

Access to Public Washrooms

ISSUE

City Council previously had a discussion related to the establishment of a public washroom peer navigator pilot program. In connection to that discussion, City Council requested an updated overview of the current provision and level of service for the publicly accessible washrooms provided by the City of Saskatoon (City), as well as any plans for future considerations for public washrooms. City Council also requested Administration include information related to existing seasonal public washroom facilities and whether or not they could be upgraded to become year-round facilities, and, if yes, what the capital and operating impact would be.

BACKGROUND

The popularity of riverbank parks with residents and visitors continues to grow. Provision of washroom facilities along the Meewasin Trail is needed by park patrons as well as any member of the public who may be attending festivals and special events in riverbank parks. As part of the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan Project, the City replaced the seasonal washroom facility, located along the Meewasin Trail, with a new year-round washroom facility to support existing and future programming opportunities. Construction of this facility was completed and open to the public in July 2021.

In 2022, construction of the Permanent Outdoor Festival Site Headquarters Building (Headquarters Building) was completed. The Headquarters Building, situated between Friendship Park and Kiwanis Memorial Park, will provide accessible universal washrooms, an important amenity of which event organizers will no longer need to supply exclusively through rental services, with the exception of large-scale events where additional portable washrooms would still be required. This facility was constructed to enable operations year-round, providing the public the ability to utilize these washrooms throughout the year. Through engagement, event organizers and the public identified year-round access of accessible washrooms as a leading amenity of importance in the provision of events.

CURRENT STATUS

The City operates 18 public washroom facilities, soon to be 20 washroom facilities, in various parks throughout the city. Of this total, there are eight, soon to be 10, washroom facilities operating year-round, nine washroom facilities operate seasonally and one year-round washroom facility which currently only operates during outdoor special events.

For a complete list of City-operated outdoor public washroom locations and hours of operation, see Appendix 1. Generally, year-round washroom facilities are available to the public from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., from the beginning of May until October, then from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. in late fall until the end of April. The specific hours of operation varies between locations. The year-round washroom facilities at Al Anderson, Alexander McGillivray Young, Funk and Glen Penner Parks are available to the public from May until September and may be available, only during Community Association programming, in the fall and winter.

Seasonal washroom facilities are available to the public, from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., from the beginning of May until the end of September, weather dependent. The current plan for the newly constructed year-round washroom at the Permanent Outdoor Festival Site is to be open to the public only during outdoor special events utilizing Kiwanis Memorial Park and/or Friendship Park.

In providing a high-level overview of all City-provided washrooms accessible to the public, Administration believes there is merit in sharing other facilities which also indirectly provide a service related to access of public washrooms. Additional washrooms, which support leisure and recreation facilities and are available for public use, include the washrooms associated with the majority of spray park and paddling pool locations as well as those in all Leisure Centres, Indoor Arenas and public libraries across the city. While these washrooms are predominantly intended for use by facility patrons, they are open and accessible to the public during operating hours of the various programs and facilities.

Additional public washrooms in City-owned parks, which are not operated by the City, include:

- Diefenbaker Park – Optimist Hill Chalet
- Nutana Kiwanis Park – Baseball Saskatoon Service Building
- Gordie Howe Sports Complex

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

With the completion of the year-round washroom facilities on the Meewasin Trail, next to the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan site and as part of the Headquarters Building between Friendship Park and Kiwanis Memorial Park, there are no plans to construct any additional public washrooms along the Meewasin Trail at this time. Administration is currently reviewing to determine if there is a functional location in Wallace Park, in the Willowgrove Neighbourhood, for a seasonal washroom facility. There is no immediate timeline, nor currently allocated funding related to when this seasonal washroom will be completed.

In terms of a general approach to the provision of stand-alone washroom facilities within park areas, it is typical to locate washrooms in areas with the greatest volume of traffic, such as along the Meewasin Trail and at District or Multi-District Parks. To date, the provision of washroom facilities within neighbourhood parks has only been in conjunction with construction of paddling pools and/or spray parks when sufficient funding is available. The Parks and Recreation Levy is the current source of funding for all new neighbourhood parks and does not currently account for the provision of a structure, which could include washrooms, associated with all spray parks. If there was a desire to make this a standard level of service, it would require a substantial increase to the Parks and Recreation Levy rates for the capital construction cost, and there would be an ongoing operating impact for each new washroom facility. This would require further investigation and consultation with the Developer Liaison Committee.

City Council also requested information on the potential to convert existing seasonal public washroom facilities to year-round facilities. The Facilities Management Department completed a high-level review of the nine City-operated, seasonal washroom facilities. Upgrading any facilities, especially washrooms, from seasonal to year-round, would require a number of upgrades as outlined below.

Most seasonal washroom construction is built without insulation, heating or ventilation elements and without the depth required for domestic/sanitary lines to prevent freezing, unlike those built for year-round use. In order to bring each of these seasonal facilities to a year-round facility, the capital costs are estimated at approximately \$100,000 per washroom, or a total of \$900,000 for all nine seasonal washrooms. The upgrades may include items such as:

- Upgrading the building envelope to include a proper vapour barrier and insulation;
- Upgrading the heating and ventilation (which may require additional mechanical room space);
- Upgrading electrical panels; and
- Possibly lowering or replacing, then insulating domestic water and sanitary lines for the buildings.

The high-level costs identified above are for upgrading the seasonal washrooms only. The condition of the current fixtures/elements and/or timing for replacement of these elements has not been reviewed or included in the cost of upgrades.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In addition to the capital cost, there is an operating impact for the City to operate public washroom facilities in parks. Currently, the seasonal washroom facilities are open for five months each year, from the beginning of May until the end of September. If these washroom facilities are converted to year-round service, operating costs would be increased by approximately 2.4 times the current operating costs. The estimated operating cost, to change the nine seasonal washrooms to year-round operations, is approximately \$70,500, which is an increase of \$41,000 over the current seasonal operating cost of \$29,500.

In addition, there is an operating cost for locking and unlocking these washrooms and, in Rotary and Kinsmen Parks, a provision of additional inspections throughout the day. Upgrading the seasonal washroom facilities would increase the annual operating cost for these inspections, from \$58,800 for 153 operating days, to \$140,200 for 365 operating days, which is an increase of \$81,400.

Considering all factors, the total operating impact to change the service level, from seasonal washroom facilities to year-round, is approximately \$210,700, which is an increase of \$122,400 over the seasonal operating cost of \$88,300.

The above operating impacts do not include the washrooms at Optimist Hill, Diefenbaker Park, the Gordie How Sports Complex or the service building operated by Baseball Saskatoon at Nutana Kiwanis Park.

Consideration of a new level of service, to provide washroom facilities as part of new park development, would require direction from Committee to report back on the implications of this new level of service. An expanded service level for washroom facilities in new park development would require a significant increase to the Parks and Recreation Levy, which funds new park development and changes to the Park Development Standards. In addition, any new park development that included washrooms would result in an increased annual cost associated with operating and maintaining washroom facilities.

Of note, this change in service level would not address the development of washroom facilities in existing parks, and, if directed, a separate funding plan would need to be developed as there is no current source of funding to support additional washroom facilities within existing parks.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

At the end of 2021, the Facilities Management Department started tracking incidents at washroom facilities located in Victoria Park, Kiwanis Memorial Park (North), River Landing and Kinsmen Park Riverfront. From November 2021 to April 16, 2023, there was a total of 1,074 incidents, with the top seven occurrences being:

1. Transient/Escorted out of building – 585 incidents;
2. Garbage/Mess/Personal Belongings – 120 incidents;
3. Drug Use/Paraphernalia – 69 incidents;
4. Police or Medical Assistance Called – 63 incidents;
5. Biohazard – 43 incidents;
6. Alcohol/Intoxication – 40 incidents; and
7. Vandalism – 40 incidents.

The cost of repairs to washroom facilities, due to vandalism or other incidents resulting in damage, are not included in the operating impact identified in this report. Costs for these repairs have increased over the years and are estimated at \$30,000 per year, which are currently funded as over expenditures within the operating budget as they fluctuate depending on the number and type of incident.

It should also be noted there is additional work underway, with the downtown safety plan, related to working more proactively with those most frequently causing the incidents noted above in order to help eliminate these ongoing incidents.

There are no other legal, environmental or privacy implications of this report.

NEXT STEPS

There is no additional follow-up planned at this time, unless directed by Committee.

APPENDICES

1. Public Washroom Facilities in Parks Operated by the City of Saskatoon.

REPORT APPROVAL

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