

DATE: October 7, 2019

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Chris Bone, Associate Director – Strategic Initiatives & Partnerships

SUBJECT: Downtown Washroom and Storage Pilot Project

ATTACHMENT(S): None

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the report dated October 7, 2019 from the Associate Director of Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships titled Downtown Washroom and Storage Pilot Project, BE RECEIVED FOR INFORMATION.

PURPOSE:

In May of 2019 Council considered options to address public access to washrooms in the downtown. Administration was directed to work with downtown service providers to enhance monitored washroom access. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the steps Administration has taken to act on that direction.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Council has identified areas of focus that support social health and community well-being, as well as economic growth and development. These focus areas informed the identification of corporate priorities, including the continued implementation of enhanced reporting, bylaw enforcement, clean-up, and outreach services that contribute to a clean and safe community, with a focus on the downtown.

DISCUSSION:

The provision of public washroom access in the downtown requires careful consideration particularly given the current opioid crisis, which has been declared a public health emergency. Maintaining public washroom access in a way that ensures the health and safety of all requires onsite monitoring of use, so the City has developed partnerships to enable the piloting of two supervised service sites.

The first initiative includes the participation of the City of Prince George, BC Housing, and the Prince George Native Friendship Centre. The partners will implement a one-year pilot project in the downtown that

provides public washroom access, storage services for the homeless, and dedicated outreach workers to help connect those living on the street with available housing and support services.

BC Housing funded leasehold improvements including the placement of washrooms at the 181 Quebec Street site, and is providing an operating grant to cover monthly lease payments as well as the cost of two dedicated outreach workers. The City of Prince George is providing funding to assist with operating costs, and the placement of a full-time site coordinator. The Prince George Native Friendship Centre brings significant expertise and experience working with vulnerable populations to the project, as well as an array of diverse and culturally responsive services tailored to address the needs of individuals living on the streets. Personal storage program policies have been established that dictate storage limitations in relation to weight and duration. In addition, prohibited items such as illegal drugs, explosives, perishable items, etc., are clearly outlined within the policy document. Those utilizing the service agree to the terms of the storage program, and are required to provide intake information that will enable analysis related to client profiles, barriers to housing, and referral networks.

The site, located at 181 Quebec Street, is open Monday through Saturday. Operating hours to best suit the needs of those accessing site services, are still under review. The current schedule is structured to test a range of hours between 8 am and 7 pm. Adjustments will be made based on demand and calls for mobile outreach services. Mobile outreach workers can be accessed during site operating hours, by businesses and agencies in the downtown requiring on-site assistance with homeless individuals.

PGNFC continues to promote the availability of the service to clients and downtown businesses. Since its opening on Friday September 6, the service has been well utilized and appreciated by clients, service providers, and the RCMP.

The second initiative involves a partnership between the City of Prince George and an Association Advocating for Women and Community (AWAC), located at 144 George Street. The partners will implement a pilot project from October 2019 – April 2020 at the AWAC site that will enable co-ed access to storage, bathrooms, laundry, showers, as well as complementary services and supports. The pilot concept was informed by a community planning process, facilitated by the Community Partners Addressing Homelessness. Many stakeholders including the City of Prince George, the RCMP, and Downtown Prince George, participated in the community consultation that identified access to these types of services as a major theme.

The City of Prince George is providing funding to assist with operating costs, including staffing. AWAC is opening the main floor of its operation from 10 am – 4 pm seven days per week to provide monitored access to a range of services and supports. The organization is well positioned to build on its experience working with homeless, addicted and otherwise severely marginalized members of our community. They have skilled outreach workers who provide access to a range of services and supports, as well as significant expertise operating supported housing and housing first programs.

The site will be fully operational before the end of October, and the organization will participate in data collection processes that will help inform continued efforts to ensure the downtown is clean and safe for all.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

In response to Council direction regarding public washroom access, the City of Prince George has partnered with BC Housing, PGNFC, and AWAC to implement two pilot projects in the downtown. One pilot site, located at 181 Quebec Street will provide access to storage, washroom, and outreach services. The second pilot site, located at 144 George Street, will provide access to storage, washroom, shower, laundry, and outreach services. Council is asked to receive this report for information.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:



Chris Bone, Associate Director – Strategic Initiatives & Partnerships

APPROVED:



Kathleen Soltis, City Manager
Meeting date: October 7, 2019