

Expansion of Access to Public Washrooms and Drinking Water

ISSUE

This report provides background information and options to provide expanded access to public washrooms in the Riversdale and Pleasant Hill neighbourhoods. The report also outlines current funding that could be an option to address the lack of public washroom access and other approaches that could assist in mitigating the issue.

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 the [Pleasant Hill Village – Project Status and Funding Update](#) report, City Council resolved in part:

“\$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 in one-time funding provide an option to support additional access to public washrooms and to address priority issues related to overall community well-being.

Drinking Water

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](#). This report included a review of publicly available water in Saskatoon and advised that Saskatoon Emergency Management Organization (EMO) received funding through the Government of Canada's Reaching Home Program for a pilot project to provide bottled water distribution, misting tents and a water bottle filling station in partnership with the Westside Community Clinic.

Administration conducted consultations with the community partners to assist in determining approaches to address the lack of public washrooms. These partners are listed in Appendix 1.

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

CURRENT APPROACH

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 2). There are no public washroom facilities in the Riversdale and Pleasant Hill neighbourhoods.

The City provides water fountains and/or water bottle filling stations at parks and facilities throughout Saskatoon. Community partners, through normal operations, have distributed water bottles to individuals experiencing homelessness.

OPTIONS

While undertaking reviews for this report, Administration identified multiple options that could assist in mitigating the current issues with the lack of public washrooms for residents experiencing homelessness in Saskatoon's Riversdale and Pleasant Hill neighbourhoods. All costs shown below are for the period June 1 – October 31, unless otherwise stated. A summary financial impact of the public washroom options is shown in Appendix 3.

Administration could partner with a community organization to implement the options below including contracting the staffing and resources required. Community organizations are experienced and have the appropriate training for staff required to support individuals experiencing homelessness.

Option 1 – Unstaffed Rental of Portable Washrooms

Administration could rent three portable washrooms that would be available 24 hours/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.

Benefits and Drawbacks:

- 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.
- It may improve access to public washrooms, but this is dependent on the impact of damages on availability.

The cost from June 1 – October 31 is \$58,000 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.

Option 2 – 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.

Benefits and Drawbacks:

- 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 – October 31 is \$490,000 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.

Option 3 – Contracted 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. Contracted 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

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been successful. A community partner has expressed interest in partnering to support this resource and having it located on their property.

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 contracted staff component, there would be a rental trailer for contracted 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.

Benefits and Drawbacks:

- 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 also provides contracted staff supervision of the site to lessen the potential for damages.

The cost from June 1 – October 31 would be \$490,000 for the washroom trailer, which includes daily emptying of sewage. Contracted staffing and required equipment, including a staffing trailer, would be an additional \$458,000 for a total cost of \$948,000, plus any damages that may occur.

Option 4 – Contracted staffed, Purchased, Used, Washroom Trailer

This approach would provide the same resources as a contracted 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 the purchase of a used 5'x8' wheeled trailer unit with two toilets, two sinks and three urinals.

Benefits and Drawbacks:

- 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.
- The City does not currently have the necessary resources to provide for dumping the sewage from the trailer.
- The City does not currently have a generator that would be required for this trailer.
- Contracted staff would be required for daily cleaning of the trailer.

This approach would include the purchase of a 5'x8' wheeled trailer unit with two toilets, two sinks, and three urinals. The City has an opportunity to purchase a pre-owned unit for \$52,000 plus GST and delivery. The trailer is confirmed to be in good working condition and has a one-year warranty on the mechanical components. It can be

available within a week. The estimated cost for a new trailer is \$116,000. These would require 2 to 3 months to obtain. The estimated cost is \$500 for a contractor to empty the unit and fill it with fresh water when required. The cost of a contractor to provide this service to the trailer would be \$81,000 from June 1 – October 31.

A generator for this purpose is approximately \$6,400. Contracted cleaning costs would be approximately \$160/day, totalling \$25,000 for daily cleaning from June 1 – October 31. The total cost of a purchased trailer from June 1 – October 31 would be approximately \$164,400, with the City retaining ownership of the trailer after October 31. These costs do not include the repair of any damages that may occur.

The contracted staff support would be the same as described in the previous option. For June 1 – October 31, the cost for the trailer would be approximately \$164,400 plus GST and delivery and any damage costs for the washroom trailer. Contracted staffing and required equipment would be \$458,000. The total cost would be approximately \$622,400 plus any repairs of damage.

Option 5 – 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.

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

Benefits and Drawbacks:

- This option has significant support from community partners as it provides additional resources that are currently lacking in Saskatoon.
- This option requires longer-term planning and would be challenging to implement to meet the current needs.

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 during all operating hours. The funding required for these services was approximately \$650,000.

Option 6 – Pilot project for one contracted staffed Riverbank Public Washrooms

A pilot project could be implemented with two contracted staff providing ongoing safety and support in one Riverbank washroom location. These individuals would provide consistent and improved monitoring of the selected public washroom location.

Contracted staff would:

- monitor the physical structure of the washroom and ensure that it is clean, safe, and available.
- Connect with those who may need resources or direction to needed resources.
- Perform minor cleaning and sanitization of the high touch points in washroom stalls, washbasin areas, and any common areas in the structure.
- Notify the City of Saskatoon Facilities Management Department if the washroom requires repairs, a deep cleaning or if supplies are missing.

This pilot project would provide contracted support staff at a public washroom during regular operating hours increasing washroom availability by lowering the number of closures due to damages and provides a linkage for individuals needing other resources.

The contracted staff support would be for the hours the washroom is regularly open. Unlike the trailer options there is already a workspace for staff available and a rental trailer would not be required. To support the staff component, 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.

For June 1 – October 31 contracted staffing and required equipment would be approximately \$106,000.

Option 7 Additional access to drinking water

These additional drinking water resources provided in the summer of 2023 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 is \$34,000 and the cost for three additional outdoor water bottle filling stations would be \$15,000. The total to continue providing additional water resources would be \$49,000 through bottled water and additional water bottle filling stations.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Administration proceed with the three options described in this report including

1. Option 4 – Contracted staffed purchased, used washroom trailer,
2. Option 6 – Pilot project for one contracted staffed Riverbank Public Washroom
3. Option 7 Additional drinking water; and
4. \$702,400 be allocated from the Reserve for Capital Expenditures to Capital Project 2652 to enact these options.

RATIONALE

Two options are recommended to increase accessibility to washrooms to limit the overall impact on one washroom location. There is significant need for washroom resources and one location could be overwhelmed quickly. This was learned from the After-Action discussions regarding the Overnight Warming location this winter. The City of Saskatoon provides public washroom options in neighbourhoods throughout Saskatoon. The City can purchase a used washroom trailer that could then be used for a variety of functions within the community. There is also a cost saving with the purchase of a used trailer.

Option 4 and Option 6 provide contracted staffing resources in partnership with a community organization. This provides for the safety of the individuals who will be using these washrooms, helps to prevent damages to the washrooms and can provide an ability to support individuals in accessing other services. In discussions with Edmonton, where staffed washrooms are in place, this provides for a more secure and supportive resource.

The additional drinking water has been identified as a important services for both community partners and those experiencing homelessness.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The total cost of the recommended options is estimated at approximately \$777,400 plus \$25,000 for any potential damage that may occur.

There is currently \$100,000 available for the provision of additional washroom access and to address priority issues related to overall community well-being. Beyond the \$100,000 that has already been allocated to this project, the City does not have another readily available source of funding for this purpose. As such the Reserve for Capital Expenditures (RCE) would be the most appropriate funding source for this purpose. Currently, the RCE has an available balance of approximately \$1.17 million which is made up of an overall balance of \$1.92 million less \$750,000 being held in contingency for existing projects, per historical practice.

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It is important to note that an allocation of RCE funding would be one-time in nature and additional one-time funding would need to be sought or recurring funding be built into future operating budgets to continue this service after October 31, 2024. In addition, this would reduce the RCE balance to approximately \$470,000 (excluding contingency) and would not be a sustainable funding source for an initiative of this nature.

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; and
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.

APPENDICES

1. Consulted Community Partners
2. Public Washroom Facilities in Parks Operated by the City of Saskatoon
3. Public Washroom Options

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