

When you gotta go downtown: pop-up toilet project offers free public facilities

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The pop-up public toilet features two stalls in the bright-orange structure made out of a shipping container. It will be in front of the Holy Trinity Anglican Church for a month then moved to other locations downtown.

Instead of a traditional ribbon-cutting ceremony, a single strand of two-ply toilet paper was cut Monday at the opening of Winnipeg's pop-up public toilet.

The public porta-potties, a collaborative project between Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone, Siloam Mission and BridgmanCollaborative Architecture, will be open to the public until the end of September. The temporary facilities will move around to four sites in the city, but will spend the first month outside Holy Trinity Anglican Church on Graham Street.

"It's a crappy conversation, but we're going to step right into it," said Stefano Grande, chief executive officer of Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, about the city's need for public restrooms.

"What we'll be unleashing over the next month or so will be a series of pop-ups, with the intent of making these pop-ups part of our everyday infrastructure in our downtown."

The project will cost slightly less than \$100,000, with funding from the BIZ, CEO Sleepout proceeds, and individual city councillor budgets.

There are two stalls, one of which is fully accessible, in the bright-orange pop-up facilities made out of a shipping container. The single-stall interiors resemble that of a standard porta-potty: a toilet, toilet-paper and a soap dispenser.

Siloam Mission CEO Jim Bell said the pop-up not only provides dignity to its users, but also to those seeking work experience.

There's a social enterprise kiosk attached to the facilities, where branded T-shirts, reusable water bottles and newspapers will be sold by Siloam Mission staff. All proceeds will go towards the agency, which provides services for homeless people in the city, such as employment opportunities.

The pop-up was designed by Wins Bridgman. The owner of BridgmanCollaborative Architecture said he hopes it will provide a safe space for people of all sorts, whether it be homeless Winnipeggers, people living with colitis, those with disabilities, or small children who just need to go.

"Most people don't realize that there is this dearth of washrooms in the city. Depending on the place or time, it's almost a toilet desert," he said. "It's also a health hazard.



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A man purchases a T-shirt from the new pop-up toilet, which also sells newspapers and water bottles. All proceeds will go to Siloam Mission.

"Just like we make roads and pave them for each other in order to be able to get around our business, we need to have infrastructure to have toilets to be able to take care of each other."

Kristine Matheson, a business administration student at Red River College, is a model in the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ's "My Winnipeg Includes Public Toilets" ad campaign. Matheson, 26, has a spinal cord injury, and as a result, has weak bladder control.

She said it's always been a challenge to both access public restrooms and to do so without getting questioned if she's going to buy something from a store.

"It's about time (for accessible public toilets). It is 2018, and accessible washrooms, whether or not your disabled, are important to everyone."

A block north of the pop-up, 40-year-old Gerald McKay was panhandling on Portage Avenue. He wasn't as optimistic about the public restrooms, as the 30 or so people gathered earlier to celebrate the opening.

He said it's a good idea in theory, but it won't stay clean.

"I saw it and the first thing I thought was, 'It's going to get destroyed cause graffiti and everything.'"

The *Free Press* previously reported Bridgman, an architect and long-time advocate for public toilets, installed porta-potties near his office in 2008.

The first batch of toilets installed near the Salvation Army Booth Centre were removed due to misuse involving drugs. Later on, he placed another porta-potty behind his building. Someone set it on fire within three weeks.

The pop-up toilet will be open Monday through Friday, from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

— *with files from Randy Turner*

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