Winnipeg Foundation grant opens public washroom hours tap

By: Joyanne Pursaga
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The hours of Winnipeg's first and only downtown public washroom are set to soon expand.

The Winnipeg Foundation will provide up to $900,000 over four years to Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre so it can add up to eight hours of daily peer support service at the Amoowigamig facility (715

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“The Winnipeg Foundation has agreed to increase our services up to... 18 hours, contingent on the funding by the city (continuing),” Lanna Many Grey Horses, a program support manager with Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, told reporters Wednesday.

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The Winnipeg Foundation will provide up to $900,000 over four years to Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre so it can add up to eight hours of daily peer support service at the Amoowigamig facility (715 Main St.).

The grant will continue as long as the city keeps funding 10 hours of daily peer support services at the site, which largely serves vulnerable people who lack other “places to go.”

Many Grey Horses said she hopes the centre, which currently runs from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily through city funding, will be able to

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hire enough staff to open for 16 hours per day by mid-summer.

The City of Winnipeg has confirmed its funding to the end of 2023.

While Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata has expressed concerns staffing the site from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. could raise the risk of violence, Many Grey Horses said the ultimate goal remains to have its peer support staff operate the site 24 hours per day, seven days a week.

She said it will be possible after a risk assessment is completed and changes are put in place, though she did not have an exact timeline to complete that process.

“Once those risks are mitigated, we’re looking optimistically at providing that 24-7 service with a plan in place to ensure that we provide safe service.”

Security changes could alter the building itself, such as by adding cameras, while quick connections to police and other first responders are also needed, said Many Grey Horses.

“The community that we’re in, we’re dealing with a really vulnerable, marginalized population, different

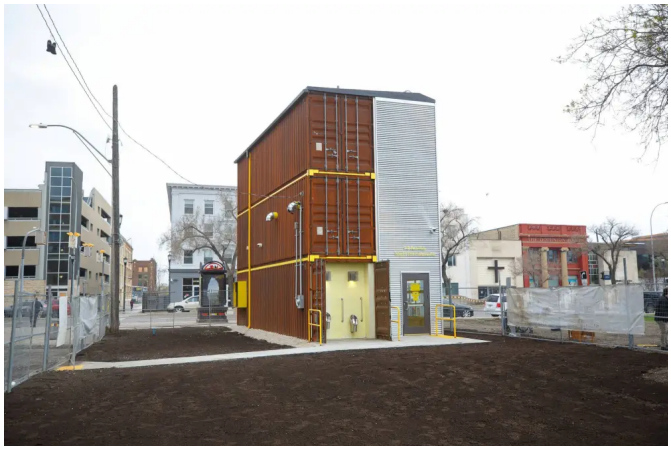
issues around varying mental wellness, substance use challenges. So people will come to us in a state that (can) be less than ideal," she said.

A Winnipeg Foundation representative said the organization supports the plan to gradually use its funding to expand hours.

"It's just such an essential facility for the community... in that area around Thunderbird House. It's just so important for them to have access to a safe, clean public washroom," said Megan Tate, vice-president for community grants.

Coun. John Orlikow, chairman of council's community services committee, said the grant comes as the city reassesses how much it can contribute to expand the washroom's hours.

"Ideally, it would be 24-7 ... (The washroom has) been such a huge success," said Orlikow. "I still have to find the funding for that and we have to deal with those security issues (as well)."



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The grant will continue as long as the city keeps funding 10 hours of daily peer support services at the Amoowigamig facility (715 Main St.)., which largely serves vulnerable people who lack other "places to go."

A city report also applauds the services at the washroom, noting peer support workers have provided thousands of clean needles, pipes, feminine products and condoms, given eight life-saving doses of anti-overdose naloxone, and helped connect more than 30 washroom visitors with permanent housing, since it opened in June 2022.

"What we thought was going to be a washroom is no longer just that washroom. It's a resource centre for folks," Many Grey Horses told the community services committee Wednesday.

Without recommending a specific

one, the city staff report lists four options for the City of Winnipeg to support the washroom's hours, which were based on it being the sole funder.

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Orlikow said the options must be reassessed to determine how best the Winnipeg Foundation contribution fits in.

The options include: continuing 10-hour daily operations ($270,500 per year); expanding the current peer support staffing model to cover 12, 16 or 24 hours per day ($324,600 to $649,200 annually); extending current services to 16 hours per day and allowing washroom access without support services between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. with private security or other non-profit staff working overnight ($612,800 to $665,800 annually); and replacing current peer support services with

a 24-hour attendant or security service staff (at least $420,000 annually).

The community services committee received that report as information Wednesday.

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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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