

Gotta go? Pop-up portable potty sets up in downtown

Free and accessible toilets will be set up in four locations downtown throughout the summer.

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The pop-up public toilet is set up on Graham Avenue in front of the Holy Trinity Anglican Church for the next month. It will then move on to another location downtown. (Thomas Asselin/Radio Canada)

A portable, pop-up style public toilet facility has set up downtown as part of a pilot project aimed at helping curb public urination as well provide some relief for people who have trouble finding public washrooms in a downtown that isn't flush with options.

"I think it's very convenient, a lot of the businesses nowadays they won't let you use a public toilet unless you're a paying customer," said Louise Strong, who checked out the facility Monday.

Strong says she's downtown often and has had trouble finding public washrooms in the past.

"A number of times that happened to me, I practically had to beg to use some facilities," she said.



Louise Strong checked out the portable washroom on Monday, she said they looked clean and was happy to see attendants on-site, but wished they had a place to wash hands and not just hand-sanitizer dispensers. (Holly Caruk/CBC)

The project is part of a pop-up initiative by the Downtown Biz, Siloam Mission, and BridgmanCollaborative Architecture.

Stefano Grande, CEO of the Downtown Biz, said lack of public washroom facilities in the downtown has been an issue for the last decade.

- [Cheeky photo campaign asks 'Peggers who gotta 'go' to cross their legs](#)
- [Time to bring public washrooms to Winnipeg's Exchange District: architect](#)
- [Winnipeg takes another look at public toilets](#)

He said the Biz regularly receives complaints from businesses who don't like the added traffic in their establishments, as well as concerns about people relieving themselves on sidewalks and alleyways.

Grande said the pop-up toilets will be set up in spots that have been identified as problem areas.

"We gave them a map, all of our staff, and we said 'where are the challenge areas of public urination and defecation?' And they drew all these spots," said Grande.



Stefano Grande, CEO of the Downtown Biz and Wins Bridgman, CEO BridgmanCollaborative Architecture, posed inside the pop-up facility Monday afternoon. (Holly Caruk/CBC)

The Biz hopes to start a conversation about the issue and answer questions about some of the potential challenges of installing a permanent structure one day.

"Part of the challenge is, how do we know where? And how do we know if the design will work?" said Grande.

Winnipeg's last public washrooms were closed in the summer of 2006, when a small building in Memorial Park, across from the legislature, was torn down after three decades of controversy over its use by homeless people and drug users.

- [Controversial loo's closure leaves some with nowhere to 'go'](#)

BridgemanCollaborative CEO, Wins Bridgman, has also [tried to remedy the situation in the past](#) and helped with the design of the pop-up.

The entire project is expected to cost less than \$100,000, with funds coming from the Downtown Biz, the CEO Sleepout and three city councillors' individual budgets.

Attendants on-site

Siloam Mission has also partnered with the project, saying it addresses an important need for all people downtown, but especially for the city's most vulnerable.

"We all know that when people are facing hardship that leads to homelessness, people often use back alleys or sides of buildings as washroom facilities, and we know that's not right," said Siloam CEO Jim Bell.

One of the biggest concerns raised over the years about building a public washroom is safety, which the Biz hopes to have remedied by staffing the toilets with two attendants.

- [Winnipeg program that pays homeless \\$11/hr to clean streets full every day](#)

The paid staff will come from Siloam Mission's social enterprise programs who will be gaining work experience as well as getting paid to provide light cleanup duties and run a kiosk.



The portable facilities will be kept clean by two on-site attendants, who will also run a kiosk selling newspapers, water, and t-shirts with proceeds going to Siloam Mission. (Thomas Asselin/Radio Canada)

People will be able to buy t-shirts, water bottles, art cards, and newspapers from the kiosk with proceeds going back to Siloam Mission projects.

"Of course the humanitarian piece and the dignity piece went with the pop-up toilet, but then the social enterprise kiosk grabbed our attention right away, because that is a great fit for our organization," said Bell.

"Training people, getting them into the workplace and helping them to transition and progress," said Bell.

Security plans in place

Bell said safety for the workers is a top concern and there are security plans in place, though he wouldn't go into detail.

Grande also acknowledged that safety issues could arise but was confident they'd be able to address them.

"We're moving forward with this pop-up toilet because it's needed for our community, and whatever happens we will manage it hand in hand with our partners," said Grande.

On Thursday, the transportable toilet was set up on Graham Avenue outside the Holy Trinity Anglican Church where it will stay for a month until it's moved to its next location.





The pop-up toilets are free and accessible to anyone. They will be open from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., Monday to Friday, until the end of September. (Holly Caruk/CBC)

Reverend of the church, Enid Pow, said she welcomed the idea, and the location.

"There are people who often come into our buildings asking to use our washrooms," said Pow.

"This is a dignity thing, because we're all human beings and we all have certain basic needs and if people are desperate they will find other places to go," she said.

Four locations throughout summer

The pop-up will be moved to four locations around downtown, including near Portage Place mall and an area off Main Street.

The two washrooms, one of which is fully accessible, will be available until the end of September, and are free to use from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

The Biz plans to expand the hours to include later evenings when there are events happening, and weekends once enough staff is trained.

Local businesses say the public facility is long overdue.

"Basically everyday we have people coming in using the washroom, we're usually not inclined to say no, just because we know when you gotta go you gotta go," said Alice Zador, manager at Thom Barga Coffee on Graham Avenue.

"I'm surprised it took this long to have anything of the sort here, I think it's something we all face everyday," she said.

Zador also said she hopes it curbs the issue of people using the staff parking lot behind the business as a washroom.

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