

Expansion of Access to Public Washrooms and Drinking Water – Report Back Items

ISSUE

This report provides information regarding options for possible investment for the City of Saskatoon's (City) ongoing provision of 24/7 washrooms in the Pleasant Hill/Riversdale areas including a transition to 365 days of operation.

BACKGROUND

On June 7, 2023, the Standing Policy Committee (SPC) on Planning, Development, and Community Services (PDCS) received an information report on [Access to Public Washrooms](#) that provided cost estimates for converting seasonal washrooms to year-round.

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 including funding projects that address priority issues related to overall community well-being.”

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

“That the Administration (Facilities Management) 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.”

On May 15, 2024, Governance and Priorities Committee received an information report regarding [Access to Public Washrooms and Drinking Water](#), which included information related to the current availability of public washrooms, approaches from other jurisdictions, along with costs to expand the current hours of operation and services provided.

On May 29, 2024, at its regular meeting, City Council received a report regarding the [Expansion of Access to Public Washrooms and Drinking Water](#) and resolved:

“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.”

At the same meeting, Council also resolved, in part:

“That the Administration report back for the 2025 budget deliberations with proposed investment for City-led ongoing provision of 24/7 washrooms in the Pleasant Hill/Riversdale area including a transition to 365 days of operation.”

CURRENT STATUS

The City operates 20 public washroom facilities, in various parks throughout the city. Of this total, 11 washroom facilities operate year-round, and nine washroom facilities operate seasonally. There are no public washroom facilities in the Riversdale and Pleasant Hill neighbourhoods.

One challenge with public washrooms is the high occurrence of damage, incidents, and misuse, which is primarily an issue when the public washrooms are unmonitored. When washrooms are closed for cleanup or repairs, misuse shifts to other unmonitored washrooms.

Until the 2024 season, most issues relating to public washrooms involved the downtown washroom sites, including River Landing Pavilion, Victoria Park, North Kiwanis Park, Festival Site, and Mendel Site/ Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan. As a result, an increase in Commissionaire support at downtown locations was approved in May 2024. Since then, data shows increased issues at sites further from downtown such as William A. Reid Park, Glen Penner Park, Al Anderson Park, and the pavilion at Meewasin Park with repairs in vandalism totalling approximately \$15,000 at those facilities.

The total number of reported incidents in the City’s 20 public washrooms from May 2024 to date is 540. 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, highlighting the need for staffing support to reduce incidents of vandalism or structures less prone to significant vandalism/damage.

The report to SPC on PDCS on June 7, 2023, included information on the potential to convert existing seasonal public washroom facilities to year-round sites. The Facilities Management Department conducted a high-level review of the nine seasonal

washrooms operated by the City. It was determined that upgrading any of these facilities from seasonal to year-round would require significant capital improvements. Most buildings lack insulation, heating, and ventilation, and they do not have the necessary depth for water and sewer lines to prevent freezing, which is essential for year-round facilities. In 2023, capital costs to convert a washroom to year-round services were estimated at approximately \$100,000 per washroom. The condition of the current fixtures/elements, inflation, and/or timing for replacement of these elements has not been reviewed or included in the cost of upgrades.

Operating costs for washrooms such as locking and unlocking, inspections, and cleaning are needed at each site throughout the day. Expanding the operations of 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, an increase of \$81,400 for the nine washrooms, or approximately \$9,000 per washroom.

In 2024, the City undertook two pilot projects to expand the availability of public washrooms in the City:

1) CUMFI Washroom Site

The CUMFI washroom site has, at times, over three hundred visitors in a day. There has been no vandalism or significant damage since it began operations due to the site having staffing 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by the Saskatoon Tribal Council Saweyhitotan Outreach, and Peacekeepers. Peacekeepers and Outreach staff have created a safe place for people to come and have a sense of belonging while being treated with dignity and respect. This space provides a place where residents can “freshen up” – either by using the washrooms, using the facility to clean their clothes, or washing themselves.

The Saskatoon Tribal Council Saweyhitotan Outreach staff tracks the number and categories of visitors. Data points indicate young children and youth are also using the washroom, spending time with the Peacekeepers, and viewing the site as a safe place in the community. This data indicates the need for additional resources in the Pleasant Hill and Riversdale areas.

In addition to the City funded services during the pilot project, the community support for this washroom approach has been significant, including:

- The Friendship Inn providing sandwiches daily to distribute to residents using the washroom;
- Large donations of toilet paper and feminine hygiene products; and
- Saskatoon Fire Department approved an ongoing fire pit to help people warm up into the evening and to create a welcoming location.

The total estimated cost for the CUMFI pilot in 2024 was \$622,400.

2) Full-time Security at the North Kiwanis Washrooms

The pilot at the North Kiwanis site includes two full time Commissionaires during regular operating hours located at the permanent washroom site at North Kiwanis from October 1, 2024 - January 30, 2025, with access to Saweyihtotan Outreach Services supports if needed. The pilot project's approved budget is \$106,000. Prior to the pilot, the service level included three Commissionaire checks per day during regular operating hours.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Saskatoon Fire has identified several approaches for providing 24/7 operation year-round in or nearby Saskatoon's Riversdale and Pleasant Hill neighbourhoods:

Approach 1: Working towards a permanent, supportive 24/7 navigation location with a washroom, shower, laundry, and warming facilities

Through the CUMFI Washroom Pilot project, users of the washroom facility and partner organizations have identified a need for a staffed navigation center that includes washrooms, showers, laundry services, connection to resources, low-barrier shelter, and a space for warming and cooling.

In a navigation and support model, staff assists residents experiencing homelessness in accessing services on site. It would be a one-stop location to initiate access to a variety of resources. This approach has successfully been implemented in Edmonton and Calgary and would be a longer-term sustainable option requiring partnerships with the Provincial Government and community-based organizations. There could be a range of services provided in this navigation location, including showers, laundry, support in accessing identification materials, mental health, and addiction supports, as well as access to supports to additional resources. This staffed navigation centre would also support the work of assisting residents experiencing homelessness to access housing-related services.

A funding model, potential partnerships and operating/capital estimates are being developed but are unknown at this time. In order to continue advancing services, a phased approach is being developed, using both the CUMFI Washroom Pilot and the overnight warming centre from 2023/2024 as early phases of the process. As a starting point, the overnight warming location at [St. Mary's Church on 20th Street](#) operated from December 4, 2023, to April 21, 2024, eight hours a night with limited services and eight staff at all times. The funding for the overnight warming centre, along with required outreach services, was over \$700,000, which was funded through the Reaching Home funds, administered by the Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership for the Federal Government.

Approach 2: Extension of existing pilot with supervision at North Kiwanis to end of 2025

An interim approach to expand availability of washrooms would be to extend the existing pilot at North Kiwanis from February 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025. To extend this pilot with ongoing security during regular operating hours, the weekly cost in the winter months is estimated at \$4,600 and in the spring-summer months the estimate

risers to \$5,300 resulting in a total estimated cost of \$239,000 for monitoring of the site, during regular operating hours, for the remainder of 2025.

Approach 3: 24/7 Washroom Operating Hours at North Kiwanis Park for the remainder of 2025

If 24/7 operation were desired at the North Kiwanis site, ongoing security would need to be in place to ensure program success. In prior operating scenarios that included periods without security, the North Kiwanis site suffered several significant incidents which unfortunately closed the site while repairs were completed.

The estimated incremental costs for the 24/7 operation of the North Kiwanis Washrooms from February 1 to December 31, 2025, are as follows:

- Commissionaire costs, which include two Commissionaires with radios stationed inside the washrooms, would be \$438,000; and
- Operating costs for additional cleaning for a 24/7 operation would be required and would be estimated at \$33,800 above the current operating base costs.

There will be intermittent service interruptions to complete regular cleaning, occasional deep cleaning, and repairs to the washrooms throughout the service.

Approach 4: Exploring partnerships and options to expand public washroom options in the Pleasant Hill and Riversdale areas

The Administration has initiated conversations with potential partners with the goal being to create City led Public Washrooms in the Pleasant Hill and Riversdale areas.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of each approach are outlined within this report and summarized in the table below; however, there is currently no funding available to support this work. If City Council were to invest in the expansion of availability of public washrooms, Approach 2 or 3 could be implemented for 2025 using the balance of funding from the Reserve for Capital Expenditures.

Approach	Estimated Cost
1. 24/7 navigation location	TBD – excess of \$700,000
2. Extension North Kiwanis pilot – regular hours	\$239,000
3. Extension North Kiwanis pilot – 24/7 operation	\$471,000
4. Explore partnerships	TBD

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The general approach to providing stand-alone washroom facilities within park areas is to locate washrooms with the greatest volume of pedestrian traffic, such as along the Meewasin Trail and at District or Multi-District Parks. To date, the provision of washroom facilities within neighbourhood parks is in conjunction with the construction of paddling pools and/or spray parks when a funding source has been identified.

The Parks and Recreation Levy is the current funding source for all new neighbourhood parks and the current park standard does not include the provision of a washroom structure associated with the spray pad. If there were a desire to include a washroom facility as a standard park amenity, it would require an increase to the Parks and Recreation Levy rate for the capital construction cost and an ongoing operating impact for each new washroom facility. This change in service level would not address the infill development of washroom facilities in existing parks, and, if directed, a separate funding plan would need to be developed as there is no funding source to support additional washroom facilities within existing parks.

NEXT STEPS

Unless directed otherwise, the Administration will complete the two pilot projects and continue with ongoing engagement with community partners to identify options to increase community well-being, including further development of the permanent navigation centre model described.

Report Approval

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