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# Manitoba's former pandemic visitation pods face varied, uncertain future



By: [Kevin Rollason](#)

Posted: 6:19 PM CST Monday, Mar. 6, 2023

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As the province steps closer to getting rid of more than 100 shipping containers formerly used as long-term care home visitation pods amid heightened COVID-19 pandemic public health orders, one prominent architect is urging restraint.

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Wins Bridgman, of BridgmanCollaborative Architecture in Winnipeg, which created the Amoowigamig public washroom on Main Street using shipping containers, said he believes the 105 the province has put out an expression of interest for removal could be repurposed for more public washrooms or a safe consumption site.

The structures also could be retained by the government of Manitoba for their original use, he added.



"The larger picture is we are being shortsighted in removing something that we may very well need to use again in the future," Bridgman said Monday.

"There is a general understanding at all levels — except with the current provincial government — that the infection is not done with us and we are not done with the infection. Why are we talking about giving them away, throwing them out or adaptive reusing them, when this issue has not gone away?"

Because shipping containers are intended to be stored and stacked on each other, the province could do so somewhere so they can be used again if needed in the near future, Bridgman said. "You don't throw out old buildings because of lack of ventilation, so they shouldn't get rid of shipping containers that were needed at the time."

The province announced in September 2020 it would spend almost \$18 million to convert and install the containers outside personal care homes, so family and friends could have a space to visit loved ones outside the facilities impacted by COVID-19 restrictions.

In summer 2022, after the province relaxed its health orders, personal care home managers began telling the *Free Press* that while the pods served a purpose at the time, they no longer needed them and many wanted them removed.

A provincial government spokeswoman now says bidders have three options for the future of the pods: they can ask to have the pods donated to a group or organization, buy the pod outright in a quasi-auction style, or opt to dispose of the pod.

All three options include the bidders have to cover the costs of the temporary shelters being moved.

"The province hopes Manitobans will come up with creative ways to put

these shelters to good use in Manitoba," the spokeswoman said.

"Manitoba government departments will have the option to secure shelters for government use and the PCHs have the option to keep them for their own use — on the condition the PCH accepts full responsibility to conform with buildings codes and legislation."

Submissions have to be filed by March 21.

Convalescent Home of Winnipeg is ready for its visitation pod to be uprooted.

"We still do have ours, but remain desirous of having it removed before (or) by spring, as we would very much like to have full access to our outside courtyard once again come the summer," said Sherry Heppner, development co-ordinator.

"We are not using our visitation shelter — the heat is off, but still connected to our building for its electrical. It is very much surrounded by snow and it is starting to rust in spots. It looks very sad."

Heppner said after the container is removed there are plans to redo the green space and install a memorial garden in honour of residents who lost their lives during the worst of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, another Winnipegger — who said months ago he hoped to send the shipping containers to Ukraine to be repurposed into temporary housing — has amended his plans.

However, Kim Sigurdson, a Métis businessman and philanthropist, said he is hoping the help people.

"We were hoping to do this out of Manitoba and ship them over, but the amount of money to do that was going to be crazy money," Sigurdson said.

"Then someone said, why don't we do it there?... So now we are applying for them to fix them up, make them into homes to help the homeless here and for people in northern reserves."

Sigurdson said even though it is a short time frame before the province closes the expression of interest, he already has architects' drawings on how the shipping containers could be converted for housing.

"We can convert all 105 of them into good homes — small homes but good homes," he said. "We promise the government we will turn them into homes."

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Kevin Rollason is one of the more versatile reporters at the Winnipeg Free Press. Whether it is covering city hall, the law courts, or general reporting, Rollason can be counted on to not only answer the 5 Ws — Who, What, When, Where and Why — but to do it in an interesting and accessible way for readers.

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