CITY OF PRINCE GEORGE

STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

1100 Patricia Blvd. I Prince George, BC, Canada V2L 3V9 I www.princegeorge.ca

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 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th 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 1st 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:

K. Soltis

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

Report Prepared By: Chris Bone, Manager of Social Planning



CITY OF
PRINCE GEORGE

Downtown Public Washroom Access

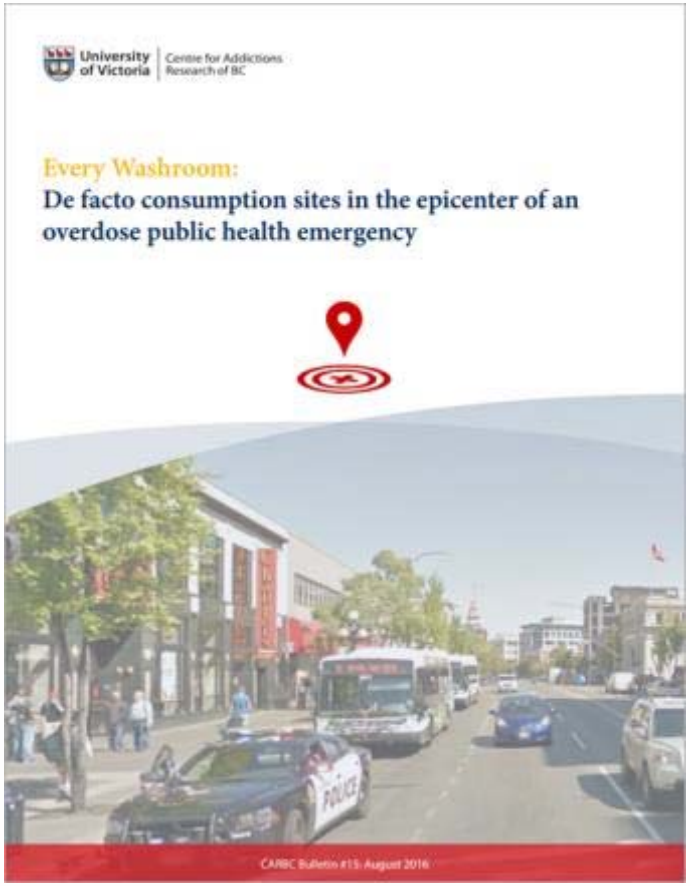
Staff Report to Council

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	• 7 am – 11 pm daily with onsite monitoring • CPG custodial staff provide daily cleaning services	$77,250
Enhance washroom access at selected downtown service provider locations	• Recommended sites: Saint Vincent de Paul, Positive Living North (Firepit), and AWAC • Service providers cover operating and maintenance • CPG provides one time grant to offset costs associated with monitoring services during peak hours	$36,000

Options

Option	Details	Estimated Cost
Enhance capacity of the PG Public Library to permit washroom access	• Provide a dedicated washroom attendant to monitor access and use during library hours	$63,695
Partner with Downtown Prince George to develop and implement a grant program to incent business to provide public washroom access	• Modelled after a City of Yellowknife initiative • One time grants are allocated to businesses that provide and promote (through signage) public washroom access	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.