

Inquiry - Design Standards for Washrooms in City Facilities

ISSUE

The following inquiry was made by Councillor B. Dubois at the meeting of City Council held on March 28, 2022:

"Can Administration provide an information report to the appropriate Standing Policy Committee that addresses:

1. The current and future design standards for washrooms in City facilities; and
2. What role does the City Administration have in mandating those design standards for facilities managed by a Statutory Board or Controlled Corporation, including the new Saskatoon Public Library."

BACKGROUND

Design standards for washrooms in City of Saskatoon (City) facilities are required to meet a variety of requirements that are laid out under several different regulatory authorities. As outlined below, these standards are based on the specific facility conditions, building size/type, occupancy and programming loads, user needs, and other considerations.

The National Building Code of Canada (Code) is a national model code that outlines the minimum requirements for building design including design standards for washrooms. In Saskatchewan, the Code is adopted through the Construction Codes Act (Act) and Regulations. All building owners in Saskatchewan are responsible for compliance with the Act, and the Code. The City is responsible for the administration and enforcement of the Act and associated Codes through Bylaw No. 9455, The Building Bylaw, 2017.

The number of washrooms required in a building is dependent on the use of the building and the number of occupants. The Code requires washrooms be provided for each sex assuming the occupant load of the building is equally divided between males and females. Urinals may be provided as an option, though are not required as a minimum in the Code. When provided, urinals are permitted to reduce the number of washrooms required by males by two thirds. The Code also includes requirements around the number of accessible washrooms and accessible urinals (where urinals are provided).

CURRENT STATUS

As an organization, the City has not adopted additional standards related to washroom design in civic buildings above the minimum requirements of the Code. The Facilities Management Department (Facilities) makes washroom design decisions based on facility specific factors and includes additional design considerations based on project and program-specific user requirements. Because there are so many project-specific considerations, general additional standards would offer minimal value over the existing practice.

Facilities regularly engages Professional Architects who provide industry leading design expertise such as emerging trends toward universal washrooms. This expertise and flexibility allows the City to adapt designs that are considered more innovative, inclusive, and accessible, and that have not been formally addressed or directed under the current Code. Generally, the factors and decisions around number, location and type of fixtures are evaluated between the design professional and the owner on a project-specific basis to meet performance requirements and satisfy user expectations.

There are a wide variety of types of City facilities that are used in different ways by the public and civic staff. An arena or swimming pool may have very different washroom requirements than an office or warehouse. In all instances, when undertaking a major renovation or new construction project, including washroom spaces in City facilities, a registered professional such as an Architect or Engineer (as laid out in the Act) is required to design, review, and seal the project-specific design drawings/specifications.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The City promotes that citizens use the washroom and changeroom they best identify with in alignment with Human Rights. In civic recreation facilities, the City has been working to provide private change options within gendered change rooms to allow residents several options where feasible, as the Code does not dictate the specific number of private or family change rooms that is required.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The statutory boards and controlled corporations are separate legal entities from the City and the City does not have the authority to mandate them to exceed the minimum requirements of the Code. The City does enforce building code compliance, and any entity would need to follow the relevant building code and legislative provisions. While the City may have additional ability to discuss the appropriate design to be applied to a building owned by the City, such as in the case of the controlled corporations, the new central library is fully owned by the Saskatoon Public Library, and therefore the City would not have authority to require standards above the minimum Code requirements.

If the City Administration were to develop additional design standards, such would only apply to City-owned and operated facilities. Changes to the Building Bylaw would be required to implement additional washroom design standards that would apply to all building owners throughout Saskatoon.

NEXT STEPS

Unless directed otherwise, the Administration will continue to make washroom design decisions based on project specific factors and includes additional design considerations based on project and program-specific user requirements.

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Report Approval

Written by: Amanda Moffat, Manager, Project Services
Troy LaFreniere, Director of Facilities Management

Reviewed by: Cindy Yelland, City Solicitor
Kara Fagnou, Director of Building Standards
Andrew Roberts, Director of Recreation and Community Development

Approved by: Angela Gardiner, General Manager, Utilities and Environment

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