

Date: September 7, 2025

To: **Mayor and Council**

Name and title: Andy Beesley, Director Civic Facilities and Events

Subject: Access to Public Washrooms in Downtown Prince George

Attachment(s):  
1. Intergovernmental Advocacy Plan  
2. May 27, 2019 Report to Council

## Recommendation(s):

That Council RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated September 7, 2025 from the Director of Civic Facilities and Events, titled "Access to Public Washrooms in Downtown Prince George".

## Purpose:

To provide Council with information with respect to the four resolutions on Access to Public Washrooms in Downtown Prince George made at the December 2, 2024 Council meeting.

## Background:

At the December 2, 2024 Council meeting, Administration was directed to prepare a report for Council in Q3 2025, on four resolutions:

1. Update the costing of recommendations from the 2019 staff report entitled "Downtown Public Washroom access" recommendations in particular: a) using service providers and b) using Canada Games Plaza; report on currently available public washrooms in downtown Prince George; and compare public washroom availability in Prince George to comparable municipalities.
2. Build a question or option in appropriate future surveys about public washroom access to determine need and demand.
3. Explore grant opportunities to expand safe public washroom access in City of Prince George including enhancing washroom upgrades for year-round access.
4. Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs to develop an advocacy plan to lobby both the Provincial and Federal Government for increased capital funding to communities to ensure safe and clean access to washrooms for all residents.

## Discussion:

### Direction 1: Enhance Access via Service Providers

Administration was requested to research and update the costing of the option from the staff report dated May 2019 that outlined:

*"Enhance access to washrooms located in selected downtown service provider locations by providing funding to enable dedicated monitoring services. Recommended sites would include Saint Vincent de Paul, Positive Living North (Firepit), and AWAC. Service providers would continue to cover all operating and maintenance costs. Currently, washrooms at these locations are available for use.*

*However, access is often dependent upon the ability of staff to effectively monitor use. The small one-time grant is intended to offset costs associated with the placement of a monitor during peak access hours. Agencies would be encouraged to utilize a client/peer employment model.”*

## **Background**

In May 2019, Council approved a staff recommendation to fund service providers to offer bathroom access, estimating the cost at \$36,000. Along with this amount, additional funding was contributed by BC Housing to support the 2 sites. In October 2019, this was introduced as a pilot project funding two “homeless hubs” operated by AWAC and PGNFC. Between 2020 and 2022, the City continued to fund both sites with a \$236,000 annual budget enhancement.

A review later determined that equivalent services could be provided through a single site. Currently, \$96,580 from the Civic Initiatives and Partnerships budget is allocated within a service agreement to support storage services at the House of Friendship ‘homeless hub’ which offers daily drop-in services such as storage, showers, laundry, snacks, emergency clothing, and referrals. Public drop-in hours are 1–8 p.m., while morning hours (8 a.m.–1 p.m.) are reserved for clients who access overnight shelter services (approximately 30 individuals).

## **Downtown Washroom Access Consultation (2025)**

Administration consulted with 5 service providers downtown, along with Downtown Prince George to gather a more current understanding of their operating environment and access to washrooms. The current engagement confirmed themes consistent with previous consultations from 2018 and 2022.

## **Key Findings**

### **1. Current Washroom Access**

- **Limited and Conditional Access:** Most agencies provide bathroom access only to registered clients during business hours. One location offers 24/7 access.
- **Restrictions in Place:** Time limits (5–15 mins), no personal belongings, and safety protocols to prevent substance use and overdoses.
- **Monitoring & Safety:** Staff conduct regular checks, and facilities include lockable, single-user, gender-neutral stalls with safety overrides.

### **2. Challenges Experienced**

- **Substance Use:** Overdoses, smoking/injecting substances, and inappropriate flushing are common.
- **Health & Safety Risks:** Fires, self-harm, and erratic or violent behavior.
- **Sanitation Issues:** Bathing in sinks, bodily fluids, and damage to plumbing infrastructure.
- **Management Response:** Includes strict rules, environmental design changes (e.g., removing mirrors), and temporary closures for cleaning and safety.

### **3. Expanding Access – Feasibility & Costs**

- **Barriers:** Many agencies report that 24/7 access is not feasible without significant resources. Staffing to meet WorkSafeBC safety standards is a major cost driver.
- **Estimated Annual Costs:** \$67,000–\$80,000+ per location, excluding full staffing benefits and other costs not considered during the consultation.
- **Conditional Openness:** Some agencies would consider expanded access if dedicated facilities and proper staffing were in place.
- **Agencies also stressed the importance of not placing further strain on overextended service providers and that broader systemic responses, such as low-barrier housing and designated camping areas, are also necessary to effectively address this issue.**

As of 2025, providers report that the true cost of expanding access has significantly increased and now includes:

- Additional staffing and peer monitors
- Specialized training (e.g., de-escalation, trauma-informed care)
- Site upgrades for safety and accessibility
- Infrastructure investments (retrofits, security upgrades)
- On-site security and incident response capacity
- Enhanced cleaning and sanitation protocols
- First aid supplies and staff readiness

## Conclusion

Meaningful expansion will require ongoing operational funding beyond one-time grants, infrastructure investment for retrofitting or constructing facilities, staffing and safety protocols that reflect the complex needs of the downtown population.

## Direction 2: Canada Games Plaza Washrooms

Administration was requested to research and update the costing of the option from the staff report dated May 2019 that outlined:

*Open the washrooms at the Canada Games Plaza from 7 am to 11 pm daily with an experienced and skilled monitor on-site during operating hours. It is recommended that this option operate as a pilot during the period June 15 - October 1. CPG custodial staff would provide daily cleaning services.*

## Background

In the 2019 report to Council, an estimated amount of \$77,250 was proposed for one onsite attendant and custodial/maintenance costs from June-October. From April 14, 2020 - November 28, 2020, the Canada Games Plaza washrooms were opened on a pilot basis to mitigate COVID-19 impacts associated with diminished public washroom access for vulnerable populations in the downtown. Costs for the 2020 pilot are noted below and were updated to reflect the 2025 costs.

2020 Actual Costs April-Nov	DESCRIPTION OF EXPENSE	2025 Costs April-Nov (Not-for-profit service provider)	2025 Costs April-Nov (contracted security only)
\$82,233	Bathroom Monitoring provided by Service Provider using peer model - 7 days per week, 10 hours/day @ BC living wage rate* (inc. MERC %), partnered model (2 people) <i>*Peer Payment Standards BCCDC</i>	\$121,827.09	\$0.00
\$129,467	Contracted Security for Canada Games Plaza (for period of washroom operation)	\$94,710.00 (1 security personnel)	\$189,420.00 (2 personnel)
\$482	Materials (Signage)	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00
\$6,930	Contracted Janitorial Service. Based on 4 basic cleans/day, 7 days/week <i>*plus \$45/hour for additional calls for biohazard response</i>	\$41,580.00 (basic call out- not including bio-hazard call outs)	\$41,580.00 (this would likely increase with no washroom attendant on site)
Not included	Supplies - toilet paper/paper towel/hand soap	\$2,475.00	\$2,475.00
\$4,298	Maintenance - Site Readiness Costs & Closure Remediation Costs (staff and materials)	\$8,000.00	\$8,000.00
Not included	Parks & Solid Waste removal services (garbage bin, site maintenance etc.)	\$25,410.00	\$25,410.00
<b>\$223,410</b>	<b>Total costs</b>	<b>\$295,502.09</b>	<b>\$268,385.00</b>

### Considerations:

In 2020, \$86,356 of project costs were offset by one-time external grants from the Canadian Medical Association Foundation and the Government of Canada’s Reaching Home program. Solid waste costs (e.g., garbage collection) were not tracked or included in 2020 but are accounted for in the 2025 cost estimate.

RCMP reported increased calls for service at the site in 2020, though associated costs were not captured; security expenses included in the 2025 estimate may help address this.

The 2020 peer-led model (used by the POUNDS Project Society) showed strengths in overdose response and relationship-building but faced challenges due to difficulties in recruiting and retaining trained supervisors. Current consultations suggest limited nonprofit capacity to deliver this model effectively, and that peer staff may be better suited to support roles like cleaning, rather than monitoring. However, in high-vulnerability areas, active on-site monitoring remains essential.

Finally, 2025 cost projections do not include long-term facility lifecycle or capital upgrade considerations.

### Conclusion

Opening the CGP washrooms for extended daily use with on-site monitoring presents a viable short-term pilot solution to increase public washroom access downtown. Long-term success will depend on sustainable funding, selection of an effective and reliable staffing model and ongoing operational and safety planning.

### Direction 3: Comparative Analysis/ Lessons from Other Municipalities

Administration was requested to:

*Highlight what public washroom facilities are currently available in Downtown Prince George and where possible the report compares public washroom availability with our comparable municipalities in BC as well as Grande Prairie and Edmonton.*

For the purposes of this report, “public” refers to civic facilities within the C1 Zone that offer washroom access to the public, either consistently during open hours or in specific contexts like events or programming. In the Downtown (C1 Zone), several City-owned or operated buildings contain bathroom facilities. However, the degree of public access varies.

Importantly, access to these facilities is also behavior-based. Most locations operate under standards of conduct or facility rules, meaning individuals may be denied entry or asked to leave if their behavior is perceived as disruptive, unsafe, or in violation of posted policies.

Facility	Public Access	Hours	Conditions
Civic Plaza	Conditional		Open to public during events
Prince George Public Library	Yes (during open hours)	Mon to Fri: 10:00 am – 8:00 pm (closing at 6:00 pm on Monday and Friday) Sat: 10:00 am – 5:00 pm Sun: 12:00 pm – 4:00 pm	Access for all visitors during operating hours
Conference & Civic Centre	Conditional		Available only during scheduled events
Two Rivers Gallery	Yes (during open hours)	Mon: Closed Tues: 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Access for gallery visitors and during community events

		Wed: 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM Thurs: 10:00 AM – 9:00 PM Friday: 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM Saturday: 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM Sunday: 12:00 PM – 5:00 PM	
<b>City Hall</b>	Limited	Mon - Fri: 8:30 am – 5:00 pm Closed Sat & Sun	For staff and those attending City business
<b>Kopar Memorial Arena</b>	Conditional		For staff and Kopar customers
<b>Canfor Leisure Pool</b>	Yes (during open hours)	Mon to Fri: 9:00 AM – 8:00 PM Sat & Sun: 1:00 PM – 7:30 PM	Washrooms open to the public during regular facility hours

While all the facilities provide some level of access, only a few (e.g., Library, Canfor Leisure Pool) offer regular access, and even then, access can be revoked or limited based on conduct.

**Information from other Municipalities**

Administration consulted with several municipalities, including Grande Prairie and Edmonton (as directed in the Notice of Motion) to understand approaches to public washroom access. Many reported challenges such as poor planning, vandalism, high maintenance costs, and safety issues—some even closed washrooms temporarily. Facilities like the Portland Loo can help reduce public defecation but are not standalone solutions. They require ongoing maintenance, security, and proper oversight. Without this, their condition deteriorates and use declines.

Ultimately, public washrooms are essential infrastructure, but must be part of a broader, coordinated strategy including housing, outreach, and health supports to be effective. In particular, Edmonton has a comprehensive, phased public washroom strategy focused on inclusion, technology (e.g. self-cleaning toilets, air quality sensors, and emergency systems) and community feedback. Phased implementation, blending temporary and permanent solutions are informed by extensive engagement and best practices from other cities. They aim to set a national benchmark for inclusive and safe public infrastructure. Grande Prairie has a successful, integrated hub model located in a city-owned facility operated by a not-for-profit with provincial/municipal funding. It includes centralized services, strong provincial/municipal funding and a mobile outreach team.

**Direction 4: future surveys about public washroom access to determine need and demand**

Administration was *directed to build a question or option in appropriate future surveys about public washroom access to determine need and demand.*

Staff acknowledge Council’s direction to include a question about public washroom access in future surveys to assess community need and demand. At present, there are no upcoming surveys where this topic would align with existing objectives. However, the City has previously conducted targeted consultations in 2018 and 2022 specifically focused on public washroom access, and the findings from these efforts have informed current planning. Should additional engagement be pursued, staff recommend developing a targeted communications strategy and engagement plan to ensure meaningful, context-specific input from the community.

**Direction 5: Grant Opportunities**

Administration was *directed to explore grant opportunities to expand safe public washroom access in City of Prince George including enhancing washroom upgrades for year-round access.*

Although grant opportunities such as those from the Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT) *Community Places* and federal social development programs are available, they often come with

narrow application windows, limited funding and/or restrictive eligibility. Research indicated there were no eligible funding opportunities available at present time.

**Direction 6: Advocacy**

*That Council directs the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs to develop an advocacy plan to lobby both the Provincial and Federal Government for increased capital funding to communities to ensure safe and clean access to washrooms for all residents.*

On August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025, the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs approved the Advocacy Plan regarding Access to Public Washrooms in Downtown Prince George and as attached to this report.

**Strategic Priorities:**

**Social Health and Well-Being:**

Maximize the quality of life for all residents

**Economic Diversity and Growth:**

Market Prince George as a place to invest, live, and visit.

**City Government and Infrastructure:**

Focus on meaningful communication and relationship development to advance shared priorities, Continue to improve processes and practices to support effective and efficient service delivery.

**Summary and conclusion:**

Numerous Departments worked together to research and compile this information for all four resolutions from the December 2, 2024 Council meeting regarding the Notice of Motion: “Access to Public Washrooms in Downtown Prince George”.

**Respectfully submitted:**

Andy Beesley, Director Civic Facilities and Events

Prepared by: Sarah Brown, Supervisor Civic Initiatives and Partnerships

**Approved:**

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting date: 2025/09/17

## Objectives

- Engage with provincial and federal levels of governments, and other funders and funding administrators, to advocate for increased capital funding to ensure safe and clean access to washrooms for all residents.

## Audience

- Provincial Government:
  - Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs
  - Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities
- Federal Government:
  - Minister of Housing and Infrastructure
- Funders and Funding Administrators:
  - Federation of Canadian Municipalities
  - Union of BC Municipalities

## Actions

- Send letters to intended audience to introduce the need for safe and clean access to washrooms for all residents
- Engage directly with intended audience to advocate and lobby for increased capital funding
- Emphasize the importance of year-round washrooms in locations such as downtown cores to ensure a strong, healthy, and welcoming community through access and inclusion lenses
- Provide further information on municipal budgets allocating funds to washrooms located within municipal assets such as civic facilities and parks or event centres versus in shared public spaces thus requiring further support from other levels of government

**DATE:** May 27, 2019

**TO:** MAYOR AND COUNCIL

**NAME AND TITLE:** Kathleen Soltis, City Manager

**SUBJECT:** Downtown Public Washroom Access

**ATTACHMENT(S):** None

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

That Council consider the proposed options to address public access to washrooms in the downtown and direct Administration to implement one, or a combination, of the suggested options.

**PURPOSE:**

At the April 11, 2019 meeting, Council endorsed Administration's continued stewardship of a number of downtown initiatives to target development, infrastructure re-investment and renewal, infill development in growth areas, the integration of transportation options, and the enhancement of safety and security. In addition, Administration was directed to return a report regarding public washrooms in the downtown for Council consideration. This report provides Council with an overview of the research undertaken to gauge the feasibility of enhancing public washroom access in the downtown. It also provides options to improve public washroom access. Council is asked to select one or more options for implementation.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

Council has identified areas of focus that support social health and community well-being, as well as economic growth and development. Many of these focus areas relate specifically to the downtown, which means access to public washrooms must be carefully considered in the context of both social and economic health.

**BACKGROUND:**

Inclusion of a public washroom was considered during design of Wood Innovation Square, the park currently under construction beside the WIDC building. A scan of municipalities throughout Canada revealed use of self-cleaning automated restrooms (often referred to as ATPs, automated public toilets) like the Portland Loo, and those manufactured by Urben Blu. Simple installation, and durability in an urban setting, made these options particularly attractive. Administration contacted several municipalities that had selected APTs as a means to enhance public washroom access, and found the reviews were mixed. Particularly noteworthy was how growing dissatisfaction with ATPs correlated with the burgeoning opioid overdose crisis. This prompted staff to undertake indepth research to ensure an informed decision could be made about how the City of Prince George should respond to calls for downtown bathroom access. The research included:

- a literature review;
- consultation with other municipalities;

- consultation with downtown service providers regarding current bathroom access;
- a survey of downtown social service clients regarding washroom access, that was conducted by Community Partners Addressing Homelessness and;
- conference calls with Vancouver Coastal Health staff to review recommended practices regarding washroom design and monitoring, as well as funded peer management programs.

A synopsis of this research follows.

Literature Review: One of the most noteworthy studies was undertaken by the University of Victoria in 2016. The study, titled *Every Washroom: De facto consumption sites in the epicenter of an overdose public health emergency*, statistically highlighted that having a private space, outside of the view of police and other community members, was a significant motivating factor for those seeking out washrooms as a place to use substances.

These findings are consistent with experiences reported by Prince George businesses, government agencies, and social service providers that have eliminated or substantially reduced public access to onsite washrooms in recent years as a means to ensure the safety of staff and visitors, and address growing maintenance and security costs.

Consultation: Many cities, most notably Vancouver, continue to trial ways to address challenges associated with providing clean, safe, and timely washroom access for everyone. Vancouver has “comfort stations” at Main and Hastings and Victory Park, automated toilets scattered throughout the downtown core, and public toilets in city parks. The comfort stations are permanent washroom sites, constructed in the early 1920s, and are owned by the City of Vancouver. The City contracts with a sole proprietor who employs Downtown Eastside (DTES) residents to manage access and cleanliness. The annual yearly contract, for wages only, is \$658,000 per year. A recent review of incident reports indicated that in a three month period, staff dealt with numerous cases of overdoses, needle and drug paraphernalia clean up, verbal abuse, and physical assaults. The automated toilets are owned and maintained according to terms set out in an agreement with the City of Vancouver and a contracted supplier that installs and maintains the toilets, in exchange for the rights to sell advertising on them. Although the City did partner with a community organization to monitor two ATPs located in the DTES, the one located at Pigeon Park is now closed. According to City personnel, the ATPs are not without challenges. Incidents of vandalism, including the jamming of the automated cleaning mechanisms, as well as substance use, and sex trade activities, lead to the facilities being “closed more often than they’re open”. In Vancouver, the ATPs have also not solved a continuing public urination and defecation problem. The cost of maintaining public toilets in city parks is growing, and most remain locked from dusk to dawn.

Consultation with Downtown Service Providers: In early 2018, Social Planning staff contacted downtown service providers and asked five questions including:

- Does your agency provide bathroom access? If so, what are the terms (location, hours of operation, who can access, etc.)?
- If bathroom access is currently provided, what issues have you encountered and how have these issues been managed?
- If bathroom access is currently provided, could it be enhanced (i.e. 24/7 access for anyone needing to use a bathroom) if additional resources were available to support staffing and maintenance costs?
- If a bathroom was “built” in the downtown core, where would you recommend it be located?

- If a bathroom was “built”, would your agency be in a position to enter into a Service Agreement with the City of Prince George requiring your agency’s oversight of the facility (supervision, connection with users, monitoring, and maintenance)?

Detailed responses were received from six agencies. All agencies reported that they provided washroom access. However, the hours of operation varied with only two agencies providing 24/7 access. All agencies reported similar issues with inappropriate use (vandalism, substance use, sleeping, bathing, etc.). Many reported increased maintenance costs and staff impacts (business continuity interruptions given the need to monitor washroom use, as well as increased trauma for those having to respond to overdoses). Some indicated that they had decreased access by locking washrooms located within the agency. Not surprisingly, all agencies indicated an interest in considering enhanced onsite washroom access if resources were available to offset costs associated with monitoring and maintenance. There was no consensus regarding where a bathroom facility should be located, and many respondents indicated that a single facility would not address the issue of urination and defecation in alleys and other outdoor spaces.

Downtown Social Service Client Survey: As part of its service agreement with the City of Prince George, Community Partners Addressing Homelessness (CPAH) was asked to collect feedback from downtown service recipients regarding illegal camping and bathroom access. In March and April of 2018, CPAH member agencies administered the survey. Three questions related to washroom facilities in the downtown. The questions, and three most frequent responses, are noted below.

- What places in the downtown area do you know about that provide washroom access for you?
  - Shelters
  - Library
  - Needle Exchange
- In terms of the agencies/organizations that provide washroom access, is there anything that could be changed to make it more convenient for you?
  - Free access, not having to purchase something to use the bathroom
  - More availability
  - More respect
- In your opinion, are more washrooms needed downtown? If yes, where should they be located?
  - All respondents replied yes, with the most frequently identified locations being:
    - Parks
    - Civic Centre/Courthouse/Greyhound/Library (tied)

Consultation with Vancouver Coastal Health: On the advice of City of Vancouver staff, research regarding the viability of establishing a bathroom facility in downtown Prince George included outreach to Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), Overdose Emergency Response and Prevention (Clinical Educator). VCH has produced a number of resources, and has undertaken several initiatives to address challenges associated with washroom access in neighbourhoods with high levels of street involvement and poverty. As VCH notes, “washrooms in these areas fill many functions beyond simply being a place to use the toilet”. For that reason, VCH has focused on implementing principles and recommendations related to the redesign and monitoring of existing washrooms in VCH DTES facilities. In addition, they facilitate and fund partnerships involving non-profits experienced with peer management programs. These agencies provide personnel at selected locations in vulnerable neighbourhoods to monitor washroom use and connect those who are interested, to services. The most recent initiative involves the provision of monitors at the City of Vancouver’s Carnegie Community Centre.

### **THE PRINCE GEORGE CONTEXT:**

Prince George is not unlike other cities challenged to foster economic growth and development while addressing complex health and social issues requiring the partnership of many organizations. Providing safe and timely access to clean public washrooms is one of those issues.

The Prince George Public Library (PGPL) helps attract hundreds of people daily to the civic district. And, as indicated above, it is identified by downtown social service clients as a place to access the washroom. Since 2015, the PGPL has noted an increased need to monitor its washrooms closely and continuously in order to maintain cleanliness and safety for all users, requiring a significant allocation of resource. Following a 2018 review of washroom incidents the PGPL moved from contract to staff security personnel, doubled security detail during social assistance weeks, and overlapped security staffing at busy times of the day. In 2015, actual security costs were \$55,476. In 2019, security costs are budgeted at \$155,520.

In June 2018, needle boxes were installed in all of the washroom stalls. Security staff empty the needle boxes weekly. A recent tally of washroom use, on a slow day, revealed between 21-43 people using the washrooms per hour, with 14% accessing the building for the sole purpose of using the washroom. The library has also tracked reported incidents related to its public washroom location. The number of incidents has increased from 59 in 2015 to 144 in 2018. Also increased is the number of calls for RMCP and EMT service for washroom incidents, from 0 calls in 2015 to 34 calls in 2018.

The City of Prince George also instituted measures to address the increase in washroom incidents. In 2017, in order to ensure the safety and security of employees, all washroom facilities on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> floors in City Hall were changed to FOB access only. Signage was also installed indicating that these facilities were for employee use only. Members of the public are now directed to the washroom located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor next to the Service Centre, where access is granted by a Service Centre representative who presses a buzzer to open the door.

The City's Parks Division has also altered accessibility to public washroom facilities to address repeated vandalism, drug use, and less than desirable inside conditions. Generally, all washrooms located in City parks are locked and unavailable to the public unless City staff are working onsite. There are some exceptions. Lheidli T'enneh Memorial Park and Duchess Park washrooms are opened and closed daily by security personnel, and cleaned twice daily by CPG custodial staff. And, with a new operational plan and increased staffing levels, washrooms at Masich place are now open during operating hours. The washroom at Memorial Park Cemetery is open and closed by City staff during business hours and by a security company on the weekends. Cleaning is done 3 times per week by CPG custodial staff.

In addition, the City has increased security presence at the Rolling Mix Concrete Arena, Four Seasons Pool, and the Via Rail Building to address a range of incidents, including inappropriate use of public washrooms.

Many businesses in the downtown have also restricted, or eliminated, public access to on-site washroom facilities in response to increasing washroom incidents.

### **OPTIONS:**

The research, together with an analysis of the Prince George context and input from a range of stakeholders, highlights the complexity of deciding how to provide timely, safe, and inclusive access to public washrooms in the downtown. There is agreement that washroom access in the downtown is important. The challenge lies in creating an environment that enables the management of issues that can accompany the use of private space, and that is also safe and inviting for the "mom and toddler".

However, the research and consultation does suggest some consistent themes for consideration. These include the:

- necessity to ensure public washroom access is monitored for safety and cleanliness during all open hours;
- value of engaging individuals who have experience working with a street involved population to provide monitoring services;
- recognition that increasing access to public washrooms, whether it be in existing facilities or through the installation of new facilities (like APTs), does not eliminate the issue of public urination or defecation;
- challenge of providing public washroom access from midnight – 6 am and;
- importance of partnerships when enhancing public washroom access in areas with high levels of street involvement and poverty.

These themes have informed the following options, which are presented for Council consideration.

1. Open the washrooms at the Canada Games Plaza from 7 am to 11 pm daily with an experienced and skilled monitor on-site during operating hours. It is recommended that this option operate as a pilot during the period June 15 – October 1. CPG custodial staff would provide daily cleaning services.

PGPL staff have repeatedly observed people trying the locked doors and, when denied access, urinating in the area. They have indicated their support for washrooms at this location to be open with attendant services. This option also reflects input from individuals who access downtown social services. When asked where public washroom access should be provided, the “Civic Centre” was one of the most frequently identified locations.

Anticipated Cost: \$77,250

Monitor (June – October): \$52,900 (estimate)

This estimate is based on two shifts (7 am – 3 pm and 3 pm – 11 pm/7 days per week), with each shift having one onsite attendant. The morning attendant would open the facility and the afternoon/evening attendant would close the facility.

Ideally, attendants would be hired and supervised by a non-profit who has experience working with a street involved population. However, given the urgency in providing downtown public washroom access during the summer season, the monitoring estimate is based on the use of contract security personnel. Pending a successful pilot, the role could be transitioned over time.

Custodial and Maintenance Costs (June - October): \$24,350 (estimate)

2. Enhance access to washrooms located in selected downtown service provider locations by providing funding to enable dedicated monitoring services. Recommended sites would include Saint Vincent de Paul, Positive Living North (Firepit), and AWAC. Service providers would continue to cover all operating and maintenance costs.

Currently, washrooms at these locations are available for use. However, access is often dependent upon the ability of staff to effectively monitor use. The small one time grant is intended to offset costs associated with the placement of a monitor during peak access hours. Agencies would be encouraged to utilize a client/peer employment model.

Anticipated Cost: \$36,000

The anticipated cost represents one time grants of \$12,000 per organization to pay for increased monitoring services, while at the same time building community capacity to provide trained and experienced peers to provide attendant services at other locations.

3. Enhance capacity of the PGPL to permit washroom access by funding the addition of a full-time, year-round bathroom attendant. This option reflects current usage and accessibility of washrooms at PGPL. While the library has substantially increased its security presence, security staff can only check the washrooms as frequently as their time allows. As such, the burden for monitoring washroom use when security is not immediately available rests with other library staff. The anticipated cost represents an attendant's wage and benefits, and is based on the assumption that trained security personnel are available to assist with behaviour management issues when necessary.

Anticipated Cost: \$63,965

The anticipated cost represents an estimate for wages for hours of operation during the months of September – April (35 weeks), and May – August (17 weeks) when the library is not open on Sunday.

4. Partner with Downtown Prince George to develop and implement a grant program incenting businesses to enable inclusive public access through bathroom design upgrades and the engagement of experienced and skilled on-site monitors.

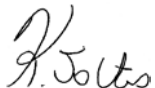
This option is modelled after an initiative implemented by the City of Yellowknife in the summer of 2017. Applicants contact the City confirming they have the written consent of the landlord to designate an existing washroom, as a public washroom. The applicant and landlord sign a [public washroom agreement/release form](#) and the City provides signage to be displayed, as well as a one-time payment of \$500.

Anticipated Cost: This would be explored based on consultation with DPG and its membership, if Council selects this as a preferred option.

**SUMMARY:**

This report provides Council with an overview of the research undertaken to gauge the feasibility of enhancing public washroom access in the downtown. It also provides options to improve public washroom access. Council is asked to select one or more options for implementation.

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:**



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Kathleen Soltis, City Manager  
Meeting date: May 27, 2019

Report Prepared By: Chris Bone, Manager of Social Planning



# Downtown Public Washroom Access

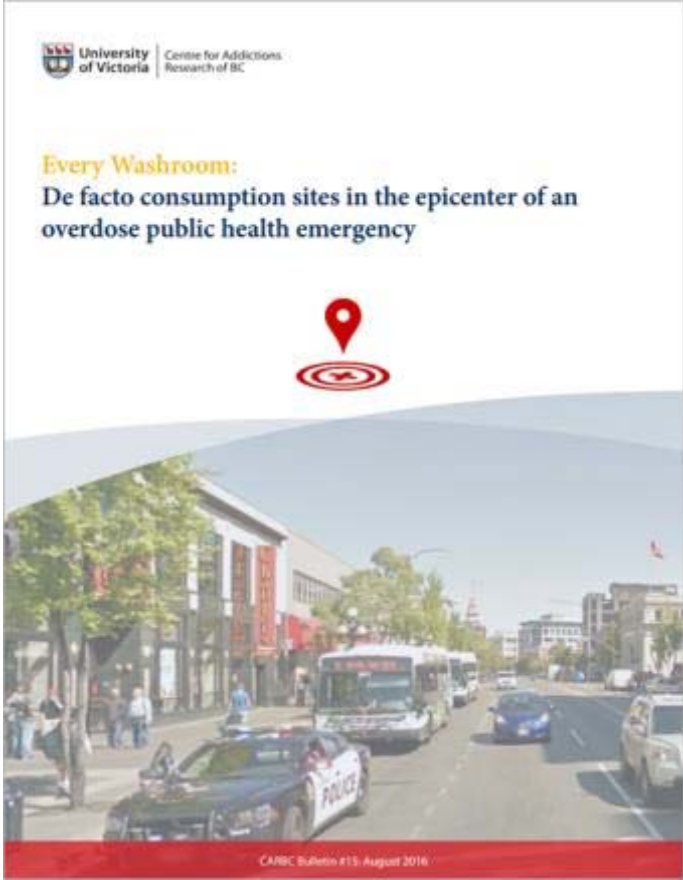
Staff Report to Council

May 27, 2019

# Outline

- Brief Background
- Research Update
- Prince George Context
- Themes
- Options for Consideration
- Recommendations

# Literature Review



# Other Jurisdictions

- ❑ The City of Vancouver
  - Comfort Stations
  - Automated Public Toilets
  - City Parks
- ❑ The City of Edmonton
  - Whyte Avenue
- ❑ The City of San Francisco
  - “Poop Patrol”



# Downtown Service Providers

## □ 2018 Survey

- Does your agency provide bathroom access? If so, what are the terms (location, hours of operation, who can access, etc.)?
- If bathroom access is currently provided, what issues have you encountered and how have these issues been managed?
- If bathroom access is currently provided, could it be enhanced (i.e. 24/7 access for anyone needing to use a bathroom) if additional resources were available to support staffing and maintenance costs?
- If a bathroom was “built” in the downtown core, where would you recommend it be located?

# Survey Highlights

- ❑ Six responding agencies all provide bathroom access
  - Two of the six provide 24/7 access
  - Recent access declining
- ❑ Impacts
  - Vandalism, substance use, sleeping, bathing
  - Maintenance costs
  - Staff impact (trauma and interruptions in business continuity)

# Survey Highlights

- All agencies willing to consider enhanced access with additional resources for monitoring and maintenance
- Non consensus regarding the ideal location for a downtown bathroom
- Many respondents indicated that the addition of a public washroom in the downtown would not address the issue of public defecation and urination

# Downtown Service Client Survey

- ❑ Community Partners Addressing Homelessness (CPAH) led survey
  - Collect feedback from downtown service recipients regarding illegal camping, and bathroom access
  - Three questions regarding bathroom access were included in the survey, administered by downtown service agencies in March and April of 2018

# Client Survey Highlights

- ❑ What places in the downtown area do you know about that provide washroom access for you?
  - Shelters
  - Library
  - Needle Exchange
- ❑ In terms of the agencies/organizations that provide washroom access, is there anything that could be changed to make it more convenient for you?
  - Free access, not having to purchase something to use the bathroom
  - More availability
  - More respect

# Client Survey Highlights

- ❑ In your opinion, are more washrooms needed downtown? If yes, where should they be located?
  - All respondents replied yes, with the most frequently identified locations being:
    - Parks
    - Civic Centre/Courthouse/Greyhound/Library (tied)

# Health Authorities

- ❑ Harm Reduction Perspective
  - “Harm reduction is a pragmatic response that focuses on keeping people safe and minimizing death, disease and injury associated with higher risk behaviour, while recognizing that the behaviour may continue despite the risks.”\*
- ❑ Public washrooms in neighbourhoods with high levels of street involvement and poverty fill functions beyond simply being a place to use the toilet.

\*From *Harm Reduction: A British Columbia Community Guide*

# Health Authority Response

- Implementation of principles and recommendations related to the redesign and monitoring of existing bathrooms to ensure they are safe and inclusive.
- Partnership funding models
  - Non-profit – managing peer recruitment, training, and supervision
  - Selected public washroom locations
  - Monitored access – optional connection to services

# The Prince George Context

- ❑ Prince George Public Library
- ❑ City of Prince George
  - City Hall
  - Parks
  - Civic Facilities
- ❑ Business Response
  - Limit Access
  - Increasing concern with public defecation/urination

# Themes

- ✓ Providing clean, safe, inclusive and accessible public washroom access is challenging.
- ✓ Increasing access to public washrooms (ATPs, existing facilities, or other options) does not eliminate the issue of public defecation and urination.
- ✓ Public washroom access must be monitored during all open hours to ensure safety and cleanliness.
- ✓ Funded partnerships, involving experienced non-profits providing monitoring services, work in area with high levels of street involvement and poverty.
- ✓ The provision of safe and clean public washroom access between midnight and 6 am is challenging.

# Options

Option	Details	Estimated Cost
Open outdoor washrooms at Canada Games Plaza	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7 am – 11 pm daily with onsite monitoring</li><li>• CPG custodial staff provide daily cleaning services</li></ul>	\$77,250
Enhance washroom access at selected downtown service provider locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recommended sites: Saint Vincent de Paul, Positive Living North (Firepit), and AWAC</li><li>• Service providers cover operating and maintenance</li><li>• CPG provides one time grant to offset costs associated with monitoring services during peak hours</li></ul>	\$36,000

# Options

Option	Details	Estimated Cost
Enhance capacity of the PG Public Library to permit washroom access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide a dedicated washroom attendant to monitor access and use during library hours</li></ul>	\$63,695
Partner with Downtown Prince George to develop and implement a grant program to incent business to provide public washroom access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Modelled after a City of Yellowknife initiative</li><li>• One time grants are allocated to businesses that provide and promote (through signage) public washroom access</li></ul>	To be determined based on consultation with DPG membership

# Recommendation

- ❑ That Council consider the proposed options to address public access to washrooms in the downtown and direct Administration to implement one, or a combination, of the suggested options.