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⚡ WEATHER ALERT ⚡

City eyes private partners in public washroom expansion

By: [Malak Abas](#)

Posted: 5:11 PM CST Thursday, Feb. 29, 2024



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Meet the powerful tools

The City of Winnipeg is exploring a private-sector incentive partnership model in its push to open new public washrooms.

A report scheduled to be discussed at the March 6 meeting of the community services committee suggests the city research funding safety enhancements, harm reduction training and staffing to organizations in

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exchange for opening their facilities to the general public.

Seeking such support hasn't been easy in prior years.



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The permanent public washroom at 715 Main St. which aims to serve vulnerable individuals.

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A 2020 pilot project that installed portable toilets funded through on-site advertising struggled to find interested business partners. A 2019 survey found of 350 downtown businesses, only 46 expressed interest in offering public washrooms to non-customers.

Offering financial support to help ensure such washrooms remain clean, safe, and maintained could change that hesitance, the report suggests.

“The public service would no longer directly rent temporary washrooms from an external vendor, but instead would leverage the 2024 budget for temporary and/or permanent washroom provision,” it reads, in part.

The suggested new pilot would last six months, at four to six washrooms.

There’s obviously a need for more public washrooms downtown, community services committee chairman Coun. Evan Duncan said Thursday.

However, “(It’s) not to anybody’s surprise that the temporary washroom program, without the social services support piece, is not very successful,” the Charleswood-Tuxedo-Westwood councillor said.

Duncan compared previous hesitance from private businesses to the success of Amoowigamig, the permanent public washroom at 715 Main St., maintained by Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre since 2022.

According to the public service report, that facility noted 32,276 visitors in 2023, either to use the toilets or receive peer supports (including naloxone, hygiene products and harm reduction supplies).

In some months, people visiting Amoowigamig seeking peer supports outnumbered those visiting for washroom access.

“They’re doing great work there, and clearly that need is there,” Duncan



said. “But if you start doing that in two, three, four, half-a-dozen locations — at what point in time is it that we just say, this is not financially sustainable, we can not do this on our own as a city?”

City council provided Ma Mawi with \$270,500 in 2023 to keep the washroom open 10 hours a day. The centre received a grant from the Winnipeg Foundation of \$225,000 yearly from 2023-26 to expand support services and hours of operation to 16 hours a day.



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A new report looks at options to expand the

The report suggests extending Amoowigamig's open hours from 16 hours a day to 24 would require a total annual budget of at least \$650,000, a number that has been referred to the 2024-27 budget review process.

Meantime, Duncan called the installation of more public washrooms a “Shared Health piece” and said the province has a responsibility to contribute to public health initiatives.

“How can the City of Winnipeg partner with the province? Can we offer up our sewer and water services? Do we have land that



hours for the permanent public washroom at 715 Main St, but safety risks may present an obstacle to round-the-clock operations.

can be used? What role do we play — but we can not lead on this moving forward,” he said.

“And clearly, without incentive to the private sector, at this point in time, there doesn’t appear to be much buy-in there.”

A Shared Health spokesperson said the options being considered by the city don’t fit under the services the province provides.

“While we work closely with organizations that support the delivery of care and support to individuals who are unhoused, the creation of an incentive program for businesses to open their washrooms to the public is not part of our current operational mandate,” the spokesperson said in an email.

Wins Bridgman, the architect behind Amoowigamig’s design, hopes community and design consultation will be included in any future washroom talk in the downtown core.

His office is located directly opposite Amoowigamig. He knows its value firsthand. “It makes a huge difference to people to know that there is a service for people to use a washroom.”

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Malak Abas

Reporter


Malak Abas is a reporter for the Winnipeg Free Press.


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