grind made to temporarily host a food service from its downtown Pembroke Coffee House that was ill-equipped to do so on a longer-term basis.

In last year’s AGM address by our then board chair, Garth Marquardt referred to The Grind’s creation and subsequent growth as a “leap of faith”. Well, with the decision to take on a food security program permanently, I can say our Board definitely took a “giant leap of faith”. While this decision subsequently has given us a great sense of satisfaction that our mission to help our marginalized brothers and sisters has been enhanced, we were also quickly reminded that it has created significant stresses on the organization from a financial, volunteer and space utilization perspective. But we persevered and in spite of the added



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stresses of the COVID pandemic, we soldiered on to adapt our operation quickly to meet strict food and personal health and safety measures. We thank the Renfrew County and District Health Unit and Pembroke's Fire Department for their guidance in ensuring that our operations remained safe.

This decision to establish a Community Kitchen was only a band-aid solution as we realized from the get-go that we would ultimately have to find an alternate, more suitable location that could also accommodate our other programs and services. In the meantime, however, we set about to create a temporary kitchen within the space that had served as our Coffee House, with spill-over into the area that once housed our three-bedroom emergency shelter. In a strange way, the pandemic allowed us to provide this service more effectively by freeing up space that would otherwise have been occupied by clients had they not been barred for health reasons from entering the premises. That our clients could only access meals on a take-out basis was a blessing in disguise – despite it creating other issues such as homeless clients not being able to eat in-doors, or use the washroom facilities – a problem exacerbated by the appearance of winter and a very hot summer. The lack of alternate community facilities within which to stay warm or cool and to attend to hygiene needs created a lot of concern, especially with COVID requiring extra special attention for hand washing etc.

The realization that finding a larger space was essential if The Grind was ever to return to a “normal” operating state after the pandemic subsided dominated our thought processes as we entered 2020. This led to the Board making a decision to accept the City of Pembroke's generous offer to lease its decommissioned fire hall on Victoria Street adjacent to Pembroke's downtown district. After the conclusion of public consultations, the city and The Grind signed a five-year lease in mid-June. The attraction of this new location was that it offered a much larger space that could accommodate all of the Grind's existing services (except of course transitional housing) as well as allow for modest growth. The downside of the decision was that required renovations to make the space “liveable” would be costly – in the range of \$500,000 - \$600,000. When I talked earlier about taking a “leap of faith” – this decision to move into the fire hall was a giant one for sure. While the financial risks were large as the projected costs were much beyond the capacity of the organization's existing donor base to cover, the Board felt it had no other option, particularly as the lease on The Grind's existing downtown location was quickly coming to an end in May of 2021 and no other affordable



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location could be found despite an extensive search.

Thus, the remainder of 2020 was spent in applying for large government grants to cover the renovations costs. To assist in managing the project, the Board created a sub-committee to oversee and plan the work. The project ultimately was divided into three phases to help with cash flow recognizing that if successful, not all of the applied-for grant funding would be available at once. Although a couple of large funding applications were unsuccessful, the Grind succeeded by late December in securing an Ontario Trillium Foundation Resilient Communities Fund grant of \$150,000. This funding would allow Phase 1 of the project to be undertaken starting in early 2021. The focus for Phase 1 site development was on creating a commercial kitchen, a client services office and an administrative office covering three sub-projects – walls/ceilings, flooring and HVAC (including new furnace and water heater). Community fundraising to cover necessary up-front costs, such as for engineering drawings and environmental assessments, electrical and plumbing work, and purchase of kitchen equipment etc. was undertaken as well. Work that had to be delayed due to COVID, for example for development of public spaces like the coffee house and public washrooms, was grouped into Phases 2 and 3. This delay also worked in The Grind's favour as a search for funds to complete them could be delayed well into the following year.

The financial pressures on the organization's food security program in 2020 attributed to COVID were largely mitigated by generous provincial and federal relief funding made available through the County of Renfrew's Community Services Division and the United Ways of Eastern Ontario and Simcoe Muskoka to the tune of around \$135,000. Some of this funding carried over into 2021. On behalf of our clients who benefited, we thank the senior levels of government and their fund managers for this welcome support. Jerry will provide more details of this support later.

In our 2019 AGM Board report, we stated the need for a more strategic approach to managing the organization – both in terms of how it is financed and in determining the scope and direction of its programs and services. Fiscal responsibility was the first step and we concluded 2020 with having taken a few additional steps to strengthen our financial management processes, with budget preparations, fund tracking mechanisms and enhanced bookkeeping services. Recognizing that our donor base, while very important from an operations



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perspective, would be unable to adequately support our goals of more consistent and knowledgeable management oversight, we took steps to engage City of Pembroke and County of Renfrew officials at the committee level. Our goal was to secure sustainable funding support for key managerial and supervisory functions. These discussions, while not conclusive, at least raised an awareness of the role The Grind plays within the health and social service sectors in meeting some of the needs of our communities' marginalized and homeless population that government-funded agencies cannot address due to the nature of their individual mandates. Our message was that The Grind is assisting a large population and therefore is an important player in maintaining a cohesive and inclusive social fabric and in complementing the work of other service providers by addressing critical service gaps. These early discussions have prepared the way to anticipated further discussions at the city and county council levels in 2021.

Whatever the outcome of these initiatives, it is clear that the status quo is not an option, nor is failure. The bottom line is that failing to achieve sustainability will force the Board to re-evaluate The Grind's service offerings and make hard but necessary decisions to ensure that whatever the outcome, the organization can live within its human and financial limitations. We have hope that, together with our community partners, we can continue to meet the critical needs of our client base.

Community agency partnerships were another highlight of 2020. They have been essential in expanding The Grind's efforts to help meet ever growing and complex needs of homeless and other clients experiencing mental health and/or addictions challenges. Initial work with the adult Developmental Services Division of Family & Children's Services of Renfrew County introduced us, for example, to the provincial Urgent Response mechanism to help clients suspected of being incapable of looking after their own affairs. This program can lead to a required psychological assessment and potentially the support of a case worker from FCSRC and even the appointment of a public trustee to look after the interests of the client. A couple of senior clients of The Grind have been assisted in the past in this way. The relationship with FCSRC also led to embedding one of their caseworkers in our Client Services Office once weekly to assist with client system navigation. Given our new, larger space, this relationship has scope for strengthening.



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In the same vein, the Grind has a strong and valuable partnership with Mental Health Services of Renfrew County and through them Pembroke Regional Hospital. Members of MHSRC's Crisis Team continued co-habiting space in the Client Services Office during 2020 to provide system navigation support to Social Service Worker Program students from Algonquin College (Pembroke) and Community & Addictions Program students from Willis College (Arnprior). The Crisis Team also operates The Grind's Transition House that provides an assisted independent living option for homeless men who are clients of an agency and who are working on a life-stabilization plan.

In its capacity as the County of Renfrew's custodian of provincial government homelessness funding, Ontario Works partners with The Grind to secure emergency shelter for the homeless in local motels. The Grind manages a Crisis Line after hours when OW offices are closed seven nights a week between 4:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. Our partnership with OW includes direct billing of accommodations and local transportation costs from motels and taxi companies to OW. While United Way East Ontario funding assisted us with the cost of operating the Crisis Line for the first six months of 2020, the County of Renfrew's COVID Relief Funding covered the costs for the latter six months of the year. With the move of The Grind to a new location, and with the move of the OW's Pembroke office to the County of Renfrew building on the outskirts of the city, there is potential for expanding our partnership to provide OW case workers with consultation space in our Client Services Office for the convenience of clients who invariably don't have their own transportation.

We thank all of our agency partners for their support.

Before I conclude, I would be remiss if I didn't thank our generous and supportive community – our donors, funders, volunteers, staff and agency partners – for their help in making The Grind possible. It's a tough journey but a rewarding one when we see what together we can accomplish to ease the pain and suffering experienced by fellow community members. Finally, it has been a privilege to serve as Board Chair and to work with other directors who themselves are generous community volunteers. I thank God for His direction and bringing in the dedicated and compassionate workers to take up the task of this important ministry. I look forward to the year ahead – we will have challenges, but I trust we are in good hands!

Thank you for the privilege of speaking to you and for joining us this evening. I now call upon Jerry Novack to provide an overview of operations for 2020.