

# Public Washroom Strategy - Annual Update

## Recommendation

That the December 2, 2020, City Operations report CR\_7185, be received for information.

## Previous Council/Committee Action

At the April 24, 2019, Community and Public Services Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide annual reports, outlining progress on the public washroom strategy, to Community and Public Services Committee in Q2 of each year, until the public washroom strategy is fully implemented.

## Executive Summary

Over the last twelve months, Administration developed and implemented a new social enterprise attendants pilot program with the aim of improving how the current washroom inventory is managed. The new pilot program was developed to establish a baseline provision of public washroom services that can inform a more permanent and ongoing program. The pilot was intended to enhance working relationships with private sector and not-for-profit organizations to address complex challenges associated with provision of clean, safe and accessible public washrooms.

To implement the social enterprise attendants program, Administration worked with Boyle Street Ventures to provide attendants at Whyte Avenue washrooms and the Nook Cafe. An evaluation was carried out to determine the extent to which key outcomes were achieved through the implementation of the pilot. According to the evaluation findings, the pilot at the Whyte Avenue public washrooms has been effective in addressing social disorder and improving cleanliness, safety and accessibility of the washrooms as evidenced by the decrease in the number of incidents reported by the Edmonton Police Service data. In addition, the pilot project with Boyle Street Ventures created employment for vulnerable people who have barriers accessing the labour market.

## Report

Public washrooms play a key role in ensuring healthy and equitable urban places. They are a common good for residents and visitors and their accessibility allows

diverse user groups to explore and enjoy the city. Access to safe and clean public washrooms is especially important for vulnerable user groups, including those without stable housing, as well as for those caring for children. To that end, Administration has undertaken a number of initiatives and measures since 2016 to improve access to clean and safe public washrooms.

Administration's approach to continuous improvement of public washroom services has followed an iterative model of planning along three phases outlined in the April 24, 2019, Citizen Services report CR\_5859, City-Wide Public Washroom Strategy:

Phase 1: Improve how the current inventory is managed

Phase 2: Increase access to washrooms through temporary facilities and partnerships

Phase 3: Develop more permanent public washrooms

### **Updates on the implementation of City-Wide Public Washroom Strategy**

At the April 24, 2019, Community and Public Services Committee meeting, Administration reported progress on the implementation of the citywide Public Washroom Strategy and committed to focus on the following next steps:

#### ***1. Establishing a governance model and shared operating standards***

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated resource limitations, Administration focused on successfully executing the operation and expansion of this pilot project. By July 2021, Administration aims to complete their strategic work on the governance and shared operating standards for permanent and portable public washrooms in parks and open spaces. This will include solving challenges associated with washroom management, standard operating procedures, inspection standards for washroom contractors and identification of efficiencies with the management of public washrooms.

#### ***2. Prototyping changes to washroom management and approaches to addressing disorder***

To activate Phase 1, Administration developed a new pilot program to establish a baseline provision of public washroom services that can inform a more permanent and ongoing program in the future. Elements delivered in 2020 include:

- Implementation of a social enterprise partnership to provide an attendant/monitor for the Old Strathcona (Whyte Avenue) washroom.
- Piloting a social enterprise partnership program with a local business to support public access to private washrooms.

Administration worked with Boyle Street Ventures to provide attendants at Whyte Avenue washrooms and the Nook Cafe. Boyle Street Ventures is the social enterprise

arm of Boyle Street Community Services and provides employment opportunities for individuals who have barriers accessing employment. This pilot project created jobs for attendants to serve as hosts to washroom users while being responsible for the cleaning, monitoring and promptly reporting illicit activities to the police. Attendants were also able to connect people to support services as needed.

Administration and Boyle Street Ventures created a pilot evaluation based on expected results with emphasis on safety, accessibility and cleanliness of public washrooms. A summary of the pilot's outcomes and evaluation findings are presented in Attachment 1.

### 3. Continuing to work with businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and other stakeholders

The Nook Cafe accessed the pilot to open their washrooms for public access any time the cafe is open for business. The pilot began in January 2020 and was expected to run until June 2020. However, the pilot was suspended in March 2020 when the Nook Cafe closed their business as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In August 2020, the pilot resumed and it is expected to run until the end of the year and a full evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data will be completed.

### 4. Identifying sites for permanent public washrooms, and associated costs

Provision of permanent public washrooms requires consideration of appropriate location, demand, community support, demographics, and capital and operating cost. Currently, there are no established criteria or standards to determine where permanent or temporary washrooms should be located, especially stand-alone washrooms in parks and open spaces.

A number of future park plans have identified potential locations for permanent washrooms in future phases of development, including district and river valley parks. Plans are in place to integrate a permanent washroom in the construction of the new downtown signature Warehouse Campus Park, which will feature a free-standing washroom building planned to support overall park programming.

### **Evaluation Findings of Social Enterprise Pilot Program**

Detailed report on evaluation findings is provided in Attachment 1.

- Edmontonians emphasized the importance of having public washrooms, as well as ensuring they are clean and safe for all users.
- The pilot was effective in increasing visitor satisfaction regarding safety and cleanliness of washrooms.
- Incident data (January to June) provided by Edmonton Police Service (EPS) showed a significant decline in incident occurrences at the washrooms - six in 2020 when compared with 21 in 2019.

- A cost analysis showed that despite a significant increase in direct staffing costs for monitoring the washroom (compared with costs of custodial services with no attendants on site), these costs may be partially offset via the overall increase in safety, cleanliness and a reduction in police response to social disorder as well as a reduction in repairs to the facility.
- Interviews with attendants indicated that vulnerable populations in the area were supported through regular engagement and support received from the attendants.

### **COVID-19 Washroom Response**

The COVID-19 Pandemic disrupted operation and accessibility of many public facilities, including public washrooms, libraries and recreational centers. While many cities in Canada closed their public washrooms due to the outbreak of COVID-19, Administration, through the support of the City's COVID-19 Task Team, worked with Boyle Street Ventures to provide attendants to keep a number of washrooms open in strategic locations around the city.

This initiative ensured that residents, especially individuals experiencing homelessness, still had access to public washrooms. Attendants provided thorough cleaning of the washrooms, disinfection and ensured users followed physical distancing guidelines to make washrooms safe and mitigate the spread of the virus.

The attendant service model to keep some washrooms open in Edmonton during the peak of the pandemic was effective in keeping the washrooms safe for use by residents as attendants ensured only one person can be allowed into the washroom at any given time. The City of Saskatoon and the Saskatoon Interagency Response to COVID team contacted Administration to gain knowledge from Edmonton's experience to implement a similar service model to serve their vulnerable populations. Lessons from Administration's COVID-19 washroom response informed the increase in custodial contract levels at other City park washrooms during the pandemic.

### **Budget and Financial Implications**

The total cost of implementing the six months social enterprise attendant pilot program at Whyte Avenue and the Nook Cafe is \$140,543. Detailed costs are provided in Attachment 2.

From April 7 to October 8, 2020, Administration incurred a total of \$548,002 on the COVID-19 washroom response to ensure residents, especially vulnerable populations, have access to public washrooms during the peak of the pandemic. Costs and locations are outlined in Attachment 3.

**Next Steps**

In line with the three planning phases outlined in the City-Wide Public Washroom Strategy, Administration aims to complete the following items by July 2021:

- Finalize a governance model and standard operating procedures for permanent and temporary washrooms in parks and open spaces.
- Create a formal long-term implementation plan to address challenges associated with managing public washrooms, which includes:
  - Establishing criteria and a method for prioritization for where permanent and temporary washrooms should be placed/constructed in the City
  - The role of City and business community in ensuring accessible, safe and clean public washrooms
- As the City continues to reimagine services, Administration will explore opportunities to work with partners, businesses and advertising companies including alternative strategies for funding operational costs of providing attendants at washrooms.

**Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management**

<b>Corporate Outcome(s):</b> The City of Edmonton has sustainable and accessible infrastructure			
<b>Outcome(s)</b>	<b>Measure(s)</b>	<b>Result(s)</b>	<b>Target(s)</b>
Increased satisfaction regarding cleanliness of washrooms.	% of citizens reporting public washrooms as either somewhat or very clean	47% (Whyte Ave location only)	TBD
<b>Corporate Outcome(s):</b> Edmonton is a safe city			
<b>Outcome(s)</b>	<b>Measure(s)</b>	<b>Result(s)</b>	<b>Target(s)</b>
Increased satisfaction regarding safety of washrooms.	% of citizens reporting feeling either somewhat or very safe at public washrooms	59% (Whyte Ave location only)	TBD
Decreased number of incidents involving illicit activities.	# of incidents involving illicit activities reported in the area by EPS	12 (January to June, Whyte Ave location only))	TBD

**Attachments**

1. Public Washroom Pilot Project Evaluation Final Report
2. COVID-19 Taskforce Washroom Response
3. Summary of Costs

**Others Reviewing this Report**

- R. Smyth, Deputy City Manager, Citizen Services
- M. Persson, Chief Financial Officer and Deputy City Manager, Financial and Corporate Services
- J. Meliefste, Acting Deputy City Manager, Integrated Infrastructure Services
- S. McCabe, Deputy City Manager, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development
- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor