
Public Toilets in Downtown Victoria: A Discussion Paper



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Executive Summary

Public washroom availability has been recognized as an issue in many countries around the world over the last decade. In Victoria, the issue has been regularly raised, especially since the closure of the Centennial Square washrooms.

Public washroom provision in communities is not the responsibility of one particular party(s) and private providers have generally addressed need by making their facilities more or less available to the public. Recently issues with drug use and vandalism, however, have resulted in a more restrictive approach in allowing use of private washrooms and forced the closure of the unsupervised City washrooms in the Square.

The above experience and resulting response by washroom providers have heightened the perceived need and affected those requiring washrooms in the downtown. In an informal survey, local shoppers and workers reported knowing where they could go, however most felt that there was a need for more public washrooms. Visitors were able to find places to go and were rarely declined access, but felt compelled to make purchases. Marginalized persons have the greatest difficulty accessing washrooms, especially late in the day, and often resort to using the outdoors. A final group, bar patrons, has a unique need for service which, in its absence, has created a public urination problem for merchants and property owners who must contend with the mess and smell the following mornings.

Cities in Europe and North America have responded to need in a variety of ways. Many have formed agreements with advertising agencies to establish automated public toilets in exchange for public advertising opportunities. Some have hybridized small enterprises with public washrooms. Others have maintained existing facilities with supervision and in some cases they have used portable units. In Europe, retractable urinals have filled a niche in addressing the need for the "evening economy."

The paper identifies eleven suggestions for further exploration in addressing the needs for public toilets in Victoria. These include: promoting awareness and availability of retailers' washrooms; identifying public toilets on maps and signs; developing a tourist targeted program; forming better arrangements with private providers; establishing a new public washroom(s); promoting public washrooms in new developments; supporting the provision of full service washrooms by social service providers; and exploring means for addressing public urination including retractable urinals.

"...the degree of civilization of a society can be gauged by its domestic and toilet facilities."

Toilet lobbyists in England, 1858

A Global Issue

The issue of a lack of public washrooms in the downtown is not a complaint unique to Victoria. Availability of toilets has been an ongoing issue throughout the world. Since the 1970s, there has been a pronounced decline in the public toilets provided in Europe. The situation is similar in Australia and New Zealand. In the U.S., Seattle's Downtown Human Services Council identified the lack of public toilets as "...the top issue facing downtown merchants" in the 1980s. In Asia, Japan and South Korea, governments have recently devoted enormous resources to addressing the issue and, in some cases, have even established awards for their best public washrooms.



Why Do We Need Them?

A review of cities found a common set of reasons for a need to ensure that more public washrooms are made available. These include:

1. An increasingly aging population with an associated more frequent need.
Over 1/3 of men over the age of 50 are likely to experience urinary dysfunction.
Persons with medical conditions (e.g. Crohn's disease, colitis, bladder infections) also need more frequent access to washrooms.

2. Concerns with health and hygiene issues arising from public defecation and urination.
Urine and feces attract life forms that act as vectors for spreading disease.
3. Creating a more livable city.
The concept of "livable cities" includes having basic amenities that will provide a comfortable experience for downtown patrons. The average person requires a washroom every 1-6 hours (American Restroom Association). Parents with infants and children also require more frequent access to dedicated services.
4. Accommodating an increased number of visitors, shoppers and residents in the downtown.
The growth of urban residential populations is a global trend and tourism is a growth industry in many cities. There have also been great efforts to attract more shoppers with their attendant needs, especially where there is a desire to expand the "evening economy" when fewer businesses are likely to be open to provide washrooms.

The lack of public toilets was raised as one of the top two issues facing the downtown area during the Victoria Urban Development Agreement public consultation process held in July, 2005. Public washroom provision is also consistent with the City's Official Community Plan objectives toward a livable, people friendly and well-served community. Similarly, the Downtown Victoria Plan includes initiatives for pursuing Victoria as a place to enjoy an urban experience and the topic is also mentioned in the City's Downtown Beautification Strategy.



Council and City managers receive regular requests for improved public washroom facilities in the downtown and it is raised in the media from time to time (see Appendix A).

Whose Responsibility?

The common problem found worldwide is that the provision of toilet facilities is not any particular agency or organization's responsibility. Therefore services tend to be gradually reduced or are not introduced at all.

In B.C., as is the case in many jurisdictions, the requirement for the provision of public toilets is only specified in the Building Code. Section 3.7 of the BC Code stipulates that "...a building ... shall be provided with, or have accessible to its occupants, ... toilet fixtures." This requirement applies to premises such as workplaces, restaurants and retail shops. As this relates more to the structure rather than the service, many facilities in retail shops are not made available to the public and are often used for storage.

As a result of this lack of responsibility, Clara Greed, a prominent advocate for public washrooms concludes that only "...if a local authority is well intentioned and has the political will... (is) toilet provision likely an output." She argues that the provision of public toilets provides an essential element in achieving urban renewal, effective town planning, economic regeneration and sustainable cities. Most municipalities, she observes, tend to overemphasize more glamorous initiatives such as public art installations and overlook the need to address this basic human need (Greed, World Toilet Summit 2003).

Available Facilities

The map shown in Figure 1 indicates the locations of public and semi-public washrooms in the downtown.

Semi-public washrooms are defined here as privately owned facilities where public use is generally not restricted. The map shows several locations that are, or have been, subject to high use and others which have either restricted access, are of moderate use, or cater primarily to the street community. A location is also shown for a new facility to be incorporated into the Dockside Green development.

The walking distance indicated by the circles is approximately 200 metres from the washroom. This can

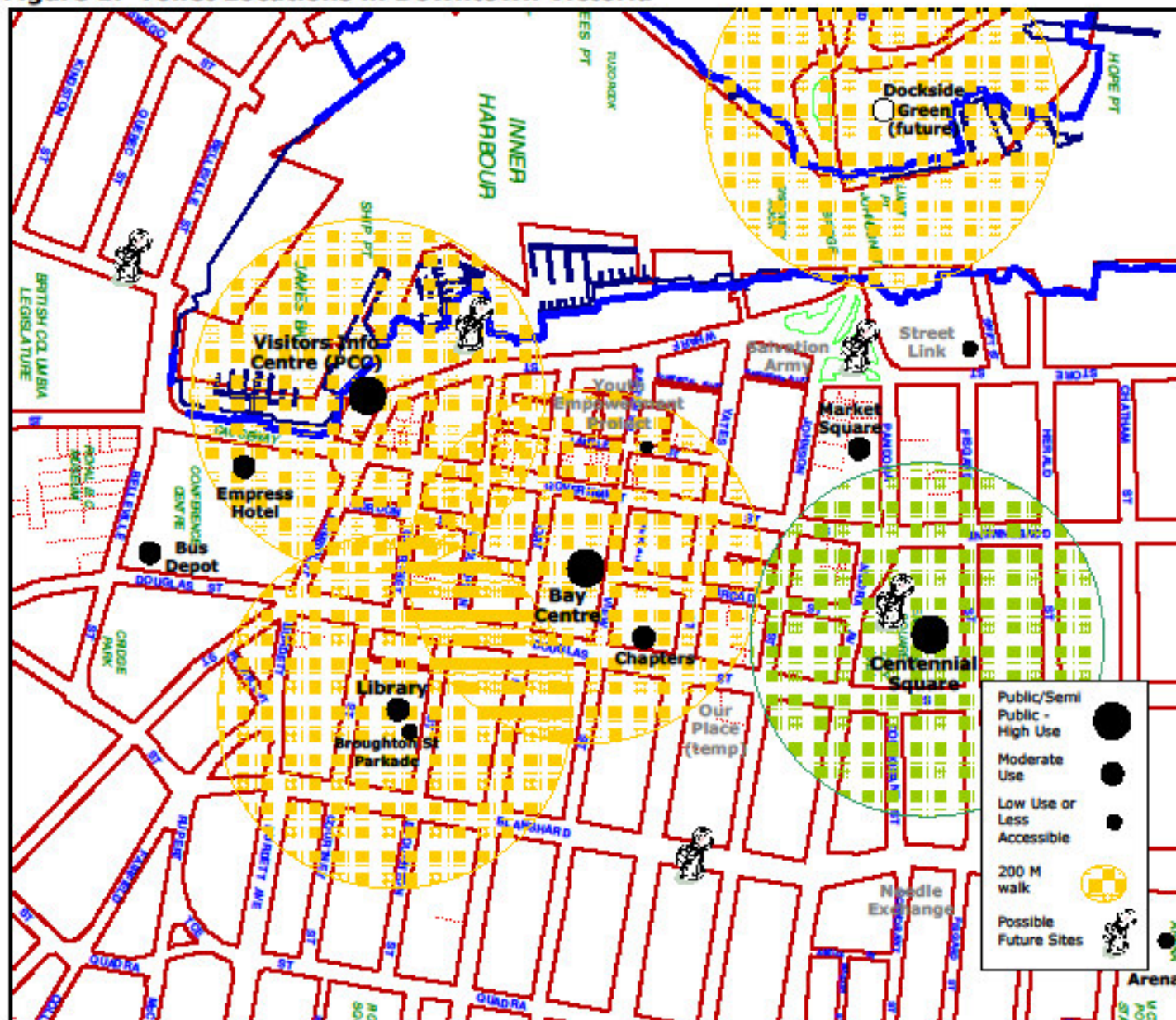


be considered a comfortable range and likely greater walking distances would be acceptable.

Of the higher use facilities, only the Centennial Square washrooms have been devoted to public use. Up until recently, they have been used only while special events and the Sunday Market on Government Street are taking place. During Folkfest, for example, the washrooms were open from 11:00AM to 10:00PM with the number of uses ranging from 85 to 225 over each day of the event. They are now open on a supervised 24 hour, seven day a week basis on a trial basis.

Semi-public facilities at the Bay Centre and Visitors Information Centre (Provincial Capital Commission) are reported to receive very high traffic. Chapters Books, Market Square and the public library also receive high public use. All of these operators report providing this service to the broad public reluctantly. This is primarily due to the social misuse they experience, but is also the result of the amount of supplies and servicing required to provide for the high use. The city currently relies heavily on these providers to meet public need.

Figure 1. Toilet Locations in Downtown Victoria



There are a few other facilities known to experience regular public use such as the bus depot and the Empress Hotel and they face similar issues but to a lesser degree.

Targeted facilities for the street community are available at Streetlink and the Open Door. These are well-used by their clientele, however, they are available only for limited hours. Other washrooms are available for patrons at all restaurants, bars and hotels in the downtown and are present in all workplaces.

A list of the primary facilities and a summary of their amenities and issues is provided in Appendix B.

Existing available toilet locations can be considered in relation to indications of pedestrian traffic volumes (see Figure 2). Areas of high traffic can be seen along Fort Street and the eastern side of the downtown core. Considering existing facilities (accepting the defined washrooms and walking distances), gaps are apparent around the Blanshard and Yates area and areas east of Blanshard in general. Although relatively low traffic is shown in the 2003 data, the Wharf and Store Streets area in proximity to the Johnson Street Bridge also shows as a gap.

The Centennial Square washroom location appears to be a key location in serving the north end of the downtown core, an area where activity is likely to increase in the future.

Issues for Facility Operators

Centennial Square

In Centennial Square, public washrooms were closed due primarily to issues with drug use. Washrooms, especially in a low traffic area, provide a private location with light and water that facilitate administration of intravenous

drugs. On occasion, drug users and dealers have commandeered control of the washrooms, precluding use by others. In addition to these activities presenting real risk of accidental infection and physical confrontation, they also generate a climate of fear and danger which is upsetting to the public.

In other jurisdictions attempts have been made to reduce the attractiveness for this misuse by using blue lights which do not illuminate veins. This objective has been circumvented by users

through marking their veins with pens before entering the washroom and therefore it has not been effective. On the contrary, it has been argued that this increases risk of harm to drug users from multiple punctures when trying to find a vein. It also creates a poorly lit environment which is discomforting to other washroom users (Australia National Training Authority, 2000). While helpful, design features can generally not substitute for supervision where misuse is likely.

Closure of the washrooms at the Square resulted in increased pressure to use washrooms in nearby City Hall. There are currently no facilities in City Hall designed for public use other than those on the second floor adjacent to Council Chamber and committee rooms. City Hall staff has commented that there should be a washroom onsite or nearby to which City Hall visitors can reasonably be directed.

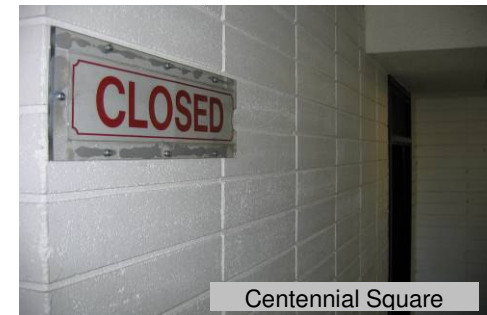




Figure 2. Pedestrian Traffic Counts – 2003 (source: Victoria Real Estate Board)

Other Public and Semi-public Washrooms

Most of the operators of semi-public facilities in the downtown state that their washrooms are very busy and that they face a host of issues related to use by the street community.

These include:

- **Drug use** – blood, discarded and hidden used syringes, toilets dismantled for access to water;
- **Bathing** – persons stripping and climbing into sinks to wash for extended periods with an associated mess and cleanup;
- **Vandalism** – graffiti, breaking of fixtures;
- **Theft** – of other washroom users' property, stolen supplies and fixtures;
- **Sex** – prostitution, consensual sex acts and pick-up locations.

Providers also experience a generally high consumption of supplies and greater demands for maintenance with larger numbers of washroom users.

Private Facilities and Social Services

Downtown businesses experience similar problems to those listed above. Social services agencies also experience similar problems, but are *somewhat* more tolerant and conditioned to monitoring washrooms and guarding against undesirable behaviour.

The City also has several small washrooms at its parkades on Broughton and Johnson Streets. These are supervised by lot attendants as a secondary function and their use is not promoted. Opportunities for some increased use could possibly be facilitated by monitoring cameras, coded entries and/or interior design improvements.

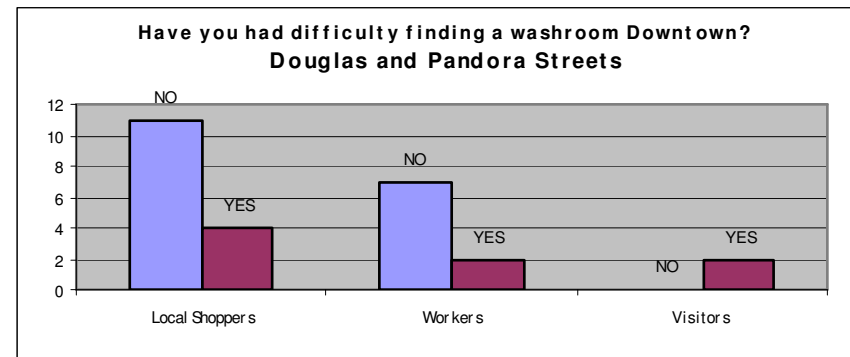
Issues for Toilet Users

Despite a widely perceived need for more public washrooms, there are several different types of demand, each with its own implications for possible solutions.

Shoppers and Visitors

The first is a perceived need for amenities for the average downtown user. These can be broken into various groups.

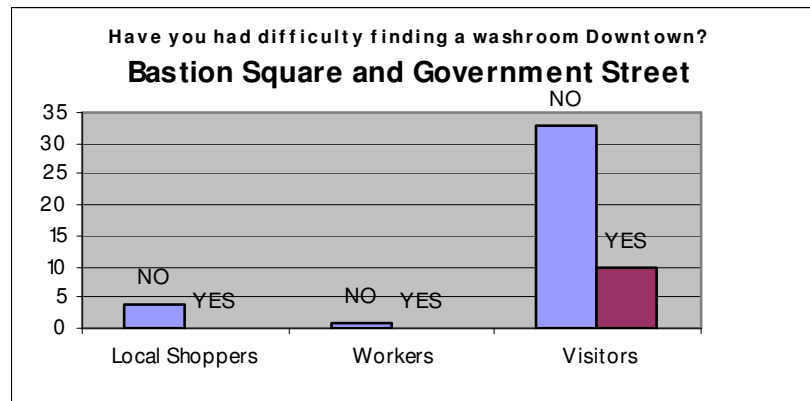
In an informal survey undertaken at Douglas and Pandora Streets (Figure 4), most respondents were shoppers (i.e. not visitors or workers) who reported a good knowledge of facilities locations and did not indicate problems with finding washrooms *for themselves*. They did however tend to express strong opinions that availability was an issue *for others* and that there is a need for greater access to public washrooms. Of those stating that they did have difficulty finding a washroom, many tended to have an unkempt appearance that may have affected their



acceptability at businesses. Other respondents specified that the evenings were most problematic times to locate toilets.

Visitors were less knowledgeable about locations of public washrooms. An informal survey undertaken in the

summer of 2004 found that the most important issue for visitors was a lack of adequate signage indicating where washrooms are located. They did not however report problems with washroom availability, likely because visitors regularly use restaurants and stay in nearby hotels. Most had found the Visitors' Centre or the Empress Hotel, or had simply used a restaurant where they had eaten. Several commented that it was more of an issue in the evenings and that they felt compelled to make a purchase at businesses where they asked to use washrooms. Regarding the latter, visitors are likely to appear as such and are therefore less likely to be restricted from using private facilities when they do ask.



While many of the above user groups report knowing where to find facilities and therefore do not necessarily identify a strong need for more washrooms, these users do put pressure on existing semi-public washrooms where they are often not purchasing or otherwise using the premises. While washroom provision is a shared responsibility, this may be considered as an unreasonable burden on these operators and an indication that there is a need for facilities which are available to the general public.

A final group, downtown workers, does not report a need for washrooms. The Building Code requires that adequate facilities are provided in each place of work and this addresses the need of this group. This group also frequents the downtown regularly. They shop and eat in the downtown and therefore have a good knowledge of where facilities exist.

Marginalized Individuals

Homeless persons clearly lack toilet facilities, though many were aware of a few businesses and social service agencies where they could go.

Their need is especially problematic in the evenings when restaurants, malls and other facilities are closed. The managers at Market Square report that they have found street people waiting for their washrooms to open in the morning. Urine and feces have also been found outside the closed doors of the public washrooms in Centennial Square (see photo).

Social service agencies such as Streetlink and the Our Place (Open Door/Upper Room) have washrooms, but these too are only available for a portion of the day. Our Place has temporarily relocated to 711 Johnson Street while they construct a new facility. Toilet facilities are available from approximately 7:00AM to 3:30PM at this location.



Drug users use toilet facilities as a place to self-administer drugs. Here they are provided with a secluded place with light and water which facilitates injection use. In the

absence of another convenient place to inject, washrooms are preferred to the open street by users.

It has been stated that users of opiates require greater access to washrooms as they are subject to incontinence following use. Consultation amongst agencies was not able to confirm this perception. On the contrary, it was suggested that long term users were more likely to be constipated and it is only during withdrawal that incontinence was likely to be experienced.

Other individuals who may have mental health or other issues that result in a disheveled physical appearance find that it is more difficult to find available private washrooms. This situation has increased with greater prevalence of drug use and other social problems in downtown washrooms. It would appear that shop owners are using visual clues to identify persons who may be drug users or who may indulge in other unwelcome misuse of their washrooms. They report that it is often not easy to discern which persons are drug users and therefore they tend to take a restrictive approach.

Contrary to assumptions the general public may have, many street people report a lack of dignity in having to use open spaces as a washroom. This group also expressed concerns about the safety and sanitary conditions of washrooms that may be available to them. As marginalized individuals they indicate that they experience more vulnerability to other members of the street community than the average person.

Bar Patrons

In a compact downtown such as that found in Victoria, there is some confusion as to who is causing the problem with public urination. A portion of this problem is attributable to the street community, however in some areas, the source of the problem is late night bar patrons.

A small but noticeable proportion of late night party-goers tend to leave drinking establishments and find that they need to use a toilet. Perhaps they have reached a stage where they have lost their discretion or they may have suddenly found that they are "full" and must relieve themselves in short order. Whatever the cause, urination by this group causes a stench and inconvenience to merchants and property owners who must tolerate the odour and/or clean up the following morning.

The map of primary liquor licences shown in Figure 3 indicates the locations of drinking establishments. At each site, the number of seats and closing time are shown. The majority of seats with closing times from 1:00 to 2:00AM can be seen to be situated within a block of an axis drawn from Centennial Square to Bastion Square. The Engineering Department confirms that public urination is most problematic in proximity to Bastion Square.

This problem is not unique to Victoria. Across North America and in Europe, municipalities have been presented with this problem, especially where there has been a new-found interest in strengthening the evening economy, as discussed above.

Approaches for Service Provision

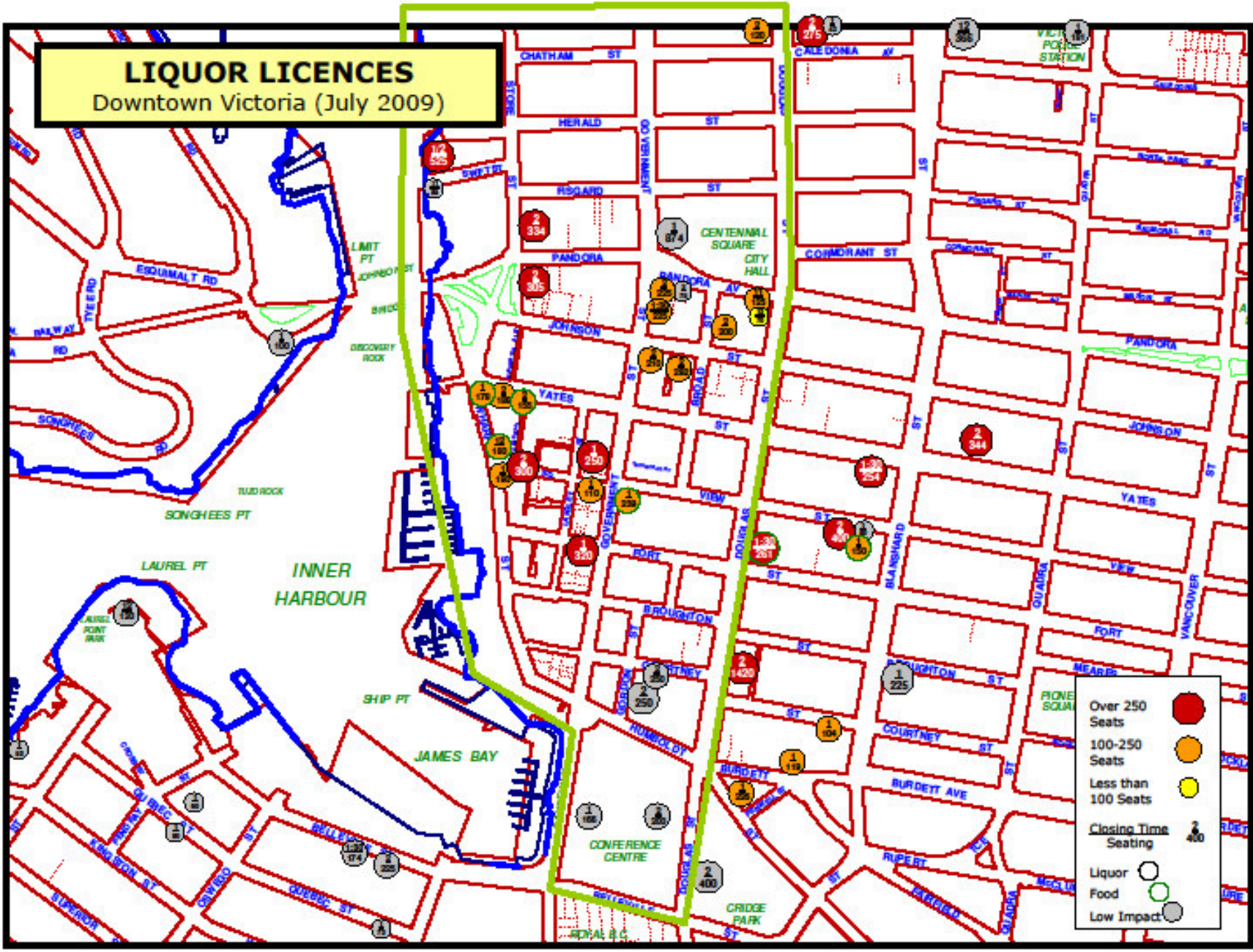
General Use

There have been a number of approaches to increasing the availability of public washrooms. The types of demand existing in Victoria discussed above suggest that a multi-faceted approach is necessary. Further, given the costs of constructing and operating any new facilities, it is imperative that all options for addressing need are explored to arrive at a cost-effective solution.

Christchurch, New Zealand (pop. 350,000) reviewed its options for addressing need and pursued a comprehensive

LIQUOR LICENCES

Downtown Victoria (July 2009)



strategy. It opted to ensure that facilities were kept available at public amenities such as the local library and it sought ways to encourage private provision of washrooms for public use. It also concluded that there was a need to establish a "...well identified 24 hour public toilet including baby change, showers and baggage storage."

Reflecting a primary concern for cost, Doncaster (U.K.) Council evaluated options for attaching costs for toilet provision to the sources of the increased demand. They proposed that new residential and office developments include a requirement for public toilets. In addition, they suggested that levies be established for pubs and special events in order to partially fund washrooms. They also looked at sharing costs for public washrooms with community organizations and businesses. Hamburg Germany adopted a similar approach by funding a public washroom with revenue from a nearby market.

In Victoria, shoppers and visitors currently rely on private facilities offering semi-public service. One option towards addressing government's share of responsibility might be to provide some financial compensation to providers of the high public use locations. This could be conditional on their providing signage and indicating washroom locations on wayfinding maps, something operators currently do not favour. Given the apparent scarcity of public funds to address more pressing social issues, such an expansion of responsibilities may not find strong support.

Accepting the reality of semi-public providers, there are still gaps in locations. Addressing these gaps would provide broader service. It may also be possible to exploit or develop private toilet facilities in storefront businesses where current location gaps exist. Businesses may be



paid to provide signed public washrooms while continuing to operate their enterprises. This may be piloted with interested businesses prior to establishing the longer term arrangements necessary to ensure that the toilets are known to the public and can be relied upon.

Although it may be desirable to provide additional washrooms at new locations in areas where there are gaps (see Figure 1), much of the current need could be addressed by a dedicated public washroom which can be established as a reliable and well-designed public landmark. The most suitable location as identified in Figure 1 would likely be in the vicinity of City Hall.

This would serve several functions. It would:

- provide for an area not otherwise served for shoppers and visitors
- serve an area of concentration of social services
- address the needs of City Hall
- make a strong public service statement from the City of Victoria
- reduce the pressure on other facilities currently providing for public need
- in part, address the public urination issue
- provide for festivals and celebrations in the square
- not meet with significant neighbour opposition that may occur elsewhere, as they are present now.

Types of Delivery

The establishment of new public washrooms has generally been approached in two ways – automated public toilets and conventional washrooms. Temporary facilities have also been used to address short term demand or to gauge need.

1. Automated Public Toilets

Automated Public Toilets (APT) have been used in Europe for many years (e.g. London has 670 of them) and have

only recently been introduced to North America. APTs are small independent structures (double or single toilet) placed in high traffic areas on boulevards and in urban parks. They are technologically sophisticated facilities which go through a cleaning/ disinfection cycle after each use. Their appeal lies in the promise of a high-tech solution to the demand for hygienic public facilities. Most importantly however are the arrangements that are typically made with advertising companies who provide the APTs and required ongoing maintenance in exchange for advertising opportunities. There is therefore no additional hard cost to the municipalities to provide the service.



Seattle APT

San Francisco (pop. 740,000) has addressed its need for public washrooms by establishing 25 automated public toilets. They entered into an arrangement common to other cities in the USA whereby they provide public space for advertising kiosks in return for the installation and maintenance of the APTs (4.5 kiosks per APT). In addition to the APTs, this program generates an additional \$200,000 in revenue to the City annually.

Their APTs are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and are shut down, typically due to vandalism or mechanical failure, 20-25% of the time.

Despite the apparent allure that APTs seem to have with municipalities, social problems related to washroom use persist with the APTs. In order to generate additional revenue to fund supervision of some of the more problematic locations, San Francisco is currently considering greater advertising exposure through rotating

advertising kiosks. This may involve the creation of a transitional employment program for the hard to employ, something that San Francisco has successfully established in its Parks Department. They report that it is otherwise difficult to negotiate a financially viable arrangement with the City employees' trade union.

Vancouver examined APTs and found the cost to be high. They estimated \$15-30,000 in site preparation and \$375,000 U.S. to purchase each unit. Nonetheless, they have recently opted to move forward with a long-standing plan to introduce 17 APTs (in conjunction with other public amenities) through their 20 year contract with Viacom-Decaux in exchange for bus shelter advertising. CSA certification is currently being pursued and eight APTs are to be installed by the end of 2006.

Seattle wished to avoid the high level of advertising which typifies most arrangements for APTs elsewhere and so it opted to pay for the lease of the units from sewer revenue. They leased five APTs in 2004 for 10 years at a cost of approximately \$600,000 USD per year. There was an initial cost of about \$100,000 to set them up.

Their APTs tend to emphasize serving the tourism sector during the day and the street community during the evenings. All are open 24 hours except for one which closes from 11:00PM to 5:00AM. City staff claim that use averages 500 visits per day for the toilets, a number that one Councillor observed justified the high cost. Staff claim that the street community generally respect the facilities and that they have noticeably reduced public urination and defecation. Prostitution, sleeping and drug use have

remained problems in some locations and doors are jammed open and closed from time to time. Seattle has relied on public observation to partially manage these issues.

APTs near Pioneer Square and Pike Place Market were visited by the author in September 2005. The former had sustained (kicking?) damage to the front door. There was a trail of blood at the entrance which extended into the unit and around the sink. It appeared to be in poor sanitary condition. I was advised not to use the latter by a nearby merchant due to its reputation. Indeed, persons waiting outside this unit expressed frustration over the length of wait and the types of activities they claimed were likely to be going on inside.

In Canada, Exceloo distributes APTs quoted by the distributor as ranging in price from \$100,000-\$180,000 for a single or \$140,000-\$200,000 for a double, depending on the features desired. Installation and maintenance costs are extra. The distributor expressed an interest in establishing a demonstration unit as it would be the first one in Canada.

APT costs for Victoria are likely to be \$150,000-225,000 for purchase and installation and an additional \$50,000-100,000 in annual maintenance. Terms for a lease may also be available. An advertising package that would remove all costs to the city in exchange for more commercial advertising in the downtown may be available. The city currently has a program that generates approximately \$165,000 a year in revenue through bus shelter and kiosks advertising. This number of advertising sites could be increased, although as a relatively small isolated city, the value of advertising exposure is limited. In addition, this would be contrary to the general direction in urban aesthetics that Victoria has chosen in the past. A change would therefore have to be made, likely with public support.

User fees are another mechanism used to offset costs, however, it is illegal to charge for washroom use in British Columbia and therefore that option is not available, nor would it likely be palatable to the public.

Still, APTs would not address the need for supervision of users with social issues patronizing a washroom(s), which would be a requirement at a downtown location. Unless supplemented with other temporary services, APTs are also of limited utility if there is an intent to use them for special events where a high volume of users require access over a short period of time.

2. Conventional Facilities

Conventional structures can be as simple as those recently installed in Surrey parks for a cost of less than \$10,000 per unit and a \$150 charge for pumping out (once or twice a year). They can also be constructed to incorporate a higher degree of technology and aesthetics that may be more appropriate in an urban location.



A conventional structure (rather than an APT) would provide greater aesthetic flexibility. Pundits argue that, despite its basic function, a public washroom in a high profile location can and should be of high quality design. Firstly, an attractive design can add to the architectural appeal of a locale, rather than

detract from it. Secondly, rather than a utilitarian, fortress-like appearance, a public facility should be welcoming to the public. Finally, it is argued that the more civilized the appearance of the washroom, the more likely patrons are to behave accordingly.

A landmark building would also contribute to a “wow” factor and higher costs would likely pay dividends in an enhanced reputation of the city over the long term.

A customized structure would also allow for the accommodation of an attendant. Vancouver, for example, maintains two of its oldest facilities on the Downtown East Side where social concerns are paramount. These underground washrooms provide simple, clean facilities. They are monitored by contracted attendants who also maintain them during operating hours (7:00AM to 7:00PM daily). The cost for the contract for the two attendants is approximately \$84,000 a year with the city paying for supplies.

The social malaise around the locations in Vancouver is more pronounced than in downtown Victoria however, based on Victoria’s recent experience, similar incidents are likely to occur. The Vancouver attendants “speak the same language” as their client group and therefore are not intimidated by them. Attendants keep an eye on the amount of time people are spending in cubicles. If it is unreasonably long, they knock on the doors and enquire about their situation. Sometimes its drug use, but it may also be someone who has, for example, fallen asleep. There are no needle drop boxes in the facilities as they want to discourage washrooms as sites for drug use.



Given their constant presence and the assertive approach of the attendants, the arrangement works well in Vancouver and would likely be appropriate for Victoria.

A customized structure may also provide for a suitable storefront business to be incorporated into the facility. Poland addressed its inability to maintain its large public

restroom system by leasing many of its publicly owned facilities to merchants who incorporated businesses into the premises. Discounted lease rates were offered with the provision that access must be maintained to public washrooms. A similar arrangement may offset costs for a public washroom in Victoria.

Although it requires further research, a public washroom would likely require a total of from 5 to 7 toilets and a urinal. It may be designed with more flexibility to serve high volume use during special events (depending on location) by complementing indoor facilities with adjacent temporary facilities (see Urilift below).



Finally, a conventional facility may present more options for environmentally appropriate technology such as

natural lighting, solar panels and composting toilets. This would make a statement for the City, which is currently being both celebrated for its Dockside Green development and criticized for its lack of treatment of sewage.

The costs for establishing a washroom would likely range from \$250,000-450,000 with \$20,000-30,000 in annual maintenance, depending on design. Cost for attendants would likely range from \$45,000-55,000 a year depending on hours of operation.

3. Temporary Portable Facilities

A short term program involving the placement of two portable toilets was undertaken in Vancouver’s Downtown East Side from August until December, 2001. These operated through the night when the existing public washrooms were closed and were supervised by local

residents who were paid a small stipend. Each morning the toilets were removed from the site. Total costs including provision of a hand washing station was approximately \$8,500 a month. A survey found that during one month, an average of 265 persons used the toilets each night.

In Victoria, such a program is attractive in addressing short term needs due to the low capital costs. Costs for portable toilets are estimated at less than \$150 per month. Enclosures can be constructed to reduce risk of vandalism and improve appearance for less than \$1,000 per unit. If, however, a significant target group for such an initiative is the street community, it is imperative that ongoing supervision is in place, similar to arrangements made in Vancouver.

Visitors

Visitors' need for washrooms are similar to those of shoppers and residents and could be addressed by options discussed above. Due to their lack of knowledge of the city, they would likely also benefit from improved signage and having washroom locations indicated on wayfinding maps.

Visitors bring benefits to the tourism-related business community in the downtown and are not a problematic user group. It may therefore be possible, for example, to create an agreement amongst the hoteliers and restaurateurs to agree to provide washrooms to anyone with a hotel key without the obligation of making a purchase. This would be a low cost improvement in addressing needs that would likely not result in any significant extra pressure to any specific businesses.

Social Needs

The needs of the street community are many and often underfunded. Although toilets and washing facilities would

seem to be a priority, resources are limited and compete with other equally pressing needs, especially when any washroom would have to be supervised in order to avoid misuse. The increase in social agencies providing hygienic services to address needs such as bathing should be strongly encouraged and supported where and when possible. Similarly, safe injection sites would reduce misuse of public and private washrooms and merit support on those grounds.

A supervised public washroom would provide a clean, safe place for this segment of the community and would remove the need for public defecation and urination in the area within reasonable walking distance of the facility. Any persistent problems with such would clearly not be attributable to lack of public toilets. This would be contingent on the washroom having hours that extend from early in the morning to late into the evening. It is not likely that a public washroom could easily facilitate bathing services.

Public Urination

It is difficult to prevent inebriated bar goers from urinating on public and private property when they lack judgment and perhaps personal physical control. Where both bars and hotel rooms are located in the same premises, some downtown licensees have posted signs on exit doors requesting that patrons keep noise down when leaving. In other cities, business associations have distributed drink coasters with messages encouraging revelers to keep noise down and not urinate in the streets. Good neighbour agreements have also provided more informal pressure and coercion for bar owners to take more responsibility for their patrons' behaviour.

Another option used which has expanded rapidly in Europe is the "Urilift". This is a three-person urinal that hydraulically rises out of the ground in the evenings when

bars are most active. The units are easy to install, very resilient and self-cleaning. Maintenance costs are very low and they are reported to have functioned very well in Amsterdam where they have 10 of the units in operation. During the daytime, they are invisible to shop owners and therefore there is great flexibility in



where they can be located. None have been installed in North America, though the Dutch distributor states that he would welcome an opportunity to pilot a location here. The cost per unit has been estimated at approximately \$75,000 all found.

Urilift has recently introduced a retractable sit-down toilet which may be suitable to some locations in Victoria where social issues are not pronounced and demand is high only during certain times of the day.



Summary of Possible Strategies

This paper has examined the current situation in Victoria for both service providers and users. Approaches to addressing service needs have been discussed and prospective issues identified.

The overarching goal of this initiative is to ensure that there is a network of washrooms throughout the downtown that is available during hours of need in each area. As discussed above, this is not expressly a municipal responsibility. It will rely on all parties in the downtown to effectively meet the need. The following is a summary of suggested strategies for addressing the issue in Victoria that may be considered.

Support and Promote Existing Facilities

1. Promote awareness and availability of toilets in retail premises.

Promote awareness amongst consumers and merchants that all businesses must have toilets available to building users. Suggest to merchants that they should make these available to persons present in their premises.

2. Sign and identify washroom locations on maps.

Visitors and regional shoppers need to know where public washrooms are located. This is not an expensive proposition, but requires that semi-public toilet providers support such an initiative.

3. Encourage program for tourist access to existing private facilities.

Visitors report feeling obliged to make purchases at businesses where they are requesting use of washrooms. For example, it may be possible to develop a mutual agreement through the restaurant and hotel associations to make any facilities available to visitors simply by showing their room keys.

4. Pursue arrangements to adopt existing semi-public washrooms as public toilets.

As these providers will continue to provide washrooms to the general public beyond their customers, it may be possible to establish agreements with operators which would allow their facilities to be identified as available to the public.

Develop New Facilities

1. Establish a new dedicated public washroom.

The reasons for this strategy are manifold and discussed above. For reasons discussed above, the most suitable location would appear to be near its current location in Centennial Square.

2. Reopen the existing public washroom in Centennial Square.

While a new public washroom is under development, address the need for additional services by providing supervision for reopening the existing washroom.

3. Explore opportunities for public washrooms to be identified as public amenities in new developments.

Well-designed public washrooms may be incorporated in new developments as public amenities. Both construction (capital) and annual operating costs should be considered.

4. Assess the opportunities for further private provision of public washroom services.

In areas where there are gaps in service, there may be businesses, social service providers or other properties with suitable excess capacity or a desire to enter into a partnership in providing public washrooms.

5. Support the inclusion of bathing and toilet facilities at downtown social services.

Places like Our Place and Streetlink provide limited services for the street community. Safe, clean toilets and bathing services with proper supervision should be supported and advocated. Given the

jurisdiction of senior government for health, this is likely best pursued jointly.

6. Explore options for addressing public urination by bar patrons including a possible urinal(s).

There may be opportunities to promote behavioural changes with the bar patrons in cooperation with the liquor licensees. Consideration should be given to the viability of public urinals where drinking establishments are concentrated.

7. Explore function that retractable toilets may serve.

Retractable toilets may cost effectively serve areas of periodic demand and low risk of abuse.

CUMMINTARI

Where to go? A B.C. solution

Comfort stations provide relief

BRIAN HUTCHINSON
in Vancouver

We've all been there: trembling on a street corner, in an unfamiliar part of town, scouting desperately for a washroom. Any washroom.

Find a hotel, say experienced urban trekkers. Look for a gas station. Seek the nearest Starbucks, advise others. But what if it's a dodgy neighbourhood, or it's late, and everything is closed? Desperation sometimes makes people do untidy, unsanitary things. Their problem then becomes the city's problem.

Victoria has had enough of it. British Columbia's staid and scenic capital is being abused by men and women with bladder control issues.

"An increasing level of concern has been raised about how should I put it, public urination," tiptoes Wendy Zink, manager of Victoria's community development division.

The matter took on sudden urgency this year after a city councillor came almost face to face with a man using an exterior wall for a toilet, late one night in downtown Victoria.

The city is looking at how to deal with the issue; one solution, recommended in a report delivered last month to City Hall, is to establish free "drop-in services for street people to maintain personal hygiene."

The report, called Taking Stock of Downtown Victoria, suggests that the city's homeless population are most in need of public restrooms, complete with attendants, toilets, showers and laundry facilities.

The positive washroom situation seems to be a local secret. Visitors to Vancouver usually cringe at my suggestion that they use the public facilities, if necessary. When they do, they rave about them.

Officials here don't want to boast about their toilets, it seems; no one from the city responded to my washroom-related messages yesterday. No matter. For some real perspective, I headed to the Downtown Eastside, Vancouver's worst neighbourhood.

There are no Starbucks in this part of the city. No gas stations. There are dozens of old hotels, but they cater to a rough-looking crowd.

Hygiene is a serious issue in the Downtown Eastside, so hotel and restaurant johns are best avoided. Establishments tend to keep their facilities under lock and chain, anyhow, to keep out heroin and crack cocaine users.

I had heard of the Downtown Eastside's two separate sets of gender-specific "comfort stations," but I'd never dared set foot inside. They are 80 years old, and are located below the city pavement, under ground. From street level, they look slightly sinister.

Yesterday, I went down one set of stairs, on the corner of East Hastings and Main. The men's room was spacious, with tiled floors and walls. It did not smell bad inside. It did not smell good, either. It smelled of chemical cleanser: toxic, but in this context, reassuring.

I noticed a small office, facing a long wall of full-length urinals. Standing next to a desk inside was one of the comfort station's full time, on-site managers, Jim Scott. He handles the two men's rooms. His wife, Julie, operates the ladies' rooms.

Mr. Scott and his wife emerged from their respective chambers

vice would not be restricted to the homeless. Bar patrons, she notes, often find themselves in trouble, once the city's saloons close at night. "Anywhere there is a bar, there may be a problem with outdoor urination," she says.

Victoria's large population of senior citizens should not be left in the cold, either, with no place to go.

City of Victoria staffers are beginning to examine how other centres have addressed the issue. Self-cleaning toilets, all the rage in London and Paris, and closer by, in Seattle and San Francisco, will be considered. But they are expensive to maintain, and seldom free of charge. They occasionally malfunction, trapping customers inside as they move into auto-clean mode.

Victoria planners need look no further than Vancouver. One night expect public urination to be a significant problem here, what with all the coffee, tea and micro-brewed beer that is consumed. The heavy rains and clammy winter air don't help; here are lots of accidents waiting to happen.

But they don't. This city is a public washroom haven. I'm always tumbling across extraordinary examples of magnificent restroom splendour, sparkling clean, well stocked, and — big bonus — free if people sticking needles in their veins.

A favourite emergency pit stop: several blocks from Stanley Park, beside a long stretch of each. The washrooms are bright and efficient, and are cleverly designed to allow individual privacy, while discouraging lingerers.

OCT 1 2004
NATIONAL POST

fresh air. Employed by the city's engineering and sanitation department, they work 12-hour shifts, five days a week, and supervise a staff of seven.

It's good work, they say. It's necessary work. On an average day, just over 1,000 "clients" use their facilities. Almost half are elderly, and dozens are children. "We make sure that everyone feels safe inside the stations," said Mr. Scott.

"But there are always people trying to things they're not supposed to do," added his wife. "Yesterday, I found a hooker sitting in one of the sinks. She had her feet in the next sink. She was shaving her legs before work. Well, I put a stop to that."

Drug peddlers, prostitutes and ordinary folk wandered past us as we chatted on the street. One man approached; he had painkillers for sale.

Mrs. Scott glared at him. "I've only been working here the last ten f—ing years," she yelled. The peddler shrinks away.

I asked the Scotts what they think of Victoria's urination problem. They think it could be solved with some comfort stations, such as theirs. "They aren't expensive to operate," insisted Mr. Scott. "And most people think they are surprisingly clean."

We talked for a few more minutes. The Scotts are so friendly, and interesting, that I considered asking them for lunch. But I had to leave.

"Come back and visit us soon," said Mrs. Scott, smiling. "Now that's service."

National Post
bhutchinson@nationalpost.com

VN Sep 29/04

There's nowhere to go in downtown Victoria

Don Descoteau
Victoria News

A man unsuccessful in finding a place to relieve himself emerges, cursing, from the doorway of what was once an open public washroom in the Fisgard Street parkade.

"If they're going to lock the doors then I'm going to piss on their (walls)," he exclaimed.

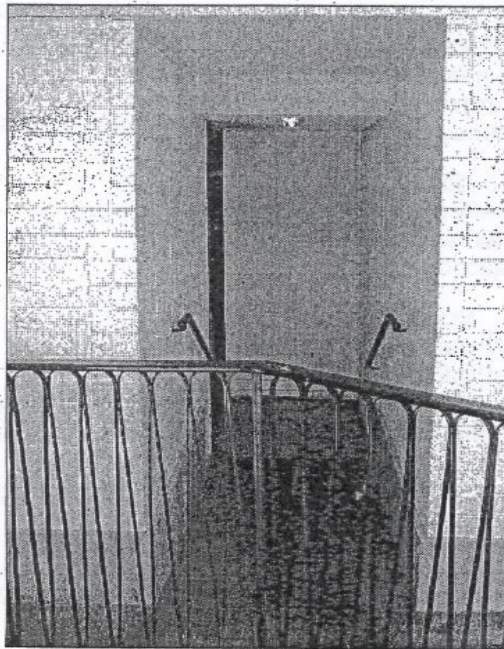
The mid-afternoon scene Monday spotlighted a problem that contributes to the unease some merchants and shoppers feel about the street population in downtown Victoria.

Having more public facilities is one way the city could help homeless people exercise the most basic human health practices, a fact that could go a long way toward giving them back their self-respect, says Victoria Cool-Aid Society spokesperson Dana Oshiro.

"If we're going to talk about quality of life of the community, we have to take ownership of everybody in the community," she said, adding that 60 per cent of people Cool-Aid serves have mental illness or addiction problems.

Vancouver-based consultant Jay Wollenberg, who authored a city-commissioned \$25,000 study entitled Taking Stock of Downtown Victoria, paid for by the province, offered a number of short- and longer-term solutions to improve the outlook of the downtown.

Among the short-term fixes he suggested might make a tangible difference for downtown shoppers and visitors was the enhancement of "drop-in services for street people to maintain personal hygiene."



DON DENTON/VICTORIA NEWS

The former public washrooms off Centennial Square remain locked and inaccessible.

In the bigger picture, lack of affordable housing is a key problem affecting Cool-Aid clients and forcing them onto the street, said Oshiro. They already feel "dehumanized" having to ask for help from facilities such as the Open Door or Streetlink. Not being able to enter a downtown restaurant to use a washroom, she said, is just one more way they feel ostracized.

"We get a lot of complaints about clients that offend businesses owners or clients that offend business customers," Oshiro said. "Ultimately, why is the burden of taking care of people within the community falling only upon service providers? Why aren't people a little more accountable?"

The mix of people on the street in downtown Victoria is indeed eclectic. There are those battling mental illness, young people who claim they have no better place to go, people with addiction habits that can be fed downtown and panhandlers who can fall into any of the aforementioned categories.

Wendy Zink, the city's manager of community development, admitted there is no easy solution to reducing the number of people hanging out on downtown streets or the effect they tend to have on business.

"It goes beyond simply addressing the basic needs of homeless people," she said. "There's some other compassionate reasons we need to help those people who are less able to help themselves."

Coun. Charlayne Thornton-Joe, council's downtown liaison, said city staff's 2004-05 work plan includes studying what other cities do about public washroom facilities.

Appendix II. Existing Facilities

Public

Centennial Square

Open: during special events & Sunday market

Men: 4 urinals, 2 toilets, 3 sinks; Women: 4 toilets, 3 sinks

Issues: vandalism, drug use, prostitution

Semi Public

Tourist Info Centre (PCC)

Open: 7:00AM to from 5:30 to 10:00PM depending on season/events

Men/women 4 toilets 3 sinks in each

Also showers, laundromat

Maintained 3 times/day

Operating Cost \$72,000 year

High use (1,200/day)

Issues: bathing, vandalism, theft

Public Library

Open: Mon-Sat 9:00AM to 6:00PM (to 9:00PM Tue/Thur)

Men 3 urinals, 5 toilets, 4 sinks; Women: 6 toilets, 4 sinks; one handicapped washroom

Issues: drug use, vandalism, overuse; bathing

Chapters

Open: store hours

Men: 2 urinals, 1 toilet (H) 2 sinks; Women: 4 toilets (1H), 2 sinks

Pass code locked and informally monitored, but they do not filter users

Issues: drug use; bathing

Empress Hotel

Generally accessible, but restricted during large events
Overwhelmed by demand and do not want to promote

Maintained constantly

Issues: bathing

Market Square

Men: 2 urinals 2 toilets 2 sinks; Women: 3 toilets 2 sinks

Open: 9:30AM to 5:30PM

Issues: drug use, bathing

Noticed increase use when Centennial closed

Fishermen's Wharf (GVHA)

Open: was 8:00AM to 8:00PM, but pass card only in 2005

Men/women 2 toilets each, 2 portajohns in summer 2004

Also showers

Issues: vandalism, drug use, prostitution

Bus Depot

Open: 5:30AM to 11:00PM

Men: 2 urinals 1 toilet 1 sink; Women: 2 toilets 1 sink

Issues: occasional drug use and bathing

Bay Centre

Open: Mon-Wed 9:30am - 6:00pm

Thu-Fri 9:30am - 9:00pm

Sat 9:30am - 6:00pm, Sun 11:00am - 5:00pm

Men: 4 toilets 3 urinals 3 sinks; Women: 9 toilets (1H), 3 sinks

Maintained every 45 minutes

Issues: volume, bathing, theft, drug use

Other Public

Beacon Hill Park - Cook and Dallas

Men: 1 urinal, 1 toilet, 1 sink; Women: 2 toilets, 1 sink

Open: ½ hour after sunrise – ½ hour before sunset

Beacon Hill Park – Tennis Courts

Men: 1 urinal, 1 toilet, 1 sink; Women: 2 toilets, 1 sink

Open: ½ hour after sunrise – ½ hour before sunset

Issues: drug use and dealing, prostitution, graffiti

Beacon Hill Park – Central

Very busy

Men: 4 urinals, 3 toilets (1 H), 2 sinks; Women: 5 toilets (1H), 2 sinks

Open: ½ hour after sunrise – ½ hour before sunset

Issues: drug use and dealing, prostitution, graffiti

Johnson Street Parkade

Men and Women's single toilets

Open: Signed, but generally not open to the public due to social issues; key lock only

Broughton Street Parkade

Men and Women's single toilets

Open: Not signed or generally open to the public, but may be accessed via buzzer from the nearby kiosk

Social

Streetlink

Open: 9:00AM – 5:00PM

Laundry, washrooms, showers, lockers, meals, emergency accommodation

Men and women

Only refuse entry if safety is a threat or illegal activities

Most complaints originate from other clients

Open Door

Open: 10:00-12:00 noon; 2:00-4:00PM Monday to Friday

Men: 1 toilet, 1 sink; Women: 1 toilet, 1 sink; 1 shower

Issues: drug use, prostitution

Closes September 30, 2005

Appendix III. Exeloo "Galaxy" Model

The Exeloo Galaxy Concept

The atmosphere of any town or city can be determined by the style of its buildings and the provision of facilities. The Exeloo Galaxy range of automatic public toilets combines the highest quality of amenity and a design style which is a major street feature.

Features:

- Automatic doors
- Toilet Seat Washer
- Electronic Basin Unit
- No Touch Flushing
- Concealed Operating Components
- Electronic Toilet Paper Dispenser
- Movement Sensor
- Automatic Systems
- Wash Cycle
- Electromagnetic Locking
- Music and Voice Messages
- Signage

Options:

- Baby Change Table
- Sanitary Disposal
- Sharps Disposal
- Coin or Card Operation



Structure:

- Precast concrete floor
- Stainless steel wall and roof frames
- A variety of cladding materials
- Fibreglass ceilings
- Resilient wall interiors
- Non-slip and moisture resistant flooring material.
- Aluminium frame doors.

Research Summary Report:

"Effects of the Exeloo Automated Cleaning System", University of Auckland

The Exeloo automatic public toilets wash cycle was extremely effective and removed 99.9% of the contaminating micro-organisms even though they had time to dry on the surface. The results were very consistent and confirmed the effective elimination of micro-organisms from contaminated areas within the Exeloo unit.

