Staff Report to Council

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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) *Peer Payment Standards BCCDC	$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 *plus $45/hour for additional calls for biohazard response	$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
$223,410	Total costs	**$295,502.09**	**$268,385.00**

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	
City Hall	Limited	Mon - Fri: 8:30 am – 5:00 pm Closed Sat & Sun	For staff and those attending City business
Kopar Memorial Arena	Conditional		For staff and Kopar customers
Canfor Leisure Pool	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 5th, 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