

Access to Public Washrooms and Drinking Water

ISSUE

This report provides information regarding options for additional access to public washrooms in the Riversdale and Pleasant Hill neighbourhoods. The report also outlines a current funding option to address the lack of public washroom access and other approaches that could assist in mitigating the issue, as well access to drinking water.

BACKGROUND

On June 28, 2023, at its regular meeting, City Council received a report regarding the [Public Washroom Navigator Program Pilot](#) and resolved:

“That the Scope of the Public Washroom Navigator Program Pilot be broadened to accommodate complementary uses which includes funding projects that address priority issues related to overall community well-being.”

At the same meeting, City Council also received a report on [Access to Public Washrooms](#) and passed the following motion:

“That the Administration be directed to open all public washrooms at 8:00 a.m. on a go-forward basis except Cumberland and Riversdale Kiwanis Park recognizing their use was designed exclusively for user groups and further that Administration, when appropriate report back about challenges and any further resources needed.”

The initial public washroom navigator program had \$50,000 approved to support access to public washrooms. Also related to public washroom access, on April 24, 2024, at its regular meeting, during the review of a project status and funding update report, City Council passed a motion providing:

“\$50,000 to the Assistance to Capital Project 2652 the Washroom Navigator Program project component, to be integrated with the Assistance to Community Groups Grant – Social Services Cash Grant Social Program for Washroom Accessibility Grant(s) to support public washroom initiatives or similar community project(s) that aims to improve community well-being.”

These two funding sources totalling \$100,000 provide an option to support additional access to public washrooms and to address priority issues related to overall community well-being.

CURRENT STATUS

Like many other communities in Canada, Saskatoon is being impacted by an increase in residents who are experiencing homelessness. With warmer months approaching, significant gaps in services and resources, including access to public washrooms and drinking water for residents experiencing homelessness, has increased. With the closure of the St. Mary's overnight warming location, there are no public washrooms available in the Riversdale and Pleasant Hill neighbourhoods between 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m.

The Saskatoon Fire Department, Saskatoon Police Service, and community partners all report a rapidly increasing number of residents experiencing homelessness. This, combined with a decrease in services and resources, is creating significant risk for the safety and well-being of these residents. The City of Saskatoon (City) provides public washrooms in many neighbourhoods (Appendix 1). There are no public washroom facilities in the Riversdale and Pleasant Hill neighbourhoods.

Administration conducted consultations with the following community partners to assist in determining approaches to address the lack of public washrooms:

- Central Urban Metis Federation Inc.
- Friendship Inn
- Prairie Harm Reduction
- Quint Development Corporation
- Riversdale Business Improvement District
- Sanctum Care Group
- Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Service
- Saskatoon Police Service
- Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership
- Saskatoon Tribal Council
- Saskatchewan Health Authority – Public Health
- St. Mary's Parish
- St. Paul's Hospital
- The Salvation Army
- Westside Community Clinic
- YWCA Saskatoon

Community partners have expressed that their resources are limited and that they have no additional capacity in the provision of access to public washrooms.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

While undertaking reviews for this report, Administration identified approaches that could assist in mitigating the current issues with the lack of public washroom and drinking water access for residents experiencing homelessness in Saskatoon's Riversdale and Pleasant Hill neighbourhoods.

Access to Public Washrooms and Drinking Water

Unstaffed Rental of Portable Washrooms

Administration could rent three portable washrooms that would be available 24 hours a day and could be put in place within two weeks. Potential locations in the Riversdale and Pleasant Hill neighbourhoods are currently being identified. Measures would be taken to limit damage.

Community partners have expressed many concerns regarding the use of unstaffed washrooms, including the risk of undetected medical distress and the likelihood of extensive damage.

The cost from June 1 – September 30 is \$44,000 plus any damages that may occur. This cost includes daily cleaning and weekly relocation to a new area within the neighbourhood, as well as a hand sanitizer-based option for hygiene which is a requirement as requested by community partners.

Unstaffed Rental of Washroom Trailer

A washroom trailer, like those used on many construction sites, could be rented to provide additional public washroom access. These trailers provide more than one toilet and a sink for handwashing.

Community partners have expressed concerns regarding the use of unstaffed washroom trailers, including the risk of undetected medical distress and likelihood of extensive damage. Administration has contacted rental companies for this product, and there was significant hesitancy by the vendors to rent this type of trailer for this purpose due to concerns of potential damage. The rental companies also indicated there would be a significant financial requirement for any “out-of-the-ordinary use” damage.

The cost from June 1 – September 30 is \$372,000 plus any damages that may occur. This cost includes daily cleaning, weekly moving to a new location, a trailer with two toilets and two sinks, and a generator to provide electricity for pumps and lights.

Staffed Rental of Washroom Trailer

A washroom trailer could be rented to provide additional public washroom access. This approach would include 24 hour/7 day a week staffing to provide safety and support in accessing additional services, such as referrals and information regarding available community and government services. Staff would provide limited navigation support to these other services and manage the site to increase safety and minimize damage to the washroom trailer. A similar resource is in place in Edmonton and has been successful. A community partner has expressed interest in partnering to support this resource on their site.

Community partners are supportive of this approach. It will provide increased safety for residents using the resource, a value-added approach to accessing other services, and hygiene options for increased health and safety.

This approach would include a washroom trailer as described in the previous option, with the addition of a minimum two staff members at all times on site. To support the

Access to Public Washrooms and Drinking Water

staff component, there would be a rental trailer for staff to work from, maintenance, repairs, required insurance, 2-way radios, cell phones for emergencies, administrative costs for a community partner to oversee the washroom trailer plan and general supplies, including personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning supplies, and first aid supplies and training.

The cost from June 1 – September 30 would be \$372,000 for the washroom trailer, which includes daily emptying of sewage. Staffing and required equipment would be an additional \$345,500 for a total cost of \$717,500, plus any damages that may occur.

Staffed, Purchased Washroom Trailer

This approach would provide the same resources as a staffed rental of a washroom trailer, however, by purchasing a washroom trailer, the City could increase washroom access on an ongoing basis.

This approach would include a 5'x8' wheeled trailer unit with two toilets, two sinks, and three urinals for \$49,000 plus taxes and delivery (as is). The City does not currently have the resources required for dumping the sewage from the trailer. The estimated cost is \$500 for a contractor to empty the unit and fill it with fresh water each time it is required. The cost of a contractor emptying the purchased trailer would be \$61,000 from June 1 - September 30.

The trailer would also require either an electrical connection or a generator. A generator for this purpose is approximately \$6,000. Cleaning costs would be approximately \$150/day. Daily cleaning from June 1 – September 30 would be approximately \$19,000. The total cost of a purchased trailer from June 1 – September 30 would be approximately \$135,000. These costs do not include the repair of any damages that may occur.

The staff support would be the same as described in the previous option. For June 1 – September 30, the cost for the trailer would be approximately \$135,000 plus taxes and delivery and any damage costs for the washroom trailer. Staffing and required equipment would be \$345,500. The total cost would be approximately \$615,500 plus any repairs of damage.

Staffed Navigation Facility with Washroom, Showers and Laundry

A staffed navigation facility could be opened that would include washrooms. Staff would assist residents experiencing homelessness in accessing services on site. It would be a one-stop location to initiate access to a variety of resources. This navigation and support centre model has been successfully implemented in [Edmonton](#).

This approach would be a longer-term sustainable option that would require partnerships with the Provincial Government and community-based organizations. There could be a range of services provided in this navigation location, including meals, showers, laundry, mental health and addiction supports, as well as access to supports to additional resources.

Access to Public Washrooms and Drinking Water

This staffed navigation centre could support the work of assisting residents experiencing homelessness in accessing the process to emergency or transitional housing, when available.

It is challenging to assess the funding requirements for this facility. The services offered would impact the funding requirements. As a starting point, the overnight warming location at St. Mary's operated from December 4, 2023, to April 21, 2024, 8 hours a night with limited services and eight staff at all times. The funding required for these services was approximately \$600,000.

Increased Hours and Security for Riverbank Public Washrooms

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. Additional public washroom access could be extended from current closing time to midnight, increasing the hours that the Kiwanis North, River Landing, and Shakespeare washrooms are open. To increase public safety and mitigate the risk of damage, security would be in place at each washroom from 6:00 p.m. to midnight.

The cost to provide security at three washroom sites, seven days a week from May 27 - September 28 from 6:00 p.m. to midnight would be \$54,338.

Drinking Water and Cooling

On June 7, 2023, at its regular meeting, the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development, and Community Services received an information report regarding [Public Drinking Water Access](#). In the summer of 2023, Saskatoon Emergency Management Organization (EMO) received funding through the Government of Canada's Reaching Home Program to provide bottled water distribution, misting tents and a water bottle filling station in partnership with the Westside Community Clinic. These resources have been identified by community partners as significant resources for residents experiencing homelessness.

The misting tents will continue to be shared with community partners and with the Summer Special Events organizers. The pilot project for the water bottle filling station at the Westside Community Clinic received positive feedback, and other community partners have expressed an interest in partnering to provide more water bottle filling stations.

To continue providing water bottle distribution and three additional water bottle filling stations, Saskatoon EMO would require funding. The Reaching Home Program was a one-time funding source. The funding required to continue the bottled water distribution would be \$32,000. To expand the outdoor water bottle filling station to three other locations would be an additional \$4,775.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is currently \$100,000 available for the provision of additional washroom access and to address priority issues related to overall community well-being. Several of the options above are estimated to cost in excess of this amount. Any options selected for implementation exceeding \$100,000 would require the identification of a source of funding. There is no current existing operating budget to address the lack of access to public washrooms in Riversdale and Pleasant Hill, or the additional resources needed for access to drinking water.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The total number of incidents occurring in public washrooms increased by approximately 32% between 2022 and 2023, from 731 to 1,083 per year. In the first 2 weeks of May 2024, 63 incidents were reported. The top seven types of incidents are as follows:

1. Individuals escorted out of the building
2. Garbage/mess/personal belongings
3. Drug use/paraphernalia
4. Police or medical assistance called
5. Biohazard
6. Alcohol/intoxication
7. Vandalism

Many of these incidents resulted in the closure of the washroom(s) for cleaning or repairs, which highlights the consideration for staffing support to reduce incidents of vandalism or structures that are less prone to significant vandalism/damage.

NEXT STEPS

A decision report regarding access to public washrooms and drinking water will be presented to City Council at its meeting on May 29, 2024.

APPENDICES

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

Report Approval

Written by: Pamela Goulden-McLeod, Director Emergency Management
Reviewed by: Pam Hamoline, Director Facilities Management
Andrew Roberts, Director Recreation and Community Development
Approved by: Jeff Jorgenson, City Manager