

RE-OPENING WASHROOMS IN THE CANADA GAMES PLAZA

DESCRIPTION:

Administration committed to return an enhancement request for Council's consideration regarding re-opening of the Canada Games Plaza washrooms. This followed references by members of Council to the need for public washroom access, as well as an August 2021 announcement by the Prince George Public Library that it would be locking public washrooms at the Bob Harkins Branch, with access only being granted on a "by request" basis. Frequent incidents of suspected and observed substance use, as well as improperly discarded substance use supplies, including biohazards, prompted the decision. As promised, Administration is presenting for Council consideration a 2022 budget enhancement for \$250,000 to enable seasonal opening of the Canada Games Plaza Washrooms.

During the period April 14 – November 28 2020, the Canada Games Plaza washrooms were opened on a pilot basis as a means to mitigate COVID-19 impacts associated with diminished public washroom access for vulnerable populations in the downtown. Several related costs, noted below, informed the 2022 Budget Enhancement Request.

2020 Cost (\$223,410)	Description
\$ 82,233	Bathroom Monitoring provided by the POUNDS Project Society – 7 days per week and 10 hours per day
\$129,467	Contracted Security for Canada Games Plaza (for period of washroom operation)
\$ 482	Materials (Water and Signage)
\$ 6,930	Contracted Janitorial Service (for a 3 month period, prior to the transition of this responsibility to the POUNDS Project Society)
\$ 4,298	Maintenance - Site Readiness Costs & Closure Remediation Costs (staff and materials)

A portion of the above noted costs, amounting to \$86,356, was covered by one-time external grant funding provided by the Canadian Medical Association Foundation (through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities) and the Government of Canada (through its Reaching Home Homelessness Strategy program). It is important to note that solid waste costs associated with the placement and emptying of additional garbage containers was not tracked. The RCMP also reported an increase in the calls for service at the site, although associated cost implications or business continuity impacts were not tracked.

While a peer (defined as those with lived or living experience) management model such as the one offered by the POUNDS Project Society, is a best practice because it is a cost effective and staff have the relationships and expertise necessary to manage access and overdoses, it is not without challenges. Trained supervisors required to successfully manage peer employees with many barriers to employment, are difficult to recruit and retain. This often creates significant peaks and valleys in service delivery. However, the monitoring of washroom access in areas of high vulnerability is mandatory to ensure the health and safety of everyone. Few non-profits have the capacity to provide the service and if an alternate service delivery model, such as monitoring by contracted security, were pursued operating costs would increase exponentially.

The City is continuing to fund the Prince George Native Friendship Centre and the Association Advocating for Women and Community to provide washroom access in the downtown core as part of their respective personal storage programs. In addition, a working group of the Community Safety Hub partnership has been established to explore the enhancement of washroom access provided by other non-profits located in the downtown.

FINANCIAL COST OF THE ENHANCEMENT:

An increase to the 2022 Facility Maintenance budget to enable seasonal opening of the Canada Games Plaza washrooms would be **\$250,000**.