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News

Pop-up toilet breaking down bathroom barriers (/news/pop-up-toilet-breaking-down-bathroom-barriers)

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A temporary public washroom has opened downtown.

The pop-up toilet is currently on Graham and Smith, at the Holy Trinity Church, but it will move to three other sites over this summer and fall; in addition to the Holy Trinity site, the washroom will go up somewhere in the SHED district, somewhere near Portage Place, and somewhere off Main Street.

Stefano Grande of Downtown Winnipeg BIZ said they're hoping the toilet will be at each site for 30 days.

"We feel that within 48 months we should have enough information to present to our city and our partners in terms of what (a) permanent asset (could) look like," said Grande after the official ribbon-cutting of the pop-up toilet today.

The pilot project is meant to start a conversation about permanent public toilets downtown.

The structure itself is made by Wins Bridgman, owner of BridgmanCollaborative Architecture. He says it's made out of a shipping container.

"Really, it's a sea can with walls that pop up when it's open and close down to make it secure when it's closed. So it's completely logical. It just looks as though it's a celebration when it's open. And we've done that with a system using kind of typical garage-door springs," said Bridgman.

One of the two toilets is designed to be fully accessible. Bridgman said they ordered the biggest washroom available, from the US, but admits it still could be bigger and the goal is to make sure everyone can use it.

According to Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, the project itself was launched to fill a need for clean and accessible public washrooms.

"A public toilet by definition invites everyone, and that's so key, because if we're going to have the public downtown it means everyone's invited, everyone is welcome to be here," said Bridgman.

Siloam Mission is staffing a kiosk attached to the washroom with people from its Exit Up! program. The staff will also provide light cleaning duties.

Siloam's Jim Bell said proceeds from merchandise sold at the kiosk will go to Siloam's social enterprise programming.

"So when you sell a newspaper or a water, for example, those moneys will be deposited, we'll put them in a reserve if you will. So



Wins Bridgman speaks at today's ribbon-cutting.

for other initiatives like this, going forward, we'll use that as seed capital (to) put into the next project," said Bell.

Safety, and the potential for drug use in these facilities, has been considered.

"What we're hoping is that public urination, that negative stuff that happens in our back alleys -- here's a solution," said Grande. Grande also said part of their jumping off point was recognizing a challenge of needles being used downtown; he said needle dispensers are inside the public toilets, and they will be managed on a daily basis.

Bell said safety and security protocols are in place for workers, but didn't want to get into what they are.

The total cost of the pilot project, including marketing and awareness, is less than \$100,000. Capital funding comes from Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, the CEO Sleepout, and the individual budgets of city councillors John Orlikow, Jenny Gerbasi, and Cindy Gilroy.

Standard operating hours for the toilets will be 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. but Downtown Winnipeg BIZ says efforts will be made to expand those hours.