

Humane Access to Public Washrooms

Improving city-wide provision of equitable and accessible toilets in
New Westminster

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Acknowledgements

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New Westminster sits on the traditional and unceded territories of the Halkomelem speaking peoples. We acknowledge that many of the systems that led to the erasure of Indigenous histories and culture are still in place and are being perpetuated in current times. We hope that this work will help contribute towards a more compassionate and equitable New Westminster for the future.

This report was created as a partnership between the City of New Westminster and the University of British Columbia's School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP) planning studio. The final report will be submitted to the City of New Westminster to help inform future policy.

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*Susan Point Welcome Gateway, Stanley Park
Source: Vancouver Heritage Foundation*

Executive Summary

This report was prepared by three UBC graduate students. We are all members of an equity-seeking group but recognise our own biases when considering accessibility and equity. New Westminster is located on the lands of the Halkomelem-speaking peoples. This report was not prepared in consultation with local Indigenous Peoples. Therefore, we recognise the colonial framework that this work operates within.

Public washrooms are a complicated topic. Everyone needs them, but different people may have different needs or use them in different ways. Gender, accessibility needs, socioeconomic status, and age, among other factors, may impact how people use public washrooms. In the context of local government, the provision of washrooms is highly multi-departmental and has many challenges, including feelings of safety, vandalism, emergency response, and cost. In many ways the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the need for public washrooms. Many businesses, non-profit organizations and public buildings that previously provided access to washrooms have been barring their doors. Unique challenges have also arisen with economic change, including an increase in unhoused people who rely on public amenities. This has led to an increase in human waste in public spaces, which impacts public health.

New Westminster has been strongly feeling the need for more and better public washrooms. To address concerns

related to public health and safety in the Downtown area, New Westminster City Council developed the Downtown Livability Strategy in 2021. Among other goals, the strategy included provisions to create immediate and long-term actions that address cleanliness and the provision of 24-hour public toilets. This report aims to address the needs of the Downtown Livability Strategy and assist in long-term planning for public washrooms in New Westminster.

This report focuses on public washrooms as essential infrastructure; a fundamental human right. However, this report also recognizes that some groups may need additional attention to be truly accessible and equitable and asks how we can reconcile the needs of everyone. These groups include, but are not limited to: seniors, persons with disabilities, women, caretakers, the unhoused, and gender-diverse populations. Along with these special considerations comes the recognition that the normalization of public washrooms is needed to increase support.

Through a literature review, jurisdictional scan, demographic analysis, and an evaluation of current needs and infrastructure, a set of recommendations were developed. These recommendations are summarized in the following six action items:

Organizational Recommendations:

- Adopt a washroom strategy that considers, above all, sanitary infrastructure as a human right.
- Elevate existing washrooms whenever possible – for example through lengthening hours and providing attendants.
- Co-locate public washrooms with bigger developments when possible.

Physical Recommendations:

- Provide a set of key amenities in all washrooms – including changing apparatuses, menstrual products, sharps disposal containers, inclusive signage, and sanitary disposal bins.
- Design all new washrooms with maintenance and year-round access in mind.
- Design inclusive washrooms that provide options for all user groups.

Aside from these action items, it is clear from this study that public washrooms are an under-explored topic. Additional research and collaboration between providers is needed in order to continue to produce better results in the future.

Glossary

- **Public Washroom:** Any building or facility on public or private property equipped with toilets, urinals, washbowls, or other similar amenities, established and maintained for the personal hygiene and comfort of the general public.
- **Portable Toilet:** An outdoor toilet, typically referring to temporary restrooms installed at construction sites, special events, parks, etc.
- **Permanent Toilet:** A toilet that is permanently installed at a certain location, such as an intersection, park, public area, or a business.
- **Equity:** The fair and respectful treatment of all people which involves the creation of opportunities and reduction of disparities in opportunities and outcomes for diverse communities. It also acknowledges that these disparities are rooted in historical and contemporary injustices and disadvantages^[1].
- **Inclusivity:** Creating an environment where everyone feels welcome, is treated with respect, and can fully participate^[1].
- **Homeless:** An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, such as those living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or places not meant for habitation^[2].
- **Disabled:** A person who has a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities^[3].
- **Marginalized Groups:** Groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political, and economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions^[4].
- **Gender Identity:** A person's inner sense of being a girl/woman/female, boy/man/male, something else, or having no gender^[5].
- **Gender Expression:** The way a person communicates their gender to the world through mannerisms, clothing, speech, behavior, etc. Gender expression varies depending on culture, context, and historical period^[5].
- **Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity is consistent in a traditional sense with their sex assigned at birth; for example, a person assigned female sex at birth whose gender identity is woman/female^[5].
- **Transgender:** A person whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth do not correspond based on traditional expectations^[5].

- **Non-binary:** A person whose gender identity falls outside of the traditional gender binary structure of girl/woman and boy/man. Sometimes abbreviated as NB or enby^[5].
- **Queer:** An umbrella term describing people who think of their sexual orientation or gender identity as outside of societal norms^[5].
- **Gender Queer:** An umbrella term that describes a person whose gender identity falls outside the traditional gender binary of male and female. Some people use the term gender expansive^[5].
- **Universal:** Term used to indicate spaces that can be used by people of all abilities and genders. This includes multiple users, families, caregivers, and people with disabilities^[6].
- **Visible Minority:** This term refers to whether a person belongs to a visible minority group as defined by the Employment Equity Act and, if so, the visible minority group to which the person belongs. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.
- **Customer Washroom:** A washroom located in a private establishment that is only available to customers.

Contents

1. Project Context	07
Project Overview	
Guiding Principles	
City Profile	
Roles of Different Departments	
How We Got Here	
2. Organizational Context	12
Policy Review	
Prior Public Engagement	
Interviews with City Staff	
3. Literature Review	18
Economic Benefits	
Inclusivity and Access	
4. Environmental Scan	22
5. Spatial Inventory and Analysis	25
Community Demographics	
Existing Infrastructure	
Lessons Learned	
6. Recommendations	33
7. Conclusion and Key Takeaways	38
References	41
Appendices	45

Project Context

1.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

The City of New Westminster is located on the traditional lands of the Halkomelem-speaking peoples^[7]. Located on the bank of the Fraser River, the hilly city is one of the oldest settler colonies in British Columbia, originally acting as the province's first capital city. In current times, New Westminster is rapidly growing and dense, with approximately 80,000 residents calling the city home.

In September 2021, New Westminster City Council passed a motion to direct staff to develop a strategy to help Downtown recovery. In October, an interdepartmental team developed and presented the Downtown Livability Strategy. The strategy included provisions to create immediate and long-term actions that address five areas of focus:

1. Cleanliness and 24-hour public toilets.
2. Homeless outreach and added emergency shelter capacity.
3. Opioid epidemic and illicit drug response.
4. Business support and outreach.
5. Mental health response.

The first area of focus is the main goal of this project. Already, action has been taken in this area in the form of the installation of portable toilets downtown^[8], which has resulted in mixed reactions from residents and businesses and challenges for staff regarding maintenance and misuse. Long-term solutions are also in the works, including a permanent toilet in Hyack Square. There is no one team at the City that handles all public toilets, leading to difficulties with project coordination. As of right now, an

interdepartmental subgroup has been formed that will support the development of the strategy.

This project is extremely timely and necessary to improve the lives of all demographics living in New Westminster. With strong existing support at the City level, this work has high potential to grow.

The purpose of this project is to provide recommendations to help guide the City of New Westminster in the provision and maintenance of public washrooms. The strategy will provide an easily-accessible set of best practices and tested methods. Our approach includes six objectives to help achieve these goals:

- Review and synthesize existing literature on public toilets as a human right to supplement the justification for the project.
- Examine existing toilet infrastructure and initiatives in New Westminster and develop evaluation criteria to review the success of the locations and projects.
- Identify locations and areas that need additional toilets and investigate which groups have the greatest need.
- Research and explore additional strategies that the City is not currently implementing that could be used in the future.
- Collect and propose a series of best practices and workflows that can be implemented in the City going forward, written as the public toilet strategy.

1.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The project vision is based on a planning approach of intersectionality and

placemaking that presents public toilets as an essential amenity for municipalities to provide, both on the basis of equity and as an economical infrastructure investment to promote livability. The approach centers on the belief that public toilet access is a basic human right. This belief is not pioneering in nature - in 2010 the United Nations General Assembly confirmed in writing the rights of all to safe and appropriate sanitation^[9].

Planning for the provision of public toilets requires nuance. This is especially true because it is impossible to plan for the needs of all users at once, given that needs between people can be different and sometimes contradicting. Through this project, our team hopes to promote an equity-based placemaking approach.

Equity-based placemaking acknowledges that the urban landscape is not neutral, and that power structures and histories of exclusion are embedded within it. As such, public space can either perpetuate or help to reduce these inequities. Throughout this work, we hope to acknowledge the histories of exclusion that exist in New Westminster and address power imbalances that arise from a lack of easily accessible public toilets. We also acknowledge that different types of toilets can benefit or isolate certain populations, with differences depending on racial and gender identities, as well as ability and age. By recognising the intersectional identities of the residents of New Westminster, we hope to consider and address people's unique experiences^[13]. As such, a major part of this project will be to identify needs across the City and provide recommendations to design and disperse toilets strategically, planning

for those with the greatest need first and foremost.

1.3 CITY PROFILE

The City of New Westminster at a glance:

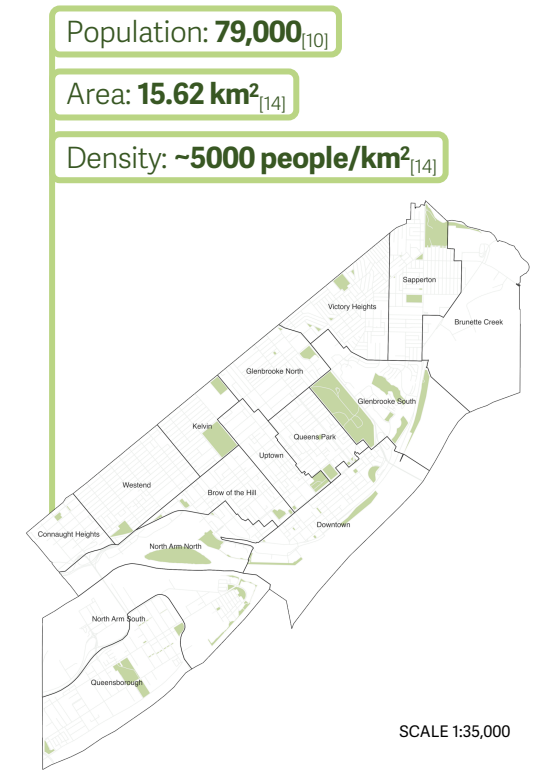


Figure 1: City of New Westminster

There are 15 neighbourhoods that make up New Westminster. The majority of the population is concentrated in the southern half, particularly in the Downtown, Uptown, and North and South Arm neighbourhoods. ^[14] The City is composed of dramatic changes in elevation, creating streets with high slopes. This is especially pronounced when walking inland from the water, from Downtown into neighbourhoods like Queens Park, Uptown, and Brow of the Hill^[11]. New Westminster is serviced by five Skytrain stations, providing good

access to rapid transit and the rest of Metro Vancouver. Development surrounding the stations are typically characterised by high-density residential and mixed-use commercial, affecting density patterns in the City and representing areas where the largest rates of growth are being seen^[12].

1.4 ROLES OF CITY DEPARTMENT

Many departments at the City of New Westminster are responsible for providing and maintaining public washrooms^[13]. Some key departments that contribute towards the Downtown Livability Strategy are as follows:

Integrated Services (Bylaw) is responsible for the adherence of City bylaws within and surrounding public washrooms.

Parks handles the provision of public washrooms in parks and recreational facilities. The building facility manager is responsible for the washrooms in each of New Westminster’s recreational facilities, while the assigned park manager is responsible for the washrooms in parks. Service workers provide maintenance to these washrooms. The department also has staff that handle engagement with the public during the process of implementing new washrooms, making sure the needs of the community are being considered.

Civic Buildings and Facilities handles the maintenance of washrooms in non-recreational civic facilities such as City Hall or Anvil Centre.

Economic Development coordinates with local businesses and promotes their needs within the City.

Community Planning evaluates the

needs of the community, for example through census demographics and homeless counts. Planning also coordinates with other departments and outside organizations to consider the broader picture of washroom provision.

Building Inspection provides building permits for new washrooms, overseeing drawings, materials, specification to code, and evaluating the resiliency and safety of the space. While developers coordinate the inclusion of washrooms in new buildings, building inspectors must sign off on the completed building before it can be used.

Fire responds to incidents in washrooms, particularly fires that are set. The department might also offer first response services to situations where public safety is concerned, for example cases of people sheltering in washrooms or overdoses.

Engineering and Engineering Operations deals with the functional operations of spaces, including overseeing service connections to sewer and electrical. They also provide damage mediation for lost and broken items, and handle graffiti. Coordinators within the engineering department are responsible for the provision of portable toilets, both in public areas and temporary provisions for seasonal sports. Building service workers provide maintenance to washrooms in public buildings.

Police provide a reactive response to incidents in washrooms, responding to calls from 911, other New Westminster staff, or direct calls from civilians. Police have the training to deal with high-risk situations and are often brought in by other City staff when it is an enclosed environment. Police also provide the 24-hr toilet at the police station.

1.5 HOW WE GOT HERE

The approach for this project is based on our collaboration with the city of New Westminster, our thorough review and understanding of the RFP, and our collective experience and interest in social planning, equity, and placemaking. To attain the project objectives, we adopted a four-phase approach.

Preparatory Phase: We collected preliminary information through initial talks with our partner to develop a better understanding of the scope of the project and understanding the local context to get familiar with the socio-economic and political setting in the city.

Information Gathering: The second phase involved gathering critical information such as policies, council reports and grey literature from the City of New Westminster. We further

conducted a literature review including but not limited to economic benefits and inclusivity in public washrooms. We also reviewed relevant case studies on successful public washroom strategies from within Canada and some worldwide.

Analysis & Synthesis: The third phase took information from the phases mentioned earlier and provided a summary of findings, further highlighting the evaluation criteria for assessing the current condition of public washrooms in the City of New Westminster.

Recommendations & Visualization: The fourth phase carries onto the analysis section. We interviewed City staff from different departments to get their perspective on the highlighted issues. After thorough review and discussions, we proposed a set of recommendations that would elevate the public washrooms in the City of New Westminster.

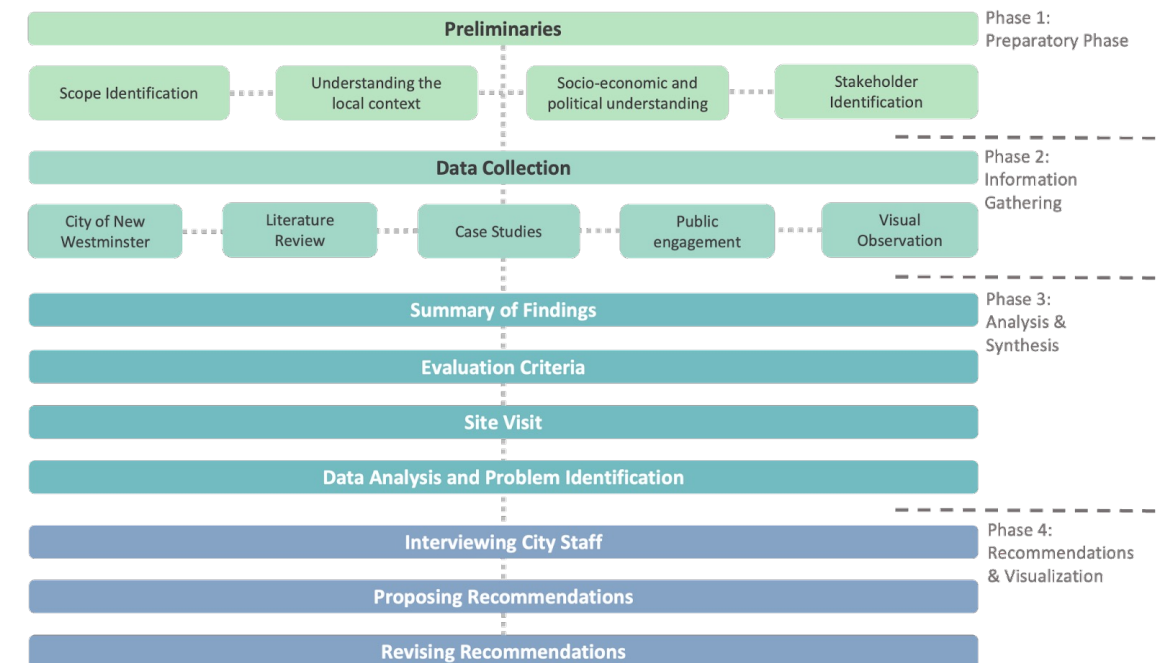


Figure 2: Phase-wise Approach

Organizational Context

2.1 POLICY REVIEW

In September 2021, New Westminster City Council passed the Downtown Livability Strategy, a motion aimed to support livability in New Westminster's Downtown. In October 2021, Council approved various immediate and short-term actions under five areas of focus as a part of the strategy to improve Downtown Livability. The first area of focus is centered on cleanliness and 24-hour public toilet provision.

Specific actions under this focus area include

Immediate:

- Installation of additional, large garbage receptacles and increased collection frequency.
- Contracting specialized waste managed to address human waste.
- Installation of temporary portable toilets Downtown.

Short term:

- Investigate feasibility of late-night garbage collections.
- Continue work to provide 24/7 permanent washrooms and initiative discussions with TransLink and faith-based non-profit service providers.
- Initiate purchasing process for prefabricated stand-alone public toilet.

While the Downtown Livability Strategy explicitly calls for the direct provision of public toilets to support livability, other policy documents in the City of New Westminster outline goals and objectives that would be supported by the provision of public toilets as the provision of public toilets promotes livability through supporting equity, public health, environmental

sustainability, and the local economy. These four themes of livability supported through the provision of public toilets are key aspects of other New Westminster policy documents and are advanced through elements of the Downtown Livability Strategy.

Equity

The provision of 24-hour public toilets is an important step in furthering equity in New Westminster. Equity seeking groups, such as those who are experiencing homelessness, the elderly, people with disabilities, and gender diverse populations have a greater need for equitable and accessible washrooms.

Promoting equity in New Westminster through public toilet provision helps achieve goals and objectives outlined in:

- Age-Friendly Community Strategy^[14]
- New Westminster Downtown Community Plan^[15]
- New Westminster Homelessness Action Strategy^[16]
- New Westminster Official Community Plan^[17]
- Master Transportation Plan^[18]
- Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Plan^[19]
- Envision 2032: New Westminster's Sustainability Framework^[20]
- Community Poverty Reduction Strategy^[21]

Public Health

Public health is supported by public toilets in different ways. The reduction of human waste in public settings reduces the potential for illnesses to spread, and public toilets also promote active transportation modes and park

visitation for diverse demographics.

Promoting public health in New Westminster through public toilet provision helps achieve goals and objectives outlined in:

- Age-Friendly Community Strategy^[14]
- Envision 2032: New Westminster's Sustainability Framework^[20]
- Master Transportation Plan^[12]
- New Westminster Downtown Community Plan^[15]
- New Westminster Official Community Plan^[17]
- Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Plan^[19]

Environmental Sustainability

A healthy natural environment is an important component of a livable city. The provision of public toilets supports natural ecosystems by diverting human waste that ends up in stormwater systems, and eventually riparian environments, from impacting flora and fauna in New Westminster's natural habitats.

Supporting environmental sustainability through public toilets helps achieve goals and objectives outlined in:

- Environmental Strategy and Action Plan^[22]
- Envision 2032: New Westminster's Sustainability Framework^[20]
- Integrated Stormwater Management Plan^[23]
- New Westminster Official Community Plan^[17]
- Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Plan^[19]
- Urban Forest Management Strategy^[24]

The Local Economy

Public toilets create a significant positive impact on the local economy that benefits residents, tourists, employees, and businesses alike. Ensuring that everyone has a place to go keeps waste off the streets and promotes a vibrant and livable Downtown.

Supporting the local economy through public toilets helps achieve goals and objectives outlined in:

- Age-Friendly Community Strategy^[14]
- Envision 2032: New Westminster's Sustainability Framework^[20]
- Future Forward: An Economic Development Plan for New Westminster^[25]
- New Westminster Downtown Community Plan^[15]
- New Westminster Official Community Plan^[17]

2.2 PRIOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The City of New Westminster aims to engage directly impacted stakeholder groups, including anticipated users and the surrounding business community, under the purview of the Public Washroom Strategy. In addition, the engagement aims to cater to the larger community, including gender nonconforming/non-binary people, seniors, and disabled individuals^[13].

The intent to create a Public Washroom Strategy has been released publicly on the City of New Westminster's website. The City has launched "BeHeardNewWest," an online interactive platform where residents of New Westminster can learn about various City projects as well as provide

feedback and ideas to the City. It offers a range of opportunities to participate in City activities, goals, issues, and choices, ranging from online discussion forums and suggestion boards to interactive maps and surveys^[26].

The City has conducted one facilitated session with people with lived and living experience, and several semi-formal interviews with business operators one-on-one, focusing on the need for public washrooms, accessibility, and safety issues. Significant feedback received included:

- The community's requirements are not being addressed; the project is clearly needed.
- Conduct thorough research about user preference and accessibility before installing public washrooms.
- Safety and comfort are vital concerns that matter most to the users.
- Contrasting views on monitoring in and around public washrooms.
- Appropriate lighting and hygiene are vital for users; blue light is frequently favoured but is not recommended, as it does not act as a deterrent to drug use and can result in harm by making injecting more dangerous^[27].
- Users selected Hyack Square as the best location for Downtown.
- Businesses want to situate public restrooms as far away as feasible.
- Public washrooms will alleviate burdens for some businesses.

All information gathered will be considered to shape the key decisions and priority actions in the Public Washroom Strategy.

2.3 INTERVIEWS WITH CITY STAFF

Between February 6th and March 7th, 8 interviews were conducted with City staff from different departments. Meetings lasted between 15 and 30 minutes and had the following goals:

- Better understand the roles and responsibilities of each department.
- Understand how departments collaborate.
- Learn more about existing needs and initiatives.

Takeaways from these meetings are summarized below. These takeaways do not include information on the roles and responsibilities of each department. For more information on that topic, refer section 1.4.

General

- Collaboration between City departments is well established. This includes in conducting regular operations as well as in the context of the Downtown Livability Strategy
- Incidents in washrooms are common, and many departments are involved in responding to them.
- The City is taking a compassionate approach regarding washrooms. This came up in multiple interviews and fits the City's current goal of being "A vibrant, compassionate, sustainable city that includes everyone."
- Homelessness was a key concern for many City staff. Considerations regarding other equity-seeking groups, such as women, seniors, persons with disabilities, and caretakers, were mentioned less often.

- Co-locating washrooms with other amenities was expressed as being efficient and effective. See Anvil Centre.
- Staff addressed the need to address problems at their roots, for example unhoused people not being sheltered.
- First response to incidents in public washrooms spans across multiple departments depending on the severity of the incidents. Multiple departments share responsibility to handle a range of incidents.

Bylaw

The conversation with Bylaw tended towards improper use of washrooms, such as them being broken into after hours, graffiti, and vandalism. Design and fewer restrictions to use were identified as ways to make washrooms more inclusive and less prone to improper use. The need to explore a region-wide public washroom strategy was also expressed, since people aren't bound to one place and cannot rely on the services of one municipality.

Engineering

Concerns that came up with Engineering included user safety, staff safety, drug abuse, as well as concerns related to needles, drug waste/paraphernalia, vandalism, and lacking waste disposal. It was expressed that theft is common and keeping amenities in washrooms is challenging, and that washrooms should have sustainable and functional designs to make maintenance and repair easier.

Planning

The representative from Planning had a social planning lens, focusing on washrooms as it relates to

homelessness. The reason that was given for this focus was that of all equity-seeking groups, the unhoused are least likely to have other options, and least likely to be permitted to use facilities in a private building.

Faith-based organizations and NPOs were identified as being important players in providing access. The COVID-19 pandemic was especially bad because service providers shut their doors at the same time as unsheltered populations were increasing. Emergency provision of toilets was arranged, consisting of 12 portable toilets at the peak. When people had more access, there were fewer complaints about human waste. Portable toilets were slowly lost due to excessive vandalism, drug activity, and challenges with maintenance.

Building Inspection

The conversation with the Building Inspection department focused mainly on how washroom structures get approved and built, and the structural challenges that exist with washrooms. Extreme weather can put washrooms out of order, and considerations need to be made for how to make washrooms accessible all the time, such as through proper insulation, and protection.

Parks

The discussion with Parks focused mainly on challenges in Park washrooms, which include vandalism, misuse, late-night noise, substance abuse, and camping out in buildings. A need for a balance between facilities that are open to everyone and keeping behaviour within washrooms acceptable was expressed. It was also noted that older washrooms (many within parks) might not meet community

needs and current standards as well as new ones. Older washrooms were built for specific purposes, not necessarily with equity in mind.

Fire

Fire shared their experiences regarding incidents within washrooms, and how first response works within the City. First responders in New Westminster make the assumption that when someone locks themselves in a washroom that forced entry is required for their safety. Fire is sometimes involved in this, but they do not have specialized training. Fire can call police for additional support. This places a burden on municipal budgets when police respond because police are expensive.

Fires are a common problem within public washrooms and structures are sometimes burned down. This makes it hard to get contractors for portable toilets, creating issues that span multiple departments.

Police

While speaking with the police department, the topic of the 24-hr washroom at the police station, the only one in New Westminster, came up. It was shared that the lobby and 24-hr toilet at the police station is open to the public during working hours. After-hours there is a watch commander that can buzz people in, observing the door through a camera. The washroom is meant to be open to anyone and came to be because of an overall lack of access city-wide. Increased advertisement of the washroom by the city has increased the number of people using it.

Literature Review



Our literature review consists of an analysis of economic benefits, and considerations for access and inclusivity as they relate to public washroom provision.

3.1 ECONOMIC BENEFITS

A major factor in the insufficient supply of public washrooms is cost, both in constructing the physical infrastructure and for the continued maintenance of facilities^[28]. News articles posted in various media outlets have highlighted the contentious issue of public toilet provision across Canadian cities, often focusing on the cost of the project, and if spending on public toilets is a prudent use of municipal funds^{[29],[30],[31]}. The media attention paid to project cost is not unjustified. Constructing a toilet can incur expenditures in the mid-range of six-figures depending on features, while maintenance fees can incur additional annual costs totalling tens of thousands of dollars^[32]. However, while cost is at the forefront of discussion, media articles rarely focus attention on the business, social, environmental, and health benefits attributed to public toilets and how their provision can provide positive economic externalities that offset municipal expenditures.

3.1.1 Business

Findings from the City of Denver's Public Restroom Pilot Project^[33] highlight significant negative business impacts that occur due to a lack of public washroom access. Public toilets are also an important factor in attracting tourists to a City. Their absence leads to diminished tourism levels, which subsequently impacts the local economy^[34].

3.1.2 Social

A lack of public toilet provision can result in increased incidences of crime, which accompany expensive enforcement and judicial proceedings. Cozens et al. found that a lack of access to public toilets increased the likelihood one would urinate in public^[35]. By providing a sufficient supply of public toilets, incidences of public urination, and enforcement costs meant to cessate the act, would decrease.

3.1.3 Environmental

In Lamichhane & Babcock the authors discuss the environmental harm caused by public waste. It was found that endocrine disrupting hormones and other pharmaceutical chemicals present in human urine were impacting fish and other wildlife in Hawaii^[36]. Public urination was causing waste to be washed into storm water runoff systems, eventually entering riparian environments impacting fish and other wildlife, imposing significant environmental costs.

3.1.4 Health

An insufficient provision of public toilets also imposes costs to public health. Stanwell-Smith notes that a lack of public toilets is leading to increased levels of public urination and defecation that impose serious health concerns^[37]. Those producing waste in public lack sanitary facilities like running water, menstrual products, soap, and hand-drying materials to maintain hygiene, and the people who are then exposed to this waste, whether they are passing by or cleaning it, are subsequently faced with a biohazard. Illness caused by exposure to human waste carries

direct costs to healthcare systems and secondary costs to local economies from reduced labour productivity and participation^[38].

The framing of public toilets has left out the positive economic impacts that result from their provision. The environmental, health, and business benefits that accrue when citizens have a place for relief has been overlooked. Other amenities, such as parks and community centres carry significant costs to the public, yet they are highly valued due to the social, environmental, health, and other benefits they bring. Buckley noted that park visitors hold the political capital that ensures their survival. If public perception regarding the costs of public toilets is a barrier to their provision, a reframing of their importance and benefits is a crucial step to developing their acceptance and public desire^[39].

3.2 INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESS

Washrooms are an essential part of everyday life. Everyone, everywhere, has to use a washroom. When it comes to a lack of availability of public washrooms, some segments of the population are especially susceptible. Those with health issues, pregnant women, gender diverse populations, children, the elderly, those experiencing homelessness, and people with disabilities are especially vulnerable when the number of washrooms, and their features, are insufficient. These subpopulations each have unique sensitivities, but their requirements are all the same: adequate availability of clean, safe, inclusive, and accessible public washrooms^[40]. By viewing washrooms through an intersectional lens, one may get a more precise grasp

of their social significance. A trip to the washroom is radically different for any able-bodied male than for people with mobility limits and physiological issues, as well as cisgender women and nonbinary people^[41].

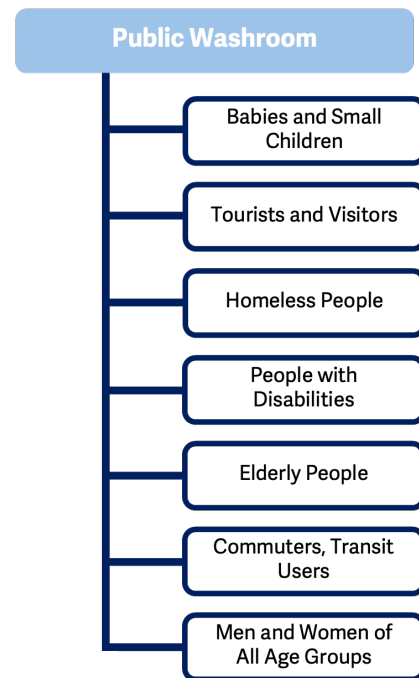


Figure 3: Range of Public Washroom Users

Washroom law in North America has developed rapidly over preceding decades to become more inclusive of various public groups, as seen by user design legislation such as the ANSI (American National Standards Institution) and the American Disability Act. Building rules and standards for accessible washrooms exist at the regional and provincial levels in Canada, but there is currently no federal legislation. Despite advances in building rules and standards over time, exclusionary elements of public washrooms persist today^[42]. These elements of exclusion are both physical and psychological in nature. Physical

exclusion can manifest as a lack of physical fixtures for women compared to men, a failure to retrofit washrooms to accommodate rising female and non-binary users of a facility, or any other factors of the built form of washrooms that hinder useability for certain groups. Psychological exclusion occurs when user groups are concerned about sharing facilities with certain segments of the population. This issue is evident in the concerns present in those who do not wish to share washroom facilities with gender-diverse populations or the unhoused. Psychological exclusion is humiliating and diminishes human existence.

Cities should prioritize greater accessibility (both access and usability), emphasizing what it means to participate in public. Modern life includes the people, the restroom, and the city. The problem is to consider history, legislation, and current limits to better promote a material reality that is inclusive and supportive of living^[44].

4 Environmental Scan

A jurisdictional scan of other municipalities that are undertaking public washroom initiatives was completed to gain perspective on work that's being done outside of New Westminster. Cities that were evaluated included: Calgary, Courtenay, Vancouver, Edmonton and Halifax (Canada), Denver and San Francisco (United States), and Kingston and Sydney (Australia). Themes and recommendations that emerged from this analysis fell into several categories. Big takeaways from each of these categories are outlined below. See appendix [B] for a full overview of the analysis and a full list of takeaways.

General: A public toilet strategy should be adopted to improve the provision of toilets in public space. Toilet strategies should be continually monitored and evaluated over time, and should include goals and objectives, as well as vision and value statements. Normalization of public washrooms in public views is a key component of a successful toilet program. Additionally, local governments should assume responsibility for public toilet provision^{[44],[45]}.

Siting: Proper siting is the primary challenge in providing a public toilet, and the most important aspect of its success. Toilets should be located in places that are highly visible and well-lit and have high pedestrian foot traffic. Toilet locations should be convenient and/or at key points of interest (e.g., in transit stations). Toilets should be located for ease of maintenance, cleaning, and delivery of supplies. Placement of toilets should be sensitive to cultural sites. If possible, toilets should be embedded into existing and new buildings^{[45],[46],[47],[48]}.

Provision and Funding: Public toilet programs can be funded in a variety of ways. These include: through BIAs, social service agencies, community groups, Community Toilet Schemes, where local governments support and partner with local businesses to provide toilets to the public, street furniture contracts driven by advertising revenue, and municipal budgets^{[45],[47]}.

Safety: Washrooms should be well-lit and properly sited. Security cameras, time limits, single-user washrooms, multi-stall washrooms with semi-open tops and bottoms, and multiple exits can help increase the security of a washroom, however they may also inadvertently exclude certain groups from using them. For a harm-reduction approach, doors to washrooms should be able to be opened from the outside. Safety mirrors and sharps containers should be installed (see section on sharps containers below). Design should not allow for spaces to conceal or discard items^{[45],[49]}.

Mobile Toilets: Many cities use mobile toilets as a temporary solution to increased demand for public washrooms. These include portable toilets as well as washroom trailers.

Hours of Operation: The potential of existing toilets should be maximized through the extension of operating hours. Additional cleaning and security checks may be necessary to keep up with demand^[45].

Wayfinding: Washrooms should be easy to find. Wayfinding can increase toilet use by increasing public awareness of their existence and locations. Directional signage and maps (both paper and online) can be used to direct users to washrooms. Signage should be

consistent with a focus on usage, not identity^{[45],[48],[49],[50]}.

On-site Attendants: On-site attendants can be critical for the success of a public toilet, providing services such as: hosting and greeting users, providing information, collecting information about users, monitoring use of the washrooms, performing cleaning and maintenance activities, providing access to emergency services, assisting users that become locked inside, reporting illicit activity, ensuring accessibility of toilets. Attendants, when collaborating with local social organizations or city-sponsored social enterprises, can provide employment for vulnerable members of the public. Additionally, on-site attendants can act as a first responder in the case of an emergency given the appropriate training. ^{[46],[49],[51]}.

Essential Amenities: Changing tables, sanitary disposal bins, and sharps containers should be present in all washrooms^{[46],[48],[49],[52]}.

Inclusivity: Public washrooms should be accessible to all. Care should be taken to determine the appropriate provision and separation of male, female and unisex toilets. These decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis. Appropriate waste bins for diapers and other sanitary materials should be provided in or near the washroom. At least one, preferably two, universal access stalls should be available in multi-stall facilities. Single-occupancy washrooms can be an effective approach to inclusivity. At least one should be available wherever possible^{[47],[50]}.

Sanitation: Minimization of the transmission of diseases should be considered when designing public

washrooms. Having doors permanently open, reducing touchable surfaces, sensors for elements like hand soap, keeping toilet lids closed when flushing, and increased ventilation are possible ways to help in this. Handwashing is also key, and handwashing stations located outside of the public washroom may improve access ^[53].



Spatial Inventory and Analysis

The first step to analyzing the need for public washrooms in New Westminster is examining pre-existing conditions. The following analysis section has two parts: demographic overview and evaluation of existing infrastructure.

As part of the analysis for this strategy document, community demographics were examined to get an idea of the demographic makeup of the City. This information was sourced from Canada's 2021 census and was contextualized prior to our analysis by Tristan Johnson at the City of New Westminster, the City's Senior Planning Analyst. These datasets offer a look at where demographics with specific special considerations for washrooms, such as children or seniors, live in the city and, therefore, which areas may have a greater need for specific accessibility components. Next, dwelling and family types are evaluated to better understand people's lifestyles in different parts of the city. Factors related to income, including median yearly salary and proportion of low-income households, were also examined to see which parts of the city might have more significant economic needs. Finally, the last section looks at visible minorities, language diversity, and immigration, which identifies areas of the city that may have unique needs concerning outreach or wayfinding.

The second section evaluates existing public washrooms in New Westminster. This section provides an overview of existing washrooms and their features, such as hours of operation, accessibility, typology, amenities, and proximity to transit to better understand where infrastructural improvements can be implemented to meet the needs of different demographics.

5.1 COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

Population Growth

The population of each neighbourhood in New Westminster has increased since 2016, except for the West End, which has seen a 1.9% decrease. Downtown, Queensborough, and North Arm North and South neighbourhoods have seen some of the largest increases.

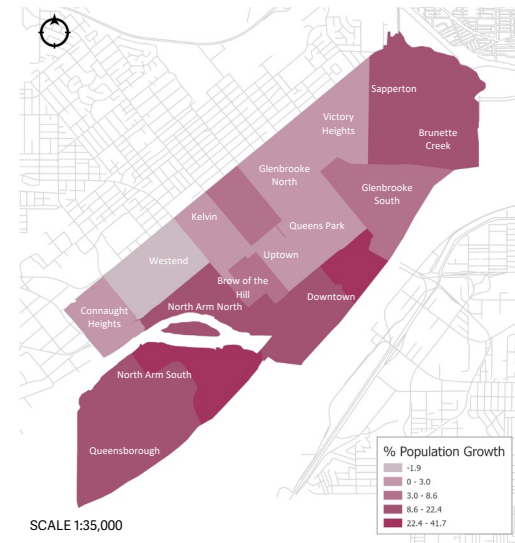


Figure 4: CNW Population Growth 2016-21

Age

The largest age category in the City is working aged people (15-64 years old), with 71% of the population. New Westminster has a quickly growing population of people under 17, with 10.4% growth since 2016. Senior populations are also growing quickly, but at a slower rate than Metro Vancouver (17.2% growth compared to 19% in Metro Vancouver).

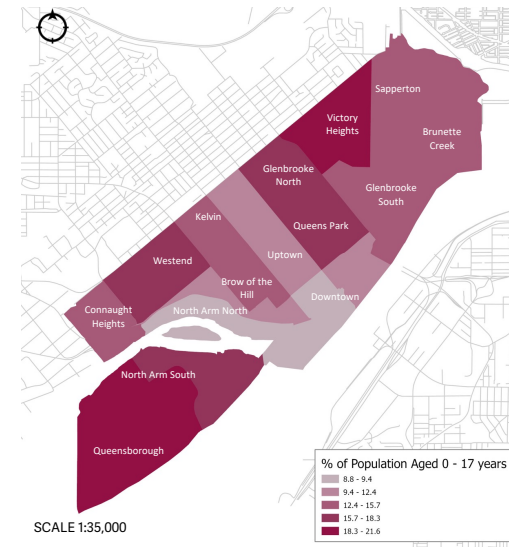


Figure 5: Population aged 0-17 years

Figure 5 shows a concentration of young people in the Queensborough and Victory Heights areas.

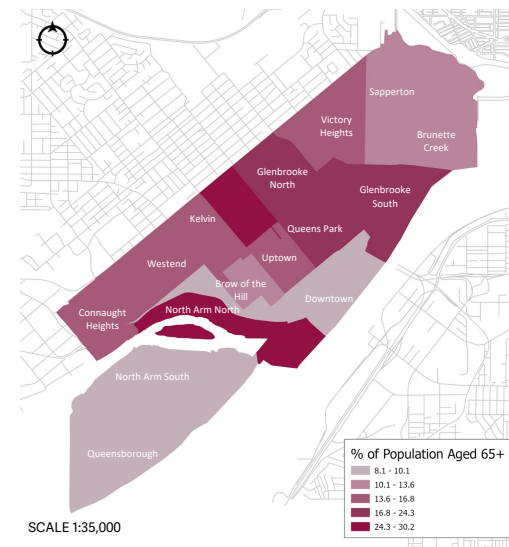


Figure 6: Population aged 65+ years

Figure 6 shows a concentration of seniors in the North Arm North and Kelvin areas.

Dwelling and Family Types

Two thirds of the total dwellings in New Westminster are apartments, with 1/3 being composed of buildings under 5 stories and 1/3 being buildings above 5 stories. Less than 1/6 of the total dwellings are single-family houses. The rest of the housing stock is composed of other multi-family formats like townhouses and row houses.

The largest household type in New Westminster is single persons, comprising 36.8% of total households. Two person households without children are the second most common, with 24.4%.

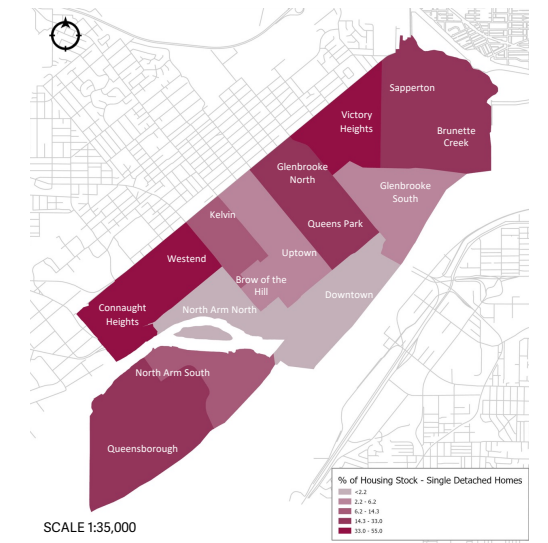


Figure 7: Single Detached Housing Stock

Figure 7 shows a concentration of single-family houses outside of downtown and especially in the Connaught Heights, Westend, and Victory Heights areas.

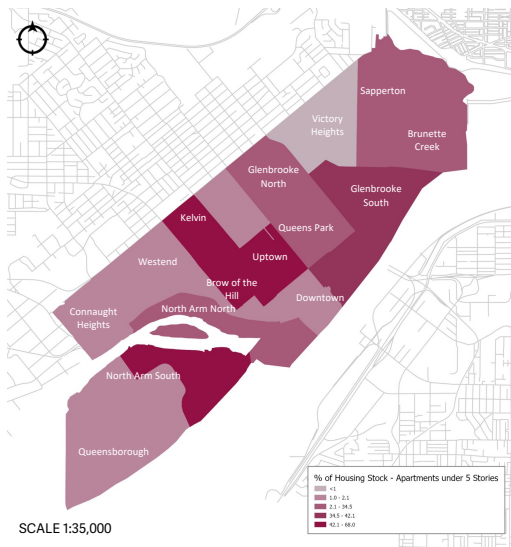


Figure 8: Low-Rise Apartment Stock

Figure 8 shows a concentration of low-rise apartments in the Kelvin, Brow of the Hill, Uptown, and North Arm South areas.

Income

The median total household income in New Westminster is \$82,000, but this number varies greatly depending on the area of the City. 10.1% of people qualify as low income. Child poverty rates are below those of BC as a whole (10.2% compared to 11.4%), but for seniors these rates are slightly higher (16% compared to 13.7%).

In total, New Westminster has slightly less wealth inequality when compared to BC. New Westminster has a Gini coefficient score of 0.28, compared to BC's 0.31.

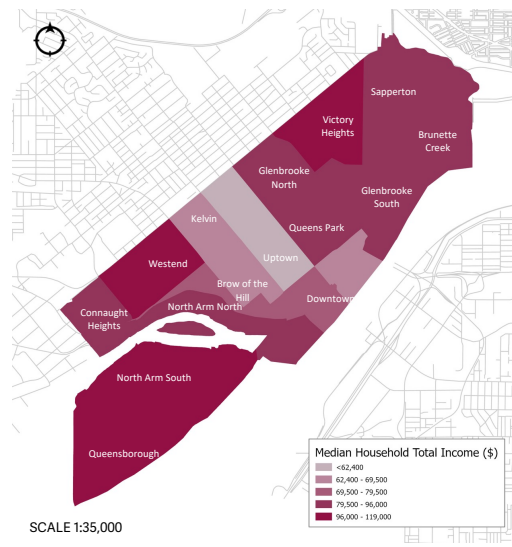


Figure 9: Median Household Income

Figure 9 shows that the Queensborough, North Arm South, Westend, and Victory Heights areas report much higher median incomes than the Downtown, Uptown, Kelvin, and Brow of the Hill areas.

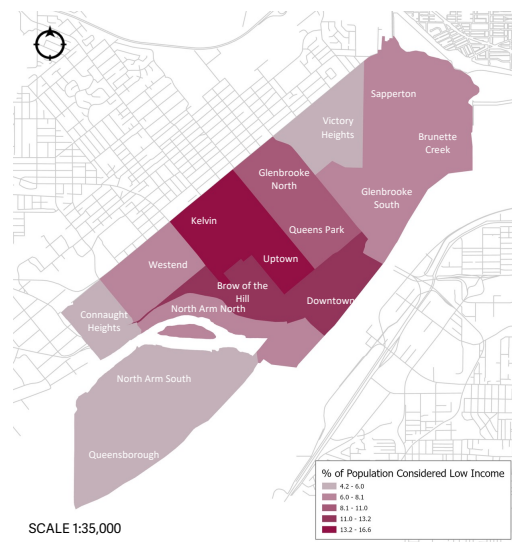


Figure 10: Low-Income Population

Figure 10 shows a concentration of people considered low-income in the Kelvin, Uptown, Brow of the Hill, and Downtown areas.

Visible Minority, Language and Immigration

New Westminster's visible minority population is nearly a majority, with 46.8% of residents falling into this category. There are no dominant groups within the City, although some of the largest groups are South Asians, Chinese, and Filipinos.

2.9% of New Westminster's population do not know English. These are mainly seniors (10.9% of 75+ do not know English). 42.9% of New Westminster residents have a mother tongue other than English, and 27.3% of residents speak multiple languages at home often. The most common mother tongues other than English are Cantonese, Punjabi, Mandarin, Tagalog, and Portuguese.

37.5% of New Westminster's population are immigrants. This has increased by 6.5% since 2016.

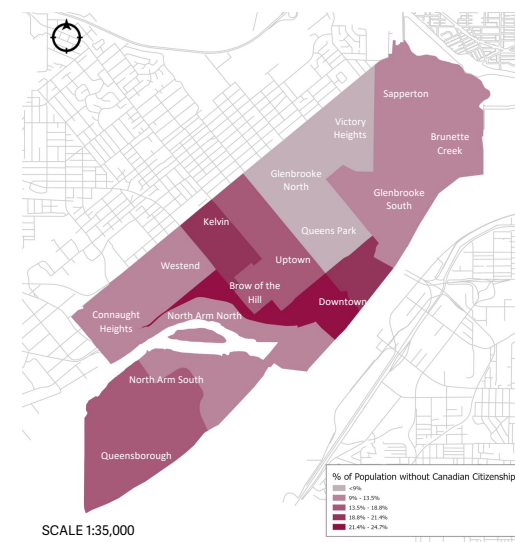


Figure 11: Population with No Canadian Citizenship

5.2 EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

A site visit was conducted to assess the existing public washroom infrastructure in New Westminster. A total of 10 different sites were visited, with each washroom evaluated based on a set of predetermined criteria (Table 1). Some sites contained multiple sets of washrooms at different locations, such as Queen's park which contains outdoor washrooms as well as indoor washrooms inside of Queen's Park Arena. The quality of existing public washroom infrastructure varied across the different sites. Overall, the sites were clean, but issues such as non-functional automatic door buttons, a lack of hot tap water at some sites, and no sharps disposals were frequently encountered problems. The amenities offered at the washroom sites also varied greatly. Some washrooms were wheelchair accessible, contained menstrual products, and had change tables, while others lacked all of the aforementioned amenities. A full analysis of each site can be found in Appendix [C].

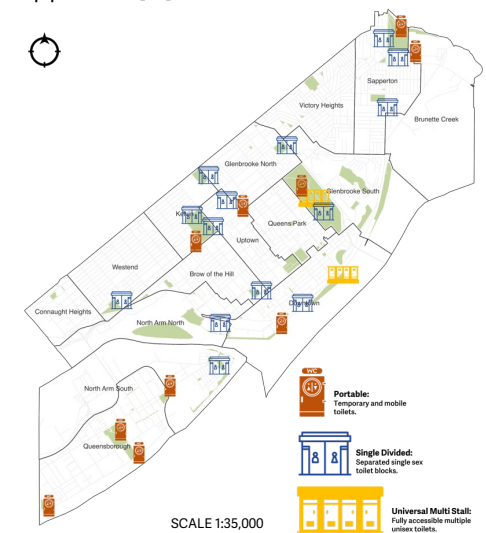


Figure 12: Typology of Public Washrooms in CNW

Despite the disparity in amenities at the different washroom facilities, all of the toilets at the sites visited were in working order, fulfilling their important role in New Westminster's public infrastructure network. Findings

from our site analysis highlight the importance of consistency across a city's public toilets in order to meet a base standard of accessible infrastructure and amenities.

Table 1: Evaluation Criteria for assessing New Westminster's Public Washrooms

Category	Criteria	Result
Clean	Whether there is the presence of refuse or other waste that would inhibit use of facilities.	Yes / No
Damage	Whether there is damaged infrastructure (broken mirrors, broken toilets, etc.)	Yes / No
Proximity	Washroom walking distance from nearest transit: $0 < x < 200m$, $200m < x < 400m$, $400 < x$ * [54]	Low / Med / High
Gender Segregation	Whether the washrooms are segregated based on a gender binary, e.g., male and female washrooms only.	Yes / No
Change Table	Whether there is a change table.	Yes / No
Soap / Hand Sanitizer	Whether there is soap or hand sanitizer.	Yes / No
Sharps Disposal	Whether there is a sharps disposal container.	Yes / No
Signage	Whether there is signage that clearly indicates the facility is a washroom.	Yes / No
Hot & Cold Water	Whether there is both hot and cold water.	Yes / No
Menstrual Products	Whether there are menstrual products.	Yes / No
Menstrual Product Disposal	Whether there is a menstrual product disposal.	Yes / No / Out of Service
Paper Towel	Whether there is a paper towel dispenser.	Yes / No

Air Hand Dryer	Whether there is an air hand dryer.	Yes / No / Out of Service
Wheelchair Access	Whether the washroom is wheelchair accessible.	Yes / No
Handrails	Whether there are handrails.	Yes / No
Lighting	Whether the washroom has working lights.	Yes / No
Smoke Detector	Whether there is a smoke detector.	Yes / No
Attendant	Whether there is an attendant.	Yes / No
Automatic Doors	Whether there are automatic doors.	Yes / No / Out of Service

5.3 LESSONS LEARNED

Some key lessons learned after evaluating the public washrooms in the City of New Westminster are as follows:

Community Demographics

- New Westminster's population is growing rapidly.
- Working-age people are the greatest demographic category – 71%.
- 2/3 of dwellings in New Westminster are apartments, only 1/6 are single family.
- Median household income is \$82,000.
- 2.9% of population doesn't know English.
- 37.5% of New West's population are immigrants.

Key Neighbourhoods

Based on the demographic analysis, the following neighbourhoods may benefit from being prioritized due to multiple factors that affect need for washrooms.

- **Downtown** - High population growth

and high proportion of high-rise apartments, non-citizens, and low-income families.

- **Queensborough** - High population growth and high proportion of children under 18.
- **North Arm North** - High population growth and high proportion of seniors, high-rise apartments, and non-citizens.

Existing Infrastructure

There are various physical amenities that can improve health and safety, inclusivity, and accessibility in the City's public washrooms.

Health & Safety

- **Sharps disposal** - Only one of the washrooms included in the analysis had a sharps disposal.
- **Menstrual products** - 27% of washrooms contained menstrual products.
- **Cleanliness** - All of the washrooms included in the analysis were cleaned to a high-standard.

-
- All washrooms included in the analysis were stocked with either soap or sanitizer.

Accessibility

- None of the washrooms included in the analysis had functional automatic doors.
- All washrooms included in the analysis had handrails.
- All washrooms included in the analysis were wheelchair accessible.
- 80% of washrooms were located within 400m of a transit hub.

Inclusivity

- Greater availability of all-gender washrooms. 73% of washrooms were segregated by gender.
- Only 27% of washrooms contained change tables.



Recommendations

Based on the outcomes of the literature review, conversations with City staff, jurisdictional scan, and analysis of demographics, we recommend the following actions and considerations for public washrooms. Worth noting is that this list isn't necessarily specific to New Westminster, but for washrooms in general. For recommendations tailored to New Westminster, see section 7: Conclusions and key Takeaways.

Recommendations in this section are separated into two categories: **physical recommendations**, which speak to the built aspects of public washrooms, and **organizational recommendations**, which speak to policy and procedures. Within these two categories are sub-categories based on the length of time in which the recommendations can be implemented. **Short-term recommendations** are mainly small changes that can be implemented immediately, **mid-term recommendations** take a bit more planning and time, and **long-term recommendations** indicate the need for major structural changes. None of the "Organizational" recommendations fit into the "short-term" category.

SYMBOLS

- P** Physical Recommendations
- O** Organizational Recommendations

6.1 SHORT-TERM

- P Gender-inclusive Signage:** Use gender-inclusive signage to indicate that everyone is welcome to use the washroom, regardless of their gender identity.
- P Changing Tables:** Offer changing tables, ideally in washrooms for all gender identities. Adult-sized changing facilities can be essential facilities for caregivers and individuals with disabilities
- P Non-slip Surfaces:** Ensure that floors and surfaces are non-slip and slip-resistant to prevent accidents and injuries.
- P Sanitary Products:** Provide free menstrual products for those who need them, and make sure they are easily accessible.
- P Sharps Disposal Containers:** Should be provided to ensure safety and the appropriate disposal of hazardous materials.
- P Sanitary Disposal Bins:** Provision of disposal bins that can be used for menstrual products, diapers, and other waste for all gender identities.

6.2 MID-TERM

- P Wayfinding:** Make sure that the washroom is clearly signposted and easy to locate, with signage that is large and visible. Online and paper maps can be provided to help in locating washrooms.
- O Public Washroom Strategy:** A public washroom strategy with well-defined values, evaluation criteria for existing and future washrooms, and typologies should be implemented to ensure

high standards of provision city-wide.

- P Ensuring Safety:** Ensure that the washroom is well-lit, with clear sightlines to prevent potential safety concerns, such as theft, harassment or assault.
- P Indestructibility:** Limit amenities in washrooms that can be easily broken and result in harm, for example non-shatterproof mirrors. Any amenities that are offered in washrooms should be difficult to destroy, made of sturdy material, and easy to replace.
- P Aesthetics:** Washrooms should be attractive and appealing. Art, murals or other low-barrier improvements can be used to increase appeal and help washrooms blend into public space.
- P Hygiene and Cleanliness:** Maintain high standards of hygiene and cleanliness, with frequent cleaning and restocking of supplies such as soap, toilet paper, and paper towels.

6.3 LONG TERM

- P Accessibility:** Ensure that the washroom is wheelchair accessible, with wider doorways, universal stalls, and grab bars for support. Washroom doors should have buttons to automatically open them.
- O Implement Anti-discrimination Policies:** Display anti-discrimination policies and posters that promote a safe and inclusive environment in the washroom.

- P Family and Caregiver Facilities:** Offer facilities for parents, caregivers and individuals with disabilities, such as feeding areas and private rooms for nursing or medical needs.
- O Co-locate Washrooms with Other Amenities:** Incorporate washrooms into publicly-accessible buildings such as schools, community centres, transit centres, and large developments. Development permit conditions can be used to ensure public washroom access in large-scale, appropriately-located new developments
- P Gender Inclusive Washrooms:** Appropriate provisions and separation of male, female and unisex toilets should be provided. Single-occupancy washrooms are the most inclusive.
- O Funding:** Washrooms can be funded in collaboration with local businesses. Funding can be offered to businesses to offset the cost of making their washrooms open to the public. Signs or stickers can be given to alert the public that they are free to use the facilities.
- P Inclusive design:** Consider inclusive design principles when designing and renovating washrooms to ensure they are accessible and welcoming to everyone, regardless of their abilities, gender, age, or cultural background.
- O 24-hour Washrooms:** Extending the hours of a washroom is the most effective way to improve accessibility. Set operating hours depending on community needs.

- P Siting:** Sites of new washrooms should be carefully selected, as they are the greatest factor to the washroom's success. Washrooms should be located in locations with high pedestrian foot traffic, near key sites and amenities. Consider the specific site when selecting locations, one size does not fit all.
- O On-site Attendants:** In many situations, attendants are critical to the success of a public washroom. They can serve many purposes, such as greeting users, monitoring the restrooms, performing cleaning and maintenance activities, and providing emergency services. Attendants that are integrated into the communities they are meant to serve are especially effective and provide additional benefits to vulnerable members of the public. These attendants might be employed by collaborating with local social enterprises. Staff should be trained to be aware of and responsive to the needs of all users, including those with disabilities or others who may require additional assistance.
- P Washrooms for Different Target Users:** Design and siting of public washrooms should be dependent on the target demographics. A combination of permanent, semi-permanent and mobile washrooms can be used to suit different needs. The demographics of the neighbourhood should be considered, and key neighbourhoods should be prioritized. According to our

analysis, these are: Downtown, North Arm North, and Queensborough.

- O Washrooms as a Human Right:** Washrooms should be considered a human right by the municipal government. This mindset results in the greatest benefits to accessibility and equity.
- P Considerations for Construction:** Washrooms should be built with the intention of being open and accessible as often as possible. Considerations for weather, seasons, and 24-hour provision. For the cold, considerations for insulation and heating need to be made. The construction of washrooms should also consider the ease of repair and replaceability.
- O Collaboration Between City Departments:** Public washroom provision is highly inter-departmental. A committee should be formed with representatives from different departments. A public washroom coordinator is helpful to coordinate between departments. Collaboration between departments doing provision, maintenance, and emergency services is vital.
- O Intermunicipal Collaboration:** If there is a disparity in the quality, or number of services offered across different municipalities, vulnerable populations are forced from their home communities to access services elsewhere if they are not available locally. Initiating conversations with municipal planners to explore efficiencies through collaboration in regard

to the provision of public services could help ensure that people are getting the support they need without having to relocate.

- O Framing of Public Washrooms:** Public washrooms are necessary infrastructure and an economical investment that produces positive externalities; however, these elements are often overlooked, and public perception tends to focus on the cost of washrooms. Discussions surrounding the provision of washrooms should focus on the positive impacts public washrooms have on health, local business, and the environment, rather than the cost of services.

Conclusion and Key Takeaways

Like many cities across the Province, the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the housing crisis have presented challenges for New Westminster; in particular the City's need for greater access to public washrooms. Not only is increased access to public washrooms important to help support the City's most vulnerable, but it also ensures that New Westminster continues to be a liveable, safe, and supportive community for all. The recommendations discussed in the earlier section of the report can be prioritized into six key action items that the City of New Westminster can implement in order to ensure the provision of humane, equitable, and accessible public washrooms for all residents.

Physical Recommendations

- 1. Key Amenities** Provide key amenities in all washrooms for an inclusive experience.
 - Inclusive signage and wayfinding.
 - Change tables.
 - Menstrual products.
 - Sanitary disposal bins.
 - Sharps containers.
- 2. Maintenance in Mind** Construct all new washrooms with maintenance and year-round access in mind.
 - Modular, indestructible builds.
 - Easy to clean and care for.
 - Good lighting and ventilation.
 - Design for extreme weather to ensure access.
- 3. Inclusive Design and Siting** Provide washrooms for everyone, with inclusivity as a top priority.
 - Accessible stalls and single-user

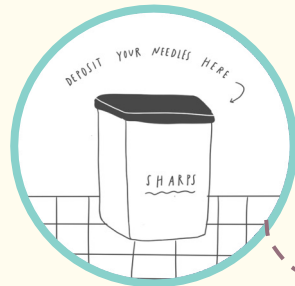
washrooms.

- Gender inclusive washrooms.
- Site and build with target users in mind.
- Site in areas with clear sightlines and pedestrian traffic to ensure safety.

Organizational Recommendations

- 1. Washroom Strategy** Adopt a washroom strategy that clearly defines organizational goals, values, and processes.
 - Develop a City-wide washroom strategy.
 - Prioritize washrooms as a human right.
 - Produce evaluation criteria for washrooms and continually monitor use.
- 2. Elevate Existing Washrooms** Whenever possible, make the most of existing infrastructure.
 - Extend hours to 24-hr when possible.
 - Consider on-site attendants to steward the washroom.
 - Encourage collaboration between City departments to optimize processes.
- 3. Co-Location** Integrate washrooms into public buildings and larger developments.
 - Include publicly accessible washrooms in public buildings such as schools, community centres, transit centres, and municipal buildings.
 - Utilize development permit conditions to include public washrooms in large-scale new developments.

VISUALIZING KEY TAKEAWAYS



Provision of **key amenities** in all washrooms.



Practice **universal signages** where possible.



Push for **inclusion** and **accessibility** for all.



Ensure **trained staff** and **supportive communication**

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Appendices

APPENDIX A - Request for Proposal

RFP FOR SCARP PLANNING STUDIO

CITY OF NEW WESTMINSTER

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- 1. Project Abstract – Developing a Public Toilet Washroom Strategy in New Westminister: considering access to public toilet facilities as a part of Basic Public Infrastructure.** New Westminister is a fast-growing and dense city in the Metro Vancouver area, and is seeking to increase livability and cleanliness by emphasizing the importance of considering the provision of just, equitable, and humane public washroom facilities as part of basic public infrastructure and by developing a citywide plan for ongoing access to public washrooms based upon this approach. Building on a pilot installation currently underway in the downtown area, lessons from that project will provide input into a broader public washroom strategy. It's important to understand that this work is new, dynamic, and not yet clearly articulated. The specific scope of work will be shaped through this process, but generally, the City is looking to engage a student team to: assist with engagement, do research and analysis, develop a public washroom strategy for the City of New Westminister, and develop a 'Best Practice Guide' for the region.
- 2. Background** – A number of issues such as fires, vacant properties, the COVID-19 pandemic, and increased homelessness have impacted livability in New Westminister's downtown. The City of New Westminister is taking a compassionate approach and has an interdepartmental team working to accomplish these actions. External stakeholders on the Business and Local Economy Task Force and the At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force are also being consulted.

In September 2021, Council passed a motion to support livability, called the Downtown Recovery Strategy. You can read the full motion, [here](#). The City has developed a strategy that includes immediate and short-term actions, endorsed by Council in October 2021. Read the report, [here](#). Longer term actions are

undergoing analysis and future updates will provide additional information. There are five areas of focus for the immediate and short-term actions.

1. Cleanliness and 24-hour public toilets
2. Homeless outreach and added emergency shelter capacity
3. Opioid epidemic and illicit drug response
4. Business support and engagement
5. Work with Fraser Health to address mental health issues

It is in the first area that this project is focused on. While garbage receptacles and litter pick may have been addressed, there remains only a few public washrooms in the downtown area and only one of those is available 24 hours. Its location at the police station means that it is not as well utilized as it could be.

- 3. Partner Profile** – The City of New Westminister is a dense community in the centre of Metro Vancouver, and spans just 15 square kilometres. Its population is roughly 80,000 people and growing. This project will address a need that has existed for many years but has been amplified as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Public washrooms are not managed or planned by a single department. Instead, the responsibility for the planning, provision, and maintenance is mostly dependent on where the washroom is, which adds a layer of complexity to addressing the issue. A Downtown Livability Strategy Working Group has been formed as an internal staff team to address the larger strategy tactics, and a smaller Public Washroom Subgroup has also recently been formed. Jen Arbo, Economic Development Coordinator will be the main contact for this RFP's project, but students should expect to also work with the Public Washroom Subgroup.
- 4. Scope of Work** – It's important to understand that this work is new, dynamic, and not yet clearly articulated. Because of the emergent needs of the community, some of the tactics underway are a "do now, evaluate and refine later" approach with unspecified timelines. All work will take place in New Westminister, which sits on the bank of the Fraser River and rising above in quite hilly terrain. New Westminister is also an old city, and infrastructure is often aging or possibly non-compliant to modern building code. This complex and unique scenario means both challenge and opportunity. Developing a strategy that contemplates New

Westminster's traits and constraints and prioritizes users' needs, while also recognizing the incredible capital cost washrooms can require provides a chance to consider creative and innovative solutions. There exists quite a few case studies in providing dignified access to washrooms in other jurisdictions. There are four main components envisioned to form this body of work:

- Assist with Engagement - assist City staff in a public engagement process with the public and businesses regarding public toilets,
- Research and Analysis - perform research (through various means and methods including consulting other municipalities) and synthesize this research into practical and tangible ideas that can feed into a citywide strategy for public washroom access,
- Development of Public Washroom Strategy for the City of New Westminster – this is a specific document to guide planning for public washrooms in the future, including maintenance, procurement and installation, and lessons learned that can be carried forward,
- Develop a 'Best Practice Guide' for the Region - potentially produce a document or publishable item that contains best practice information and that can act as a reference manual for the region and as a guide for organizations, such as other municipalities, seeking to better understand their roles in providing public washrooms.

5. Deliverables – There are four main written deliverables required with the following approximate dates.

1. Project Proposal (mid to end of October) – refined statement of work
2. Interim Report (early December) – reflection of their experience and progress to date
3. Draft Report (early March) – the actual strategy document and best practices guide – this may be presented to City Council / staff as a presentation
4. Final Report (early April) – the refined strategy document and best practices guide.

Student teams will present their Proposal, Interim Report and Final Report.

6. Required Skills and Experience – While there is no need to have functional expertise on toilets, sewers, engineering, etc. an understanding of the importance of dignified access to public washroom facilities is essential. Familiarity with the challenges that municipal governments face is also an important skill, though not mandatory. Familiarity with public realm planning best practices is an asset. Research skills such as environmental scans, comparative evaluation, development of metrics, data analysis, etc. are all

helpful. Some basic graphic design skills, document layout and structuring skills, and plain language writing are preferred.

7. Project Costs – The City anticipates few costs associated with this work, though minor expenses can likely be covered through regular operational budgets.

APPENDIX B - Policy Review and Best Practices

This section will review public toilet strategies in other municipalities in Canada and abroad. The following table shows the public toilet strategies that were evaluated. Then, themes and recommendations that emerged from these strategies will be outlined.

Many of the strategies on this list lack complete information. Some are only reports, such as Calgary's, and only discuss research findings. Others, such as Vancouver and Halifax, only discuss park washrooms. Some do not have official policy documents, such as Courtenay and San Francisco, and some are still in progress, for example Edmonton and Cardiff. While this review of the documents is valuable, a future action item may be to get in contact with these cities to gain a deeper understanding of the methods they are using to manage public toilets and their plans going forward.

Table: Best Practices

City Name	Strategy Name	Year Published	Known Toilet Types	Funding Methods	Notes
Calgary	Public Toilets in the Centre City	2008	Park Washrooms, portable toilets, APT	Municipal budget	
Courtenay	N/A	N/A	Standalone toilet (Urbaloo)	Municipal budget	24-hr toilet installed downtown in 2022
Denver, Colorado	Coordinated Public Toilet Initiative	2018	Mobile washrooms, public buildings, park washrooms, fixed location facilities	Municipal budget	
Vancouver	Parks Washroom Strategy; Public Washroom Design and Technical Guidelines	2020; 2022	Parks washrooms, APTs, public buildings	Municipal budget, street furniture contract (JC Decaux)	
Edmonton	Public Washroom Strategy	N/A	Parks washrooms, public buildings, portable toilets (seasonal and year-round), permanent outhouses, standalone toilets, transit facilities, mobile washrooms	Municipal budget	In progress as of 2022
Halifax	Parks Washrooms and Drinking Fountains Strategy	2020	Parks washrooms, public buildings, transit facilities,	Municipal budget	
Kingston, Australia	Public Toilet Strategy	2016	Divided unisex, parks toilets, transit facilities, standalone toilets, public buildings, automated toilets	Municipal budget	

Sydney, Australia	Public Toilet Strategy	2014	Parks toilets, standalone toilets, APTs, public buildings, private businesses (e.g., shopping centres)	Municipal budget, private businesses, other public authorities (parks, harbour authority, transit)	
San Francisco	N/A	N/A	Mobile washrooms, standalone toilets (Portland Loo)	Municipal budget, street furniture contract (JC Decaux)	"Pit Stop" Program
Cardiff, Wales	Local Toilets Strategy Interim Progress Statement	2022	Public buildings, parks toilets, transit facilities	Municipal budget	Final strategy still in progress as of 2022

Themes and Recommendations

This section provides a discussion on themes and recommendations that emerged from existing strategies. These should not be taken as a concrete list of recommendations, but rather a comprehensive list of suggestions from the literature.

General

- A public toilet strategy should be adopted to improve the provision of toilets in public space^[1]
- Toilet strategies should be continually monitored and evaluated overtime^{[1][2]}
- Evaluation criteria should be developed and utilised to support short and long term objectives^[1]
- Toilet strategies should include goals and objectives, as well as vision and value statements^[1]
- Normalization of public washrooms in public views is a key component of a successful toilet program^[1]
- Local governments should assume responsibility for public toilet provision^[1]
- Toilets can be separated by "level" based on permanence, accessibility and usage type to help install toilets that are context-appropriate and require fewer resources^[3].
- Key values and considerations can be laid out for situations where toilets are to be replaced, refurbished, removed, or installed to help guide decision making. Potential elements to consider are: existing provision, safety, inclusive access, cleanliness, siting and design, investment priority, and community benefit^[3].
- Health authorities or other levels of government can require municipalities to develop public toilet strategies as a way to improve provision^[4].

Siting

- Proper siting is the primary challenge in providing a public toilet, and the most important aspect of its success^[2].
- Toilets should be located in places that are highly visible and well-lit^{[2],[3],[5]}.
- Toilets should be located in places of high pedestrian foot traffic^{[2],[3],[6]}.
- Entrances should face towards the road^{[2],[3]}.
- Toilets should be located to meet Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles^{[2],[3]}.
- Toilets should not be located in areas where an individual can easily be trapped, such as places that are in-set, have tall fences, or high vegetation^{[2],[3]}.
- Toilets should be located for ease of maintenance, cleaning, and delivery of supplies^[2].
- Toilets should not be located in areas where trespassing is discouraged (eg parking garages)^[2].
- Toilet locations should be convenient and/or at key points of interest (e.g. in transit stations)^{[2],[3],[5],[6]}.
- Placement of toilets should not block the street or flow of traffic^[2].
- Placement of toilets should be sensitive to cultural sites^[2].
- If possible, toilets should be embedded into existing and new buildings^{[2],[3],[5],[7]}.
- The City of Sydney aims to provide public toilets every 400m from any point in its central city, from village centres, and from major parks^[7].

Provision and Funding

- Toilets should be planned in collaboration with members of the public and local organizations, such as BIAs, social service agencies, and community groups^[2].
- Toilets can be funded through Community Toilet Schemes, where local governments support and partner with local businesses to provide toilets to the public^[2].
- Toilets can be funded through coordinated street furniture programs through multi-media companies, such as JC Decaux. These companies provide toilets, primarily “Automated Public Toilets” (APTs) in exchange for the ability to advertise on the city’s street furniture^{[2],[3]}.
- Some cities choose to fund public toilets solely through their municipal budgets^[2].

Safety

- Safety improvements can be made through Crime Prevention Through

Environmental Design (CPTED) principles – washrooms should be well-lit and sited^[2].

- Security cameras can be used to improve security^[2].
- Time limits can be used to improve security and decrease misuse of toilets^[2].
- Single-user washrooms can be safer, however multi-stall washrooms can improve passive surveillance^[3].
- Multi-stall washrooms should have doors with semi-open tops and bottoms, as well as multiple entrances and exits^[3].
- For a harm-reduction approach, doors to washrooms should be able to be opened from the outside. Safety mirrors and sharps containers should be installed (see section on sharps containers below). Design shouldn’t allow for spaces to conceal or discard items^[3].

Mobile Toilets

- Many cities use mobile toilets as a temporary solution to increased demand for public washrooms^{[9],[10]}.
- San Francisco has a unique “Pit Stop” program, which cycles mobile washrooms through 33 sites depending on data collected by Public Works. The goal of the program is to provide clean and safe public toilets to the City’s most vulnerable neighbourhoods^[9].

Hours of Operation

- The potential of existing toilets should be maximized through the extension of operating hours^[2].
- Additional cleaning and security checks may be necessary to keep up with demand of 24-hr toilets^[11].

Wayfinding

- Washrooms should be easy to find^[5].
- Wayfinding can increase utilisation of toilets by increasing public awareness of their existence and locations^[2].
- Directional signage should be used to direct users to washrooms^[5].
- Online, paper, and mobile maps can be used to direct users to washrooms^[7].
- Signage should be consistent with a focus on usage, not identity^[8].

On-site Attendants

- On-site attendants can be critical for the success of a public toilet, providing services such as: hosting and greeting users, providing information, collecting information about users, monitoring use of the washroom, performing cleaning and maintenance activities, providing access to emergency services, assisting users that become locked inside, reporting illicit activity, ensuring accessibility of

- toilets^{[6],[10]}.
- On-site attendants, when collaborating with local social organizations or city-sponsored social enterprises, can provide employment for vulnerable members of the public^[10].
- On-site attendants can act as a first responder in the case of an emergency^[8].

Essential Amenities

- Baby changing tables are a fundamental requirement for public washrooms^{[6],[8]}.
- Adult changing tables can provide an essential service for seniors or adults with disabilities^[9].
- Sharps containers for used injection needles are a critical element of a public washroom, and help in providing safety^{[5],[6],[8],[9]}.

Inclusivity

- Public washrooms should be accessible to all^{[3],[7],[8]}.
- Washrooms should have clear, accessible and consistent signage^[3].
- Care should be taken to determine the appropriate provision and separation of male, female and unisex toilets. These decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis^[3].
- Sanitary napkin disposal bins should be provided in all female and unisex toilet facilities^[3].
- Appropriate waste bins for diapers should be provided in or near the washroom^[3].
- At least one, preferably two, universal access stalls should be available in multi-stall facilities^[8].
- Single-occupancy washrooms can be an effective approach to inclusivity. At least one should be available wherever possible^[8].

Sanitation

- Handwashing is a key element of public washrooms^[8].
- Handwashing stations located outside of the public washroom may improve access^[8].
- Minimization of the transmission of diseases should be considered when designing public washrooms. Having doors permanently open, reducing touchable surfaces, sensors for elements like hand soap, keeping toilet lids closed when flushing, and increased ventilation are possible ways to reduce transmission^[8].

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APPENDIX C – Analysis of Existing Public Washrooms in New Westminster

Category	Pier Park	Anvil Centre	Quayside Park*	Moody Park (West)	Moody Park (East)	Queen's Park	Queen's Park Arena	Terry Hughes Park	Sapperton Park	Hume Park	Front Street Portable
Clean	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Damage	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Proximity	Low	High	High	High	High	High	High	Med	High	Low	Med
Gender Segregation	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Change Table	Yes*	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Soap / Hand Sanitizer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sharps Disposal	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Signage	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Water	Yes	Yes**	Yes**	Yes**	Yes**	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Menstrual Products	No	Yes***	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Menstrual Product Disposal	Out of Service	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Paper Towel	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Air Hand Dryer	Out of Service	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Wheelchair Access	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Handrails	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lighting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Smoke Detector	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Attendant	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Automatic Doors	Out of Service	Out of Service	Out of Service	Out of Service	Out of Service	Out of Service	Out of Service	Out of Service	Out of Service	Out of Service	No
Ventilation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dividers Between Urinals	Yes	Yes	Not Applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not Applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not Applicable
* Only present in female washroom											
** Only cold water											
*** Menstrual products cost money											

APPENDIX D – What we heard from the City

General

- Collaboration between City departments is well established. This includes in conducting regular operations as well as in the context of the Downtown Livability Strategy
- Incidents in washrooms are common, and many departments are involved in responding to them.
- The City is taking a compassionate approach in regards to washrooms. This came up in multiple interviews, and fits the City's current goal of being "A vibrant, compassionate, sustainable city that includes everyone."
- Homelessness was a key concern for many City staff. Considerations regarding other equity-seeking groups, such as women, seniors, persons with disabilities, and caretakers, were mentioned less often.

Bylaw

- A major problem is the restriction of access to washrooms. There is no public washroom access at night except at the Police Station, causing some people to break in at night to Parks washrooms.
- Accessibility is another big concern; some washrooms are labeled accessible but have restricted access like heavy doors.
- Design strategies to avoid graffiti and vandalism should be explored.
- Need to explore a region-wide public washroom strategy, since people aren't bound to one place.

Engineering

- Common issues include user safety, staff safety, drug abuse, as well as concerns related to needles, drug waste/paraphernalia, vandalism, lacking waste disposal (especially sharps).
- It's difficult to keep amenities in the washroom. Theft of anything in washrooms is common, even stall doors or water taps.
- It's important to have sustainable and functional public washroom designs. The possibility for quick and effective replacement of broken parts is helpful.

Planning

- Access to washrooms is a long-standing issue and has been on the radar of homelessness advocates. The public realm in general has a shortage of public washrooms, which are currently primarily placed in parks and recreation areas.

- Ensuring that people have options is important. Washroom provision and increasing availability is the best we can do. When people are sheltered, there is less need for public washrooms.
- Planning places an emphasis on unsheltered populations. Seniors/others have more options, since businesses are more likely to let them use their washrooms.
- Faith-based organizations and NPOs can be important players in providing access. The COVID-19 pandemic was bad because service providers shut their doors at the same time as unsheltered populations were increasing.
- During the pandemic emergency provision was provided, consisting of 12 portable toilets at the peak. When people had more access, there were fewer complaints about human waste. Portable toilets were slowly lost due to excessive vandalism, drug activity, and challenges with maintenance.
- Co-locating washrooms with other amenities is efficient and effective. See Anvil Centre.

Building Inspection

- Brick and mortar public washrooms require building permits before being built. Porta-potties on sidewalks are exempt from this.
- Structural challenges exist with washrooms. Extreme weather can put washrooms out of order. Considerations need to be made for how to make washrooms accessible all the time, such as insulation, protection.
- Cost is a significant challenge.
- Aesthetics are important. How do we make washrooms look nice, not detract from the public space? New West is using a contracted architect for the new washroom in Hyack Square to improve aesthetics and provide a greater sense of dignity.
- Considerations for safety features need to be made, for example sprinklers. Should they be included? How should they go off?
- Washrooms can be provided via development permits in schools, park facilities, and new buildings that are accessible to the public, especially big projects where washrooms can easily be slipped in and full-time staff are already present.

Parks

- Challenges in Park washrooms include vandalism, misuse, late-night noise, substance abuse, and camping out in buildings.
- Public spaces show a reflection of great issues happening in the City. Issues downtown make it to the rest of the City, including parks.
- There needs to be a balance between facilities that are open to everyone and keeping things acceptable.
- Solutions to issues must be case- and site-specific

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- Older washrooms might not need community needs and current standards as well as new ones. Older washrooms were built for specific purposes, not necessarily with equity in mind.

Fire

- First responders in New Westminster make the assumption that when someone locks themselves in a washroom that forced entry is required for their safety. Fire is sometimes involved in this, but they don't have specialized training.
- Fire and police work together on responding to incidents, but first response goes to whoever gets there first. They also collaborate with bylaw (integrated services).
- Fire can call police for additional support. This places a burden on municipal budgets when police respond because police are expensive.
- Washrooms have fires frequently and are sometimes burned down. This makes it hard to get contractors for portable toilets.
- There needs to be a balance between having locks/privacy and giving users the opportunity to lock themselves in.
- Need to address problems at their roots, for example unhoused people not being sheltered.

Police

- Lobby and 24-hr toilet at police station is open to the public during working hours. After-hours there's a watch commander that can buzz people in, observes the door through a camera. Washroom is meant to be open to anyone.
- The washroom at the police station came about because of an overall lack of access. New messaging from the city has increased the number of people using it.
- Response to incidents depends on priority. In some cases, EMS or fire respond as well.
- People use sanitizer to light fires.

