



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of January 19, 2023

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** January 3, 2023
From: Thomas Soulliere, Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities
Subject: Park Washrooms Accessibility Assessment

RECOMMENDATION

That Council direct staff to implement a workplan to address the barriers identified in the Park Washroom Accessibility Audit Report (Attachment A), by the end of 2030, with funding to be considered for approval through the annual Financial Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to advise Council of the results of an accessibility audit of the City's 18 public washroom buildings in municipal parks and to outline the approach to addressing the barriers identified. This report was initiated at the direction of Council in February 2022.

More than half of the City's park washroom facilities are over 50 years old and need significant improvement to meet leading practices relating to accessibility. With the support of an external consultant, the City has now identified the current deficiencies of each park washroom facility and identified areas of focus for future renovations in coming years. Although this report does not seek Council approval for financial resources associated with the park washroom improvement program, the following highlights the current state and describes how the details obtained through the accessibility audit will be used to inform future investment planning.

BACKGROUND

The City's park washroom inventory consists of 18 facilities constructed between 1960 and 2021. Most of these are stand-alone buildings; some include spaces for other functions, such as storage, or changerooms. Given the age of most of these buildings (11 of which were opened prior to 1970 and have not been upgraded), the designs reflect previous standards which did not account for the level of accessibility and functionality required today. In addition to these service deficiencies, most of these facilities are nearing the end of their functional life and require upgrades to the building structure, plumbing, and electrical systems. In short, they require substantial investment to meet current building design standards.

In February 2022, Council directed staff to report back with a schedule, budget and implications for retrofitting existing park washrooms for accessibility, with work to be completed between 2022 and 2024, and funded from the Accessibility Reserve Fund.

In April 2022, the City engaged architectural consultants **hcma**, a firm with extensive experience designing inclusive public facilities, to complete an accessibility audit of the existing park washroom facilities. The scope consisted of identifying accessibility gaps as well as potential building improvements, with a view to inform future renovation planning.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Accessibility Criteria

At the outset of the study, a baseline was established for the evaluation of each facility. The accessibility criteria applied for the park washroom audit was based on two primary sources; *Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification* (RHFAC) V3.0 and the *Canadian Standards Association* (CSA) B651-18 *Accessible Design for the Built Environment*. RHFAC meets or exceeds current National and BC Building Codes and is the leading accessibility certification program in North America, referenced by advocates, governments, and facility owners. RHFAC's qualitative requirements consider the full user experience, from arrival to using spaces as intended.

Methodology

The inspection of all park washroom facilities was conducted in April 2022, by RHFAC-certified professionals. Based on each assessment, an accessibility rating was assigned to the facility, which related to the level of renovation required to remove barriers. The accessibility ratings for each park washroom informed hypothetical design concepts, which were drafted and subsequently costed at a high level.

The full Park Washrooms Accessibility Audit Report can be found in Appendix A, including a summary of the facilities assessed and associated rating for each.

Other Park-Specific Accessibility Considerations

In 2021, Council directed staff to explore the feasibility and impacts associated with renovating one of the Topaz Park public washrooms, including consideration of an adult change table with a lift and sling.

Changing tables for adults provide a comfortable and safe space for caregivers to help individuals living with disabilities. At present the City has an adult change table and mechanical lift in the Crystal Pool and Fitness Centre. In this location, staff are trained and available to support the proper operation of the lift. There are currently no such amenities within any of the 18 park washrooms.

There are potential risks associated with providing adult change tables and lifts in remote locations. For example, those using a lifting device must be properly trained in the safe operation of equipment, to avoid potential injury. Similarly, as the devices would not be restricted to only those who require them, others attempting to use the lift improperly may risk injury or damage. Even with regular inspection by staff, unsupervised locations present the possibility that a table or lifting device may be damaged and subsequently used by an unsuspecting visitor.

Staff recommend the City provide adult change tables and lifting devices only in staffed facilities, where support is readily available and mis-use or risk of injury is less likely.

Public Engagement

In May 2022, staff met with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (the Committee) to discuss the Park Washrooms Accessibility Assessment project. Staff also reviewed general details about the age of existing facilities and service gaps, the proposed criteria upon which the assessment would be based, as well as the deliverables anticipated from the initiative.

Staff have committed to engage with the Committee on future plans and to consider all disabilities in the scope of accessibility improvements for park facilities.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

The original instruction from Council to staff, prior to the formal assessment, was to remedy all barriers for the entire inventory of park washroom facilities within two years. Based on the outputs of the review, staff have determined that this is not a feasible option. However, below are two approaches that have been developed to guide the City's resource planning, leading to the removal of physical barriers at all public washrooms in parks. The first option is the recommended approach, which seeks to incorporate all the required renovations within a seven-year period, while accommodating other capital projects. The second option would be an expedited approach that would result in deferral of other projects to prioritize the washroom upgrades over approximately four years.

Time and cost efficiencies can be achieved by designing and procuring similar upgrades as one package; consultant procurement and design is estimated to take a minimum of nine months to complete. The total cost for all the upgrades identified is anticipated to be between \$13 – 14 million. Council is not being asked to approve this amount at this stage, as staff will include the projected program costs in the annual Financial Plan in the years ahead, subject to available funding that considers all priorities in any given year.

This option requires hiring an additional Project Administrator to support delivery of this work.

Option 1: Implement a workplan that addresses the accessibility upgrades required at all park washrooms within a seven-year timeframe (Recommended)

If Council approves this option, staff will commence the necessary design work in 2023 and include the applicable program budget in the annual Financial Plan, between 2024 and 2029. This would result in the work being completed by 2030. Although a longer project timeline is operationally more feasible, the longer timelines may seem insensitive to groups expecting to see physical barriers addressed more quickly.

Option 2: Implement a workplan that addresses the accessibility upgrades required at all park washrooms within a four-year timeframe

Should Council approve this expedited approach, staff will reduce the capital project workload for other facility upgrades to ensure focus is placed on the washroom program. Under this model, design and construction would commence in 2023 and all upgrades would be completed by 2028. Executing more projects over a shorter period affects staff workload; typically, additional resources cannot be easily added and competing projects would need to be reprioritized.

Project Risk Management

The City's Project Management Framework provides guidance on managing risks associated with infrastructure projects. The model ensures that risks are identified and mitigation strategies managed throughout the life of the project.

In the design and construction phases, a project steering committee will be established to monitor risks and provide guidance to address issues that may arise related to managing project scope, cost, budget, legal, and communications.

Accessibility Impact Statement

The development of this program aligns with the goals of the City's Accessibility Framework:

- **Focus Area (1) – Built Environment**
To systematically remove and prevent barriers in public parks, open spaces and plazas, mobility systems and City-owned buildings and facilities.
- **Focus Area (2) – Governance and Services**
To provide all residents and visitors with equitable access to municipal programs, services, information, engagement opportunities, and the ability to exercise their statutory rights.
- **Focus Area (3) – Capacity and Collaboration**
To lead accessibility change-making within the City mandate and promote collaborative, positive attitudes in our community.

2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan

The project aligns with the City's Strategic Plan, including access to services and facilities:

- (5.19) Identify and remove barriers to make Victoria accessible and apply a barrier-free lens to all decisions we make to ensure we're not creating new barriers.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

The project is aligned with the Official Community Plan, specifically with the following sections:

- (7.17.2) Identifying priorities for improvements to sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities through planning processes including opportunities to remove physical barriers, improve lighting and wayfinding, buffer sidewalks from travel lanes, and provide weather protection, benches, drinking fountains, public washrooms, landscaping, and beautification measures.
- (15.1) Encourage a fair distribution of community services, social services, and facilities across the city, to support all parts of the population.

Impacts to the Financial Plan

Council has approved \$860,000 for public washroom improvements as part of the 2022 Financial Plan. Two washrooms in Beacon Hill Park, at 2 Cook Street and 156 Nursery Road, were previously prioritized for accessibility upgrades in 2022-23. These projects have been put on hold pending the outcome of the accessibility assessment, as the funding will be carry-forward to the 2023 Financial Plan.

Once staff have direction from Council on the preferred implementation option above, the funding required to complete the remaining projects will be included in future Financial Plans, subject to availability of funds, when taking into consideration all priorities in any given year.

CONCLUSIONS

The modernization of public park washrooms requires careful planning and considerable capital investment given the age of these facilities and the volume of projects the City has committed to. This work represents an impactful and necessary effort that will provide safe and accessible washroom facilities for all park visitors.

Respectfully submitted,

Trish Piwowar
Manager of Facility Development

Thomas Soulliere
Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager

List of Attachments

Appendix A – Park Washroom Accessibility Audit (**hcma**, November 2022)

Appendix B – Washroom Improvement Program Development

Appendix A
Park Washrooms Accessibility Audit Report
hcma

Appendix B

Washroom Improvement Program Development

Factors considered in the development of the park washrooms improvement program include:

1. Project prioritization
 2. Project cost estimation
 3. Project timelines
 4. Staff resourcing
 5. Risk management
1. **Project prioritization** - Five factors were considered to prioritize the washroom facility improvement projects:
 - a) **Accessibility Rating** – lower rated washrooms should be upgraded first;
 - b) **Park washroom daily usage** – staff have been monitoring daily usage of public washrooms since 2019; improvements to higher-use washrooms get higher priority;
 - c) **Individual project costs** – budgets should be distributed as evenly as possible over the multiple years required to complete the program, to manage the impacts to the overall financial plan;
 - d) **Park redevelopment plans** – a washroom upgrade program should align with forecasted park redevelopments to reduce impacts to the public and to economize costs; and
 - e) **Existing facility building condition** – the program should align with building life-cycle renewal priorities and sequencing.
 2. **Project cost estimations** – Estimations are a combination of rough order of magnitude (ROM) and a Class D quantity surveyor estimated project costs for improvements to each washroom facility. For reasons of efficiency and to integrate required life-cycle upgrades, the scope of work related to facility improvements include whole building systems renewal, including the following building components:
 - a) Building envelope;
 - b) Hazardous materials abatement;
 - c) Mechanical and electrical systems upgrades;
 - d) Interior finishes;
 - e) Washroom fixtures and accessories;
 - f) Signage and wayfinding; and
 - g) Site improvements.
 3. **Project timelines** - Washroom renovations require coordination with multiple construction trades. Project timelines were developed by comparing the scope and complexity of each project at each location with similar projects completed by staff over the last 5 years.
 4. **Staff Resourcing** - Depending on the size of the project and including current and estimated staff workload, one staff can execute no more than two or three projects a year.
 5. **Risk Management** – The table below outlines the common risks to be managed.

Schedule	Given the current challenges with labour shortages and global supply chain pressures and staff capacity, there are risks to the procurement of contracting services and materials that may extend the project schedule.
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	Timelines may need to be adjusted to address requirements of groups wanting a more robust involvement in the project; this may also trigger a larger public policy discussion and/or a changed direction.
Budget	Current financial landscapes are challenged by high inflation rates which may extend into the future and could directly affect material and labour costs. Supply chain constraints continue to limit market options available to the construction industry.
Operational	Organizational priorities require time, commitment and resourcing to effectively initiate and complete. Impacts caused by unknown future operational changes, leading to changed staff priorities, may extended project delivery.
Scope	<p>Elements of the anticipated scope of work still require detailed analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mitigation strategy for service interruptions and washroom closures is a component of this project as it is necessary to allow work to be completed as quickly as possible. • While already factored into the options, hazardous materials abatement for buildings constructed before 1990 could impact the overall schedule. Materials testing has not yet taken place. • Accessibility best practices continue to evolve. The accessibility criteria may further evolve within the next four to seven years requiring additional adjustment to project scope and timelines.