

[Home](#) > [Local](#) > Exterior upgrades planned for downtown public washroom

Exterior upgrades planned for downtown public washroom



By: [Joyanne Pursaga](#)

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An effort to make Winnipeg's downtown public washroom safer and more inviting will soon be underway.

Amoowigamig (715 Main St.), which was designed to serve vulnerable people who lack alternative "places to go," is slated for a series of landscaping upgrades.

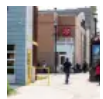
"(This latest project) develops a sense of place, a place to fit. Rather than as a washroom, where you (just) go into the washroom and you run away from it as quickly as you can. Instead, it's a community hub," said Wins Bridgman, architect for the washroom itself and an advocate for its construction.

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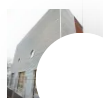
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Amoowigamig (715 Main St.), which was designed to serve vulnerable people who lack alternative “places to go,” is slated for a series of landscaping upgrades.

Since opening in June 2022, Amoowigamig has been credited with serving thousands of people per month, while its peer-support staff provided thousands of clean needles, pipes, feminine products and condoms.

The workers also administered eight life-saving doses of anti-overdose naloxone, and helped connect more than 30 washroom visitors with permanent housing, according to a recent City of Winnipeg report.

Bridgman said landscape architecture firm Brook McIlroy created an exterior plan that incorporates Indigenous culture, following extensive community consultations.

“There is a beautiful medicinal garden, so it invites people to participate. It’s a very thoughtful place-making situation that is around the washroom,” he said.

The city is seeking a contractor to install concrete paving with custom sandblasted patterns, limestone block seating, planting beds (which also include shrubs and trees), bicycle racks, waste bins, lighting on the roof edge of the building, new catch basins, and a custom, raised planter with integrated seating.

The company that wins the contract will also install an electrical conduit to support future “story marker” features at the site’s plaza, which are still being developed.

In a written statement, Brook McIlroy said the “Main & Henry Community Corner” will be a vibrant “outdoor extension of the Circle of Life Thunderbird House and function as a gathering place for all people.”

This spring, safety concerns in the area were noted as a key obstacle to



extending the washroom's operating hours, which supporters hope will eventually reach 24-7 service. Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, which offers peer-support services at the site, said staffing it from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. could raise the risk of violence.

The centre declined comment Wednesday, directing all questions to city officials.

The new rooftop lighting will highlight the washroom and its surrounding area, while new seating should help more people gather, to create a sense of safety, Bridgman said.

"This is particularly important when so many people are referring to the downtown Winnipeg area with all kinds of pejorative terms that speak against hope and speak against all the positive work that's going on. It's really important ... people who are experiencing homelessness or living on the street (have) that higher level of safety and (we) create a place for this community," he said.

Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone, which will supply the custom, raised planter with seating, and help maintain the site's garden, also expects the work to help visitors feel more comfortable.

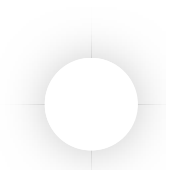
"Having a well-lit and busy community space makes the neighbourhood safer and more inviting for everyone," said Jori Pincock, BIZ manager of public realm.



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"(This latest project) develops a sense of place, a place to fit...," said Wins Bridgman, architect for the downtown public washroom on 715 Main St.


Coun. Sherri Rollins said the next round of work at the site marks an important step toward rejuvenating Thunderbird House and improving the washroom itself.



“Everyone knows there is potential. It is a really major public space all around Amoowigamig... There could be a better sense of place, a more beautiful sense of place and a more functional one,” said Rollins.

The project’s funding will be supplied through a previously approved downtown (COVID-19 pandemic) recovery strategy, which included \$600,000 for landscaping around the public washroom and other Main Street improvements.

In an email, city spokesman David Driedger said the exact cost of the landscaping project has yet to be finalized.


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Construction is expected to begin in September, added Driedger.

As of May, the washroom was open daily from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre officials previously told media they hoped a Winnipeg Foundation grant would allow enough staff to be hired to open for 16 hours per day by mid-summer. By deadline Wednesday, city officials could not confirm if its hours operation have expanded yet.

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Born and raised in Winnipeg, Joyanne loves to tell the stories of this city, especially when politics is involved. Joyanne became the city hall reporter for the Winnipeg Free Press in early 2020.

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