



October 23, 2020

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager – Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Parks Washroom Strategy

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Vancouver Park Board approve the “Parks Washroom Strategy”, attached as Appendix A and as outlined in this report, which includes short and long-term recommendations to guide the planning, building, and operations of safe, clean and accessible park washrooms in Vancouver.

REPORT SUMMARY

In large cities with growing populations, the demand for accessible washrooms is increasing with highly visible and negative impacts. Using a washroom is a basic need for everyone every day.

In Vancouver, the Park Board is the primary provider of public washrooms, with facilities located within community centres, recreation facilities, and parks throughout the city. Most of these facilities were built decades ago and reflect the standards, social norms, and accessibility measures of those past eras. With an average age of over 60 years old, many washroom structures are nearing the end of their functional life span and are now considered unsustainable with their high potable water and energy use.

Driven by the need for facility renewal, expected population and tourism growth, and changing service needs, the Park Board initiated a planning process to establish a long-term vision for washroom facilities in parks. Transformation of public washrooms is a significant undertaking, requiring time, commitment, and, most of all, capital and operating resources. The Parks Washroom Strategy (“the Strategy”) aims to create a system-wide plan to provide safe, clean, and accessible washroom facilities to enhance the park experience for all.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the important role of washrooms in managing a public health crisis by ensuring access to clean public environments and proper hygiene. The Strategy considers directions from health authorities on COVID-19, including the importance of hand washing, minimizing sources of transfer, and recognizing the compounding effect of the overdose crisis on communities most impacted by systemic inequities

This Strategy begins with an understanding that washrooms are an essential public service and that everyone is entitled to safe, clean, and accessible washrooms, and lays out a plan for how to deliver facilities in a feasible and comprehensive approach.

BOARD AUTHORITY / POLICY / PREVIOUS DECISIONS

The Strategy is guided by previous policy and decisions, including:

On [January 20, 2020](#), the Park Board approved a motion to recommend cost-free menstrual products at all Park Board Washrooms.

On [October 1, 2018](#), the Park Board approved a motion to provide universally accessible changing stations.

On [April 17, 2017](#), the Board received Building a Path to Parks & Recreation for All: Reducing Barriers for Trans* & Gender Variant Community Members.

On [November 28, 2016](#), the Park Board approved a motion to increase accessibility at public washroom facilities.

VanPlay

In July, 2018, the Park Board approved the first two reports of [VanPlay](#), Parks & Recreation Services Master Plan: [Inventory and Analysis](#) & [10 Goals to Shape the Next 25 Years](#).

In October, 2019, the Park Board approved the final two reports of [VanPlay](#): [Strategic Bold Moves](#) & [The Playbook, Implementation Plan](#).

In October 2020, the Park Board adopted VanPlay: The Framework to guide decision making and support the pursuit of equity, connectivity and access to parks and recreation for all.

The Framework lays out the following three directions:

- **Deliver services equitably**; a fair and just parks and recreation system;
- **Weave the city together**; parks, nature, recreation and culture integrated into everyday life; and
- **Welcome everyone**; parks and recreation experiences that improve quality of life.

VanPlay outlines service needs relating to washrooms and sets the following Asset Targets:

- Prioritize renewal of washrooms using the Initiative Zones and to address urgent safety and accessibility needs, including at least two new or upgraded washroom facilities in the Downtown Eastside by 2024;
- Prioritize upgrades of existing washrooms and adding washrooms at locations with multiple playing fields, destination playgrounds, water recreation access points, community gardens, beaches, and other key destinations where people stay for a few hours;
- Aim to improve access by seeking opportunities along the Citywide Parks and Recreation Network (Strategic Bold Move) and near destination playgrounds, sports fields, water recreation access points, and community gardens.

Additionally, VanPlay proposes to achieve 70-80% of washrooms in “good condition or better” by 2040. The Strategy defines this term, as noted in the ‘What We Propose’ section, below.

BACKGROUND

In 2009, a staff task force was organized to address issues around the provision of washrooms in parks. The task force was to respond to a perceived lack of clear policy framework. [Staff presented to the Board on the status of washrooms on May 11, 2009](#), suggesting that a report back to the Board should include a long-term washroom plan. Since then, many efforts have been made to improve the conditions of washrooms in the park system such as building new washrooms, renewal of washrooms, installing portable washrooms in high-need or difficult to service areas and examining operating budgets.

On May 18, 2018, in response to the [November 2016 Board](#) motion the Board received a Briefing Memo titled [Park Washrooms Renewals & Future Plans](#), in which staff communicated the initiation of a system-wide park washroom facility strategy. The Parks Washroom Strategy was a collaborative effort between Park Board and City of Vancouver staff across many departments with a goal to develop a long-term plan for the provision of safe, clean, and accessible washroom facilities to enable and enhance park experience for all.

On December 19, 2019 a briefing [memo provided the Board an update on the status of the Washroom Strategy](#). The memo discussed the engagement work and outlined deliverables and next steps. On January 9, 2020, the Board received a [memo regarding CRAB Park Improvements & Washrooms](#) and piloting of stand-alone pre-fabricated washroom structures known as the Portland Loo.

DISCUSSION

What We Have

There are 95 washrooms in the Park Board's system of park washrooms, including 61 in fieldhouses and 34 stand-alone facilities. The key issues facing the system include high operational resource requirements, the on-going need for renewal and new facilities, and accessibility and inclusivity compliance.

The high-use, public nature of park facilities and the ever-present considerations for safety and maintenance present significant maintenance and operational challenges. The majority of washroom facilities in the system are nearing the end of their service life. From ageing plumbing to saturated concrete and porcelain, on-going capital maintenance and renewals are needed to keep these high-use facilities in good serviceable order. In addition, many washrooms have high potable water use, such as those with continuously running urinal walls (for example, at Oak Park, Locarno, Prospect Point Picnic, and Spanish East). Recent washroom renewals (at Carnarvon, Hastings, Memorial South, Lumberman's Arch, Third Beach, Falaise, Clinton, and Jonathan Rogers Parks) and recently built washrooms (for example, at Oak Meadows, Trillium, Grandview) have helped decrease maintenance needs, but have only had a small impact on the system-wide issue.

Many park washroom facilities do not meet minimum standards of accessibility. Access can be restricted by the location of washroom units within a park setting, uneven or steep pathways and entrance surfaces, stairs, and widths of entrances or door handle types. Interior spaces can be too small and, therefore, not allow a caregiver and individual to be in one stall at the same time. Advancements in gender-inclusive washrooms and signage within the park board system have been made; however, much work remains to change over park washrooms that were designed under the gender-separated model.

Stakeholder Engagement

The importance of washroom services is a constant theme heard during the numerous public engagement processes that Park Board staff undertake in the delivery of various park and recreation projects. This input strongly informed the development of the Strategy. Then, feedback was also sought and received from the following committees of Council and stakeholders to seek their specific expertise and input.

Committees of Council:

- 2SLGBTQ+ Steering Committee;
- Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee;
- Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee;
- Seniors Advisory Committee;
- Urban Indigenous People's Advisory Committee;
- Women's Advisory Committee.

External Stakeholders:

- Healthy Built Environment (VCH and City of Vancouver Committee);
- Tourism Vancouver;
- TransLink;
- Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH);
- Vancouver Field Sports Federation;
- Vancouver School Board.

Feedback was also collected from a number of staff working groups and initiatives, including:

- Beach Experience Team (Park Board);
- Concession Strategy team (Park Board);
- Fieldhouse Activation Program (Park Board);
- Team UP (Park Board);
- Mayor's Overdose Emergency Task Force (City);
- Universal and Inclusive Design Feasibility Study (City).

What We Learned

In general, staff heard that washrooms need to be more accessible and inclusive, they need to feel safe, and they need to be clean. Key learnings from best practices, system inventory, and engagement are summarized below:

Accessibility

During the Strategy process, an accessibility audit of the entire park washroom inventory was completed. Roughly 40% of park washrooms do not meet CSA (Canadian Standards Association) criteria for an accessible entrance. Given many washrooms will not see renewal or significant capital maintenance for some time, a system-wide accessibility-focused upgrade is being implemented in the meantime. Staff will update the Board on this schedule as the project progresses.

Inclusivity

Access to a washroom is a basic human right, as outlined by the BC Human Rights Code. Through the Strategy process, it was determined that single-user washrooms are the most effective approach to inclusivity. These types of washrooms provide for multiple needs within one safely enclosed private area. They accommodate the safety, dignity, and logistical concerns of a wide range of people who may belong to one or more of the following groups: trans and gender diverse people, families, and people requiring a caregiver of a different gender, and they are more efficient and equitable because they eliminate the need for gendered queues.

Social Factors

Washroom building conditions and user experience can be impacted by social factors such as people experiencing homelessness and people who use drugs. However, for many of those people, who are at risk and face discrimination in non-public buildings and institutions, well-designed and maintained single-user park washroom buildings are often the only option for serving their basic needs.

COVID-19 Pandemic Learnings

On March 16, 2020, the Park Board and City began closing facilities, and stopped providing some services (including access to some washrooms). The City soon declared a State of Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The province announced on March 26 that public washrooms and showers are deemed to be essential services, and all park washrooms remained open in Vancouver.

As the COVID-19 Phase One lockdown was implemented, outdoor spaces emerged as one of the only safe and desirable public places to recreate, exercise and socialize for people otherwise confined to home. Owing to this, the number of people accessing Vancouver's parks increased dramatically over previous years baseline numbers, with many days seeing 100-200% increase in use of parks (source Google mobility data). One of the main directions from health authorities during the pandemic was the importance of frequent handwashing. Parks with washrooms enhanced visitors' safety by enabling hand washing protocol through access to sinks and soap, and were among the few public places to provide this essential service.

What We Propose

The Strategy's recommendations are divided into two categories of short-term and long-term. This recognizes that renovating the Park Board's existing inventory and building new washrooms will take time and resources, but also that there are actions that can be taken in the short-term to improve existing washrooms. These Strategy recommendations are listed below, and are included in the Parks Washroom Strategy (Appendix A).

A key Strategy recommendation (4.0, below) is prioritization to guide equitable delivery of new and renewed washrooms. The prioritization method includes the following scoring criteria: ease or difficulty of maintenance, safety, accessibility, previous assessments, public engagement and stakeholder input, and locations prioritized by VanPlay.

VanPlay set out an asset target for 70-80% of washrooms to be in 'good condition or better' by 2040. The Strategy defines "good condition" using key criteria related to safety, cleanliness and accessibility. In order to meet VanPlay's asset target, the washroom system will require increased future capital investment for upgrades, maintenance and operating budget for increased staffing.

The Strategy includes a rational justification to increase capital funding for construction, upgrades and renovations, and for operating funding to maintain washrooms into the future.

Successfully providing washroom services across Vancouver will require the continued and combined efforts of both the Park Board and the City. Exploring opportunities for the City to improve access to washrooms in plazas, new development sites, and other public spaces outside of parks will complement the network of washrooms in the parks system. Park Board staff will continue to collaborate with the City of Vancouver colleagues who are responsible for washroom services within City-governed assets.

Washroom Strategy Short Term Recommendations

1. ACCESSIBILITY (SHORT TERM)

- 1.1 Advance the work of Park Board Accessibility Task Force to arrange for simple upgrade work, aiming to replace with an accessible product when repairing damaged fixtures.
- 1.2 Identify park washrooms with major accessibility issues based on the findings of the Park Board Accessibility Task Force to feed in priority list for renewals.
- 1.3 Follow CSA (Canadian Standards Association) B651 – Accessible Design For The Built Environment standards to assess need for accessibility improvements.
- 1.4 Update VanMaps with accurate and detailed information and ensure other online mapping tools have up to date location information.

2. INCREASE STAFF

- 2.1 Increase staff on mobile washroom crews that respond to seasonality and use patterns.
- 2.2 Increase attendants at busy facilities, where their presence increases safety and cleanliness.
- 2.3 Investigate the use of remote locking and unlocking with motion sensors and call button to allow staff to focus on other priorities.

3. EQUITABLE ACTIONS

- 3.1 Provide cost free menstrual products in park washrooms
- 3.2 Work with community members with lived experience to create stewardship models for safety and openness.
- 3.3 Focus on service and not identity of the users.

4. STAND-ALONE WASHROOMS

- 4.1 Investigate and pilot the feasibility of a stand-alone washroom (e.g. Portland Loo or alternative) in a suitable location as a potential long-term model.

4.2 Consider washroom trailers that provide more durable, clean, and accessible solutions for high volume areas with construction restrictions.

4.3 Allocate funding to temporary portable washroom program for seasonal high-use parks while piloting other options to phase out temporary portable washroom program.

5. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

5.1 Increase signage to provide hours of opening information, direct the public to nearby washrooms at libraries and community centres, provide harm reduction information and develop signage for destination locations with high traffic and tourism.

5.2 Inform park users of upcoming washroom construction when washrooms are not functional.

5.3 Communicate to the public the ways in which their input is being incorporated into providing safer, cleaner, and more accessible washrooms for all.

Washroom Strategy Long Term Recommendations

1. ACCESSIBILITY (LONG TERM)

1.1 Adopt a new standard based on CSA B651 and reference the City of Vancouver's Public Washroom Design and Technical Guidelines for all renewals and new builds.

1.2 Provide an adult change table at each destination park washroom and where identified as needed;

1.3 Provide a child changing station, except where adult changing stations can be used for both purposes.

2. BUILDING RENEWAL

2.1 Implement findings on fixtures from Mayor's Overdose Emergency Task Force Washroom Strategy.

2.2 Provide a standardized approach to new washroom building design (as outlined in Section 6.3 in Appendix A), which reflects the five VanPlay park classifications, including guidelines for size to suit location.

2.3 Standardize approach to fixtures, signage, way-finding, and colour palette for consistency in accessibility, safety, durability, and appearance while allowing for individual treatments.

2.4 Implement energy and potable water improvements in the renovation of existing washrooms. In particular, when replacing fixtures specify ultra low-flow for toilet, sink faucets, and urinals (or waterless).

3. INCLUSIVE WASHROOMS

- 3.1 Design all washroom facilities to provide stall options for inclusivity of people with disabilities, families and caregivers, and trans and gender diverse people .
- 3.2 Balance safety and privacy through exploration of semi-open or louvered designs.
- 3.3 Develop communication material to outline policies about access for all.

4. PRIORITY LIST

- 4.1 Continue to use a prioritization method (i.e. Scoring Criteria) for renewal and build of new washrooms.
- 4.2 Revisit the priority list annually to ensure information is current.
- 4.3 Incorporate the findings of the internal Accessibility Task Force annually and offer input.

5. LOOKING AHEAD

- 5.1 Review City of Vancouver Public Washroom Design and Technical Guidelines annually and improve collaboration with City departments to build a larger network of public washrooms.
- 5.2 Review tour bus impacts on destination park washrooms including engagement with business operators.
- 5.3 Propose construction of approximately 6 new washrooms and 10 renewals per capital plan, and increase operating and upgrade budget to maintain washrooms.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are two categories in the current 4-year Capital Plan (2019-2022) that allocate funding for washrooms:

- New Washroom & Fieldhouses (\$8.7M). Pending final construction cost estimates, work under this category is anticipated to include:
 - o Riverfront East Park
 - o CRAB Park
 - o Coopers Park
 - o Columbia Park
 - o Tisdale Park
 - o Stanley Park
 - o Vantech Secondary School
- Renewal & Upgrades of Washrooms, Fieldhouses & Concessions (\$8.3M). Pending final construction cost estimates, work under this category is anticipated to include:
 - o Second Beach Park
 - o Collingwood Park

- Locarno Beach Park
- Spanish Banks Beach Park
- Vantech repairs

This work is currently underway and at various stages of planning, design and implementation. Park Board staff will continue to work with the City's Real Estate and Facilities Management (REFM) group to implement this on-going washroom work.

The Strategy proposes renewal and upgrade of 10 washrooms per capital plan (Strategy Recommendation 5.3), which would require more funds in future capital plans than those allocated within the current capital plan, as well as additional operating budget to maintain these washrooms.

The Park Board operating budget provides roughly \$25,000 per washroom per year for janitorial staff (~\$63 per day per washroom). This funding level makes it challenging to provide adequate servicing and will need to be further considered as new facilities come on stream and as our desire to improve service levels increases.

CONCLUSION

Access to clean, safe and accessible public washrooms is a basic human need and fundamental to an enjoyable, healthy park experience. The Park Board's Washroom Strategy sets forth a clear set of policies and priorities that will address the issues identified through engagement, best practices research and examining the system, including accessibility, inclusion, safety, cleanliness, and equitable service provision.

The on-going transformation of public washrooms is a significant undertaking and requires substantial capital and operating resources. The Parks Washroom Strategy will provide a comprehensive guide for the renewal of existing washrooms and delivering new washrooms in parks.

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