PUBLIC WASHROOM PROGRAM OPTIONS:
Downtown Winnipeg BIZ

October 2019

downtown
WINNIPEG BIZ

INTRODUCTION:

The Downtown Winnipeg BIZ strives to improve the perception of downtown by providing a welcoming environment, keeping things clean and safe, and advocating for continuous and positive change. We believe that the availability of public washrooms is a core feature of a safe, comfortable downtown that is welcoming to all. This promotes a thriving environment for our member businesses.

Through research and public conversations, it has been determined that Downtown Winnipeg has a deficit of reliable, freely accessible washrooms. This document provides options to address this problem and hopefully offer solutions that are cost effective and reliable.

THE ISSUE:

There are currently no free standing public washrooms in Downtown Winnipeg. While most commercial establishments downtown have washrooms built in, very few are truly public due to various barriers. Most commonly, a purchase must be made to access a business washroom, which limits potential users. Many people, especially those with chronic illnesses or age-related washroom challenges, must limit their travels around washroom availability and consequently face isolation at home. Visitors may limit their time spent in the downtown due to a lack of reliable washrooms. Others may feel they must go without food or drink, or "hold it", which can lead to preventable health problems. Another frequent side effect of scarce public washrooms is public urination and defecating, which is humiliating as well as a public health hazard that worsens the perception of the Downtown area. The Downtown Winnipeg BIZ Enviro Team answers as many as 300 calls per month to respond to biohazard calls.

The need for a washroom is universal, but some groups are disproportionately vulnerable to unreliable washroom access, including:

- People experiencing homelessness,
- Pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders,
- People with chronic illnesses and disabilities, and their caregivers,
- Gender non-conforming people,
- Elders and seniors (a population that is growing rapidly),
- Pregnant individuals,
- Babies and young children,
- People travelling downtown late at night from bars and sporting events.

Goals:

All washroom programs are intended to:

- Increase the number of available public washrooms downtown,
- Make the downtown more inviting and welcoming to everyone by accommodating washroom needs,
- Reduce public urination and defecation, as well as the number of calls to clean up biohazards,
- Increase confidence in those who are washroom-challenged when they visit downtown, such as those with health problems, parents with small children, and seniors,
- Provide a dignified option to people without a home,
- Improve the pedestrian experience and make all modes of transportation more practical for all,
- Create a positive experience for participating businesses by helping them gain more foot traffic and future customers.

SOLUTIONS:

We have considered three options to address downtown washroom needs.

- Option One: Pop-Up Toilets of 2018, and 2019.
- Option Two: Install permanent, tamper-proof washrooms around the downtown area that do not require staffing.
- Option Three: Set up a voluntary public-private washroom program.

Option One:

POP-UP TOILET

In 2018, Downtown Winnipeg BIZ worked with Bridgman Collaborative Architecture to develop a Pop-Up Toilet program, which involved hiring attendants from local non-profit outreach organizations to supervise, provide community connection, and maintain the toilets. In 2018 the toilets operated 7am to 7pm, 5 days per week. In 2019, the toilets operated from 7am to 4pm, 7 days per week. In both years they have made positive change in the downtown area and gained encouraging feedback from the public. However, the unheated Pop-Up Toilets are dependent on the season and partnerships with non-profit organizations, which typically have limited resources. Line-ups ups were reported more than once prior to opening and closing. They must also be put into storage throughout the winter, which is an added cost.

The cost of the Pop-Up Toilets is also significant. In 2018, the initial cost of the toilet was approximately $125,000 per unit with two toilets, including consulting, construction, permits, labour, wages, cleaning etc. For year two, the cost was approximately $40,000 per until with two toilets, and this would be the typical cost per year moving forward for one structure containing two toilets. The Pop-Up Toilets are still an important tool to address the lack of public washrooms and initiate an important conversation related to basic needs, but Downtown Winnipeg needs a solution that is immediate, cost effective, and permanent to meet the needs of people who are in need.



Option Two:

PERMANENT TOILETS

The City of Portland created a stand-alone public toilet known as the Portland Loo. It is open to the public and contains anti-graffiti wall panels, open grating, and easy-to-clean coating. It is gender neutral and can take about 300 flushes per day, comparable to an airport restroom. The Portland Loo remains open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. At night, the doors contain LED lights, and when a user enters, blue interior lights come on, (their hue is said to deter intravenous drug injection).

The City of Portland installed the first Portland Loo over 10 years ago, and it is still used today. Other Portland Loo's have been installed in British Columbia, Texas, Ohio, New Zealand and Massachusetts. To install the Portland Loo in Winnipeg, it would cost approximately $185,000 per unit for the first year, and would include construction and install as well as permits, insurance and maintenance. Shipping is not included in this price. Subsequent years would cost approximately $12,500 per unit for cleaning and cleaning supplies. They have been installed in Smithers, B.C. and other B.C. cities that experience winter conditions, although the cold weather temperatures in Winnipeg may prevent the toilet from being operational for a full year. That being said, for many cities like Smithers, the possibility of providing a public toilets for the majority of the year is more important than not providing one at all.



Portland Loo



Portland Loo - indoor view

Option Three:

THE PUBLIC-PRIVATE WASHROOM PROGRAM

A third public toilet option is to introduce a Public/Private washroom program where organizations and private businesses voluntarily open their existing washrooms to the public during their current operating hours. Washroom visitors have no obligation to buy anything in order to gain access to the washroom. Businesses benefit from increased foot traffic, free publicity and wayfinding to their establishment, and the possibility of product sales. The program would also provide dollars to each participating establishment to cover the costs of additional cleaning and supplies. This method has been successfully applied throughout the UK and Germany, and will be launched in Washington, D.C. in October 2019.

This public-private washroom partnership would have relatively low costs and could be implemented quickly without construction delays. We recommend a one-year pilot program with select participating members with the possibility of expansion in year two and onward. Broadly, such a program would entail the following:

- The City pays the businesses to cover the cost of additional cleaning and supplies due to increased traffic.
- The City provides signage, wayfinding, and an updated map of these washroom locations. The City also performs administrative duties for membership.
- Participating businesses open their washrooms to the public, keep their facilities clean and stocked, and display signage to identify their washrooms to the public.

LOCATIONS:

As part of the washroom research, the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ contacted 350 businesses in our zone, and found that 46 businesses and organizations offer public washrooms to non-customers. The full list of businesses contacted is located in the appendix. We believe that it is important to pilot the program with establishments that already have experience with offering public washrooms. We have tentatively selected 17 candidates for the pilot. These places were chosen for a combination of factors, especially experience and confidence with having public washrooms. Many of these locations already have sharps boxes installed.

COSTS:

The costs of the public-private washroom program during the first year, including 17 proposed partnerships, would be approximately $22,500 (see figure 1). This costs includes the addtional cleaning of the existing washroom due to higher traffic, a sharps box and regular servicing, and a baby change table. Year two for the same participating businesses and similar services would be approximately $15,300. In order to keep the program moving forward and expanding it is recommended that for year three, and possibly year two, that the program be increased from 17 original participants to a total of 49 participants (see figure 2). Additional costs that are unknown are the costs to print and/or advertise the washroom locations, and administrative costs for the City department.

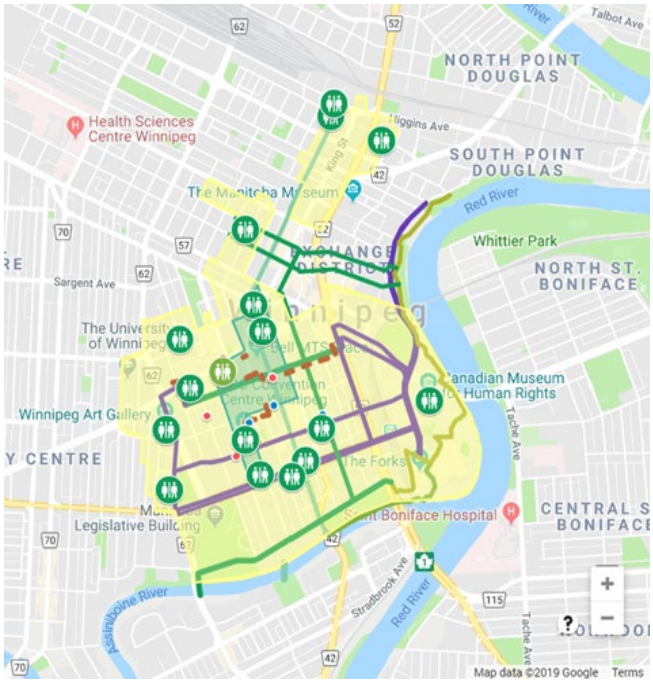


Figure 1: Public-private washroom pilot candidates

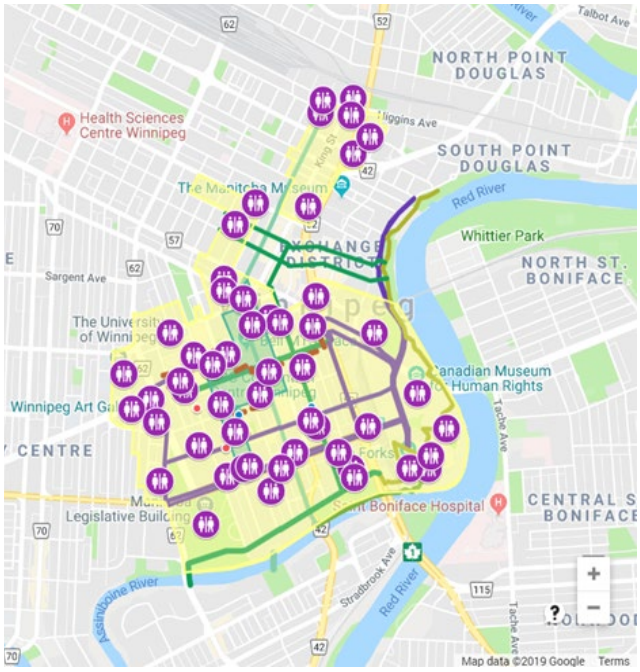


Figure 2: Public Washrooms in Downtown BIZ, July 2019

BENEFITS:

We believe that all three washroom options can have an important role in bringing facilities to the public downtown. However, the public-private washroom partnership offers significant advantages:

- A small investment produces many washrooms. The core cost of opening 17 new public washrooms in Downtown businesses is less than 20% of the cost of building two new orange Pop-Up Toilets and just 15% of the cost of a Portland Loo.
- Public-private washrooms are available quickly, without the need to wait for construction.
- Our business members will benefit from increased foot traffic, free advertising, and public gratitude.
- Downtown visitors will feel more confident about coming and lingering downtown when they know they can attend to their washroom needs with dignity and certainty.
- Downtown Winnipeg BIZ will have made a meaningful contribution to our mandate to promote a welcoming and comfortable Downtown business zone.

COST COMPARISON FOR THREE PUBLIC TOILET OPTIONS:

Table 1: Costs for Three Downtown Public Toilet Options

Option 1	Build	Install	Employment & Cleaning	Marketing	Insurance & Sharps	Sharps Service	Permits	Total per unit
PopUp Toilets - Year 1	$70,374	$15,000	$27,700	$10,000	Incl.		$1500	$124,574
PopUp Toilets - Year 2+		$10,800	$27,700		Incl.		$1500	$40,000

Option 2	Build & Install	Supply & Clean	City Services	Shipping	Marketing	Insurance	Sharps Service	Permits	Total per unit
PDX Loo - - Year 1	$163,281	$12,000	?	?	$10,000	City	$670	$1165.20	$187,116
PDX Loo - - Year 2+		$12,000	?			City	$670		$12,670

Option 3	Supply & Clean	Marketing	Decals	Insurance	Sharps Box & Service	Baby Change Table	Total for 17 businesses
Public/Private - Year 1	$600		$400	Business provides	$350	$350	$22,500
Public/Private - Year 2+	$600			Business provides	$300		$15,300

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Downtown Winnipeg BIZ strives to make the downtown a welcoming place with comfortable amenities and opportunities for people to enjoy public life. There is not a single solution to solve all washroom needs. However, we believe that one solution has the greatest potential to be a quick, cost effective and positive change in the Downtown Winnipeg area.

The Downtown Winnipeg BIZ has compared the costs of the public-private washroom program with our orange Pop-Up Toilets, as well as the Portland Loo, a permanent washroom fixture designed for urban environments. We believe that all three concepts have a role in improving washroom accessibility. However, our research suggests that a public-private washroom partnership would have lower costs and could be implemented quickly without construction delays. A one year pilot program is recommended including a total of 17 participating businesses.

In the future we believe that exploring the second option, the Portland Loos, would also be a viable solution for Winnipeg. Once installed, they are low maintenance and long lasting and they do not require an attendent to be present 7 days per week, which can make projects challenging. They will have some limitations with our cold winters, but providing a public amenity for nine months of the year instead of twelve, is still a positive for our city.