

# Public Urinal Review

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## I. Background

### Council Direction

This report is a follow-up from a resolution passed by Council on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009 directing staff to construct and deploy a freestanding urinal at the corner of Pandora and Government Streets on a six to twelve month trial basis and to report back to Council with recommendations on broader deployment.

The need for urinals was first identified in a discussion paper on public toilets presented to Council in 2006, which also identified a need for more access to washrooms for the general public and street community. Private businesses and public works crews had reported frustration with the level of public urination in entrance alcoves and other public space in the entertainment district of the downtown. Most of the problem was attributable to males who had been drinking at downtown bars during the late evenings.

The City subsequently purchased and deployed four portable urinals in the downtown each Thursday, Friday and Saturday evening from 10:00pm to 3:00am. In order to reduce operational costs and establish a more permanent solution, a retractable urinal was identified as a preferred option. This would serve the late night need, while allowing for retraction of the urinals below the sidewalk during the daytime when they would otherwise be unacceptable to adjacent businesses. The City was unable to secure acceptable terms with the Dutch supplier and staff subsequently identified a permanent freestanding urinal as the next best option.

The Mayor's Downtown Late Night Task Force, which assessed the City's late night economy recently reaffirmed concern with late night urination. In its final report, the task force noted the success of the portable urinal program and supported their role within the downtown's entertainment district.

### Design

It was recognized that if the urinals were to be in place throughout the day, they would have to meet standards for safety, hygiene and aesthetics in order to be acceptable to both users and others in their proximity.

A request for offers to design the urinal was issued and an architect was awarded the contract to develop an appropriate design in consultation with staff. The final design was considered to be satisfactory in terms of meeting all design criteria. Fabrication and installation was approved by Council.

### Location

The location selected by Council was one of four potential locations identified by staff. Although located at the edge of the entertainment district, the site was considered to be the best-suited for an initial trial.

## II. Internal Review of Performance

### Design Criteria

#### 1. Cleanliness

The urinals were cleaned three times a day throughout the pilot project. This involved rinsing out and disinfecting the urinal, washing down the enclosure and removing litter. Odour was not reported to be a problem by staff or the public. Cigarette butts were frequently discarded in the urinal and there were a few occasional instances of graffiti and vomit, but overall cleaning issues have been manageable.

## 2. Safety

One of the most important design considerations was to ensure that the urinal was both perceived and experienced as a safe place for patrons. The design allows the prospective user to see if the unit is occupied and the type of activity going on within it. Once inside, the user has good sightlines of the entrance and the areas around the urinal. The public and police are also able to survey any suspicious activity within the urinal. This degree of visibility deters unwanted activity, while moderate lighting and lack of a roof and closing door make it even less likely to be used for illegitimate purposes.

VicPD reports that they have had no issues at the urinal from a policing perspective. They feel the good sightlines and small size of the urinal allow for good observation by police.

## 3. Aesthetics

Parks comment that from an aesthetic and functionality standpoint, they consider the design very successful. The only comment pertained to colour, which they thought should be somewhat more muted. Unless the objective was to draw attention to the urinal, it is felt the structure draws enough attention without the use of vibrant colours.

Community Planning comment that the aesthetic standard is very good: playful, practical and highly original. The construction is considered efficient and sturdy without appearing clunky. Although more installations of the same would be good, it was noted that the design could be varied to offer some diversity of presentation. Colour variations are considered to be an effective option.

Development Services feel design and signage works well because it is clear what it is, and the spiral design has a sense of entry and privacy as well as an overall sculptural quality. It is also considered to be of value as a unique feature of Victoria. Using the City's character area colours is thought to be a better choice for blending the urinals into the streetscape. If recognition is the primary objective, a unique and consistent colour is suggested.

## 4. Functionality

Engineering staff made minor modifications to the design, including the incorporation of a hinge on a portion of the enclosure to allow access to the functional works of the urinal (e.g. plumbing). Engineering reports that they have resolved most fabrication issues and have certified as-built technical drawings of the urinal.

Most installation requirements are straightforward. Water, electrical and sewer hook-ups were required and these services were close to the urinal location. No storm water drainage was required due to the small size of the platform. An electrical meter was installed to allow for floor heating and it was noted that future locations should be close to an electrical kiosk to facilitate required hook-up. Proximity to these services must be considered in other locations.

There have been no maintenance issues of note. There have been a few small rust spots due to galvanizing imperfections. The medium-gauge bowl has not been subject to any incidental or intentional damage. The auto flush mechanism works well, even though it is designed for inside use. Replacement of components in any case would not be expensive.

One suggested modification was that the letters "M-E-N" or figure of a man be cut out from the vertical poles where the lights are currently located in order to provide illuminated signage to replace the peel and stick letters currently used. Signage on nearby street corners may also increase awareness and use levels.

It was also noted that the grass around the back of the urinal was not tolerating the foot traffic of the public and the washing down of the screen. In the future, such traffic should be anticipated and the perimeter areas hard-surfaced.

## Location Effectiveness

VicPD suggest that while the pilot site works well, problems could arise if the urinal were located in proximity to primary social services (e.g. Our Place). VicPD therefore cautions against locating additional urinals too close to areas where the street community congregates in order to ensure that safe and clean operating conditions are maintained.

Civic Services currently place portable urinals at Bastion Square, Johnson & Store Streets, Douglas & Broughton Streets and at View and Broad Streets. All these locations show significant use and could be considered for permanent locations, especially Bastion Square.

## Use and Access

VicPD observe that the urinal receives regular use and that most people have commented positively about them. Testimonies of those being ticketed for public urination suggest however that there may be a lack of awareness of the urinal location (and locations of the temporary weekend urinals). They also comment that there seems to be a need for more of them.

Cleaning staff and VicPD received positive comments regarding the urinals, except from females pointing out the lack of similar facilities for them. Feedback from the public also included this concern (see below), though women generally stated that they would not use such a facility even if the receptacle was better configured for their use.

## Public Urination Abatement

Civic Services indicates the data for portable urinal use show the public is using them and that there is a noticeable reduction in public urination downtown. They were receiving an average three calls a week reporting instances of public urination and since the portable urinals were introduced these calls are infrequent. However, there is still urination happening in doorways and similar types of locations, even where a urinal is located nearby.

## Costs

The final installed cost of the urinal was approximately \$75,000 however this cost may vary somewhat for future locations. Fabricating costs may be lower as there is now an example and construction requirements are fully known. Economies of scale may also be achieved if more than one urinal is to be manufactured. On the other hand, installation costs may be higher, if underground services are a greater distance from a proposed site or if the sidewalk requires reconfiguration to accommodate the size of the urinal.

Type	Capital Cost	Daily Ops Cost/Unit <sup>1</sup>	Annual Ops Cost <sup>2</sup>	Maint.	1 Location		3 Locations		
					10 Yr Ave. Annual Cost/Unit	Cost per hour of Service	10 Yr Ave. Annual Cost/Unit	Cost per hour of Service	Comp. Cost
Urinal	\$75,000	\$40	\$14,285	\$1,000	\$22,785	\$3	\$68,355	\$2	100%
APT	\$250,000	\$205	\$74,825	\$2,500	\$102,325	\$12	\$306,975	\$9	449%
Portable	\$1,200	\$450	\$70,200	\$500	\$70,820	\$91	\$72,060	\$92	4736%

<sup>1</sup> Cost per Urinal based on cleaning 3 urinals; **Portable** cost based on 1-4 urinals deployed

<sup>2</sup> Costs for Portable only provide for service during late nights (5 hours), three days a week

The cleaning costs for the urinal are \$40 a day. This level of cleaning proved appropriate and this figure has been used in the table above for estimating the daily costs for three locations over ten years of operation. The overall cost for the urinal per hour of service compares favourably compared to the current portable urinal program and automated public toilet (APT) kiosks used elsewhere.

There is currently adequate 2010 capital funding in place for the construction of two additional urinals. Operational costs can be provided by reallocating the existing budget from the portable urinals, once that program is curtailed following the installation of the permanent urinals

### III. Public Response to Trial

#### Telephone and Email Comments

At the inception of the pilot project, the public was invited to submit their comments on the project to the City. A notice was also placed in the urinal structure inviting users to provide comments. There were few submissions received and most were positive.

*"Your urinal is very, very nice and very useful. I am a senior and have to go very often. It is a very good idea"*

*"I own a couple of buildings close by and I think the urinal is very good"*

*"Thank you for allowing me to pee somewhere other than a persons doorway. The Pandora urinal is nicer than the plastic ones"*

*"The public urinal is a @\$% great thing! I would have pee'd in the street."*

*"Amazing. This urinal is great, thank you. Please keep them coming."*

*"Overall it is a fantastic idea and I fully support this!!! ... I think a little more basic instalment without the noisy flushing mechanism would be more appropriate and much more affordable to install and maintain. Nice work!!"*

*"You really think a man who is too lazy to walk 6 blocks to the Centennial washroom is going to walk 6 blocks to an outdoor urinal? Did you do a focus group with men who said they would do that and find out why they would not use the public, full facility at Centennial Square? Are you prepared to put these foul things on every 3rd block?"*

*Victoria is going to now be a worldwide laughingstock. What a waste of money and an embarrassing thing Victoria is doing." (received prior to urinal installation)*

*"I LOVE the new public art urinal."*

*"It's kind of an obvious question but it seems like a urinal will help with male public urination but what about the women who have to go?"*

Overall, the public comments received:

- Support wider use of the urinals
- Present the question of female access
- Comment about a technical detail – sound of flushing

#### Survey of Use

1. Observations were made from 11:30pm to 12:30am on Saturday May 15, 2010. Personal interviews with users were not considered appropriate given the hour of night. It was apparent that the location is at the margins of the downtown, as the majority of foot traffic was moving to the south where most of the late night venues are located. Approximately 60-80 individuals passed by the location over the course of an hour.

Three individuals used the urinal over the hour, none of whom appeared to be intoxicated. They approached it in a matter-of-fact fashion, which suggested that they had used the urinal before. Several groups walking by detoured over to the urinal to examine it, clearly not recognizing what it was. A street person commented that people use it all the time and another female patron of the adjacent bar stated that she would never use it, but was glad there was a place for males to go.

2. A second survey was conducted from 3:00pm to 4:00pm on Sunday May 16, 2010. The

Government Street Market was in operation and there was a steady flow of foot traffic by the urinal. During this period, a total of six individuals used the urinal.

Twenty five parties were interviewed. Nine of these were visitors, only one of whom recognized the structure as a urinal. All of them thought it was both attractive and a good idea. Of the sixteen local residents, three were not aware of the project while four others had heard about it in the news, but did not recognize it as a urinal. Three parties indicated that they had used the urinal in the past.

All local residents interviewed thought that it was a good idea to have urinals in the downtown and that the design was attractive. Five individuals commented that they thought it was an art piece, while one thought it looked somewhat "industrial" and would benefit from having art installed on the exterior. Two individuals commented that they thought the visibility inward and outward was a little unnerving, but both felt that it was appropriate.

Several women were asked what they thought of the urinals being designed for male use. Their responses were that (1) they were unlikely to use the urinals even if the bowl were configured for females and that (2) as regular patrons of the downtown, they knew where they could find washrooms.

While acknowledging that these observations may not capture all perspectives on the urinal or provide an estimate in overall daily use, they do suggest that:

- Many individuals are using the urinal
- Males are comfortable with the design and would/do use it if required
- The public finds the urinal design attractive
- The public finds the installation of public urinals in the downtown a positive initiative
- Many visitors and local residents do not recognize the structure as a urinal, suggesting that more effective signage is required

### **Downtown Victoria Business Association**

The Downtown Victoria Business Association commented that the pilot urinal is an excellent addition to the downtown. They were impressed with its cleanliness and considered it well designed, discreetly shaped and coloured to fit into the environment.

### **Downtown Residents Association**

Following the pilot period, the Downtown Residents' Association (DRA) reported that they considered the design and construction good and relayed the following comments received through their organization. (One negative comment from a Vogue strata complex resident was added to the next section of this report).

*"The design is great; no idea about its performance; yes, it's a positive addition to downtown. Yes, would support one or more of these in the downtown.  
... public WC for women?"*

*"I think the design of the urinal is good except for the slapped-on restroom symbol. The City should go back to the designer and get them to figure out a way to announce the urinal's purpose that doesn't break the visual flow. I know a lot of guys who have gone out of their way to try out the urinal, so I think they'd be a welcome addition in other parts of downtown. Maybe in different colours?"*

*"I think the public urinal is a success. It is discreet enough and private for users and it looks interesting from the outside, I rather like the design."*

*"It seems well used, and in a good spot."*

*"Seems to work fine, it's usually quite clean, nice to not have to run home!"*

*"There should be more. It can be hard to find a place to go, not just for the bars at night letting out but also during the day while shopping or sight seeing. Public washrooms are few and far between. Nice not to have to bug restaurants and cafes."*

The DRA comments indicate respondents:

- Support wider use of the urinals
- Support the pilot location
- Present the question of female access
- Comment about technical details – colour of urinal, signage

### Neighbours' Response

Businesses and residents in proximity to the pilot urinal location were initially surveyed by the Mayor. They were informed that the pilot project would be modified or curtailed if it was found that they could not be operated in a satisfactory manner. Recommendations to Council following the trial would also include whether or not the urinal should remain in place at the current location or be relocated.

Almost all comments from neighbours following the trial period were either indifferent or supportive of the urinal pilot. The Victoria Plaza Hotel management considered the urinal a positive addition to the area and the restaurant within the hotel building was supportive, though they noted that the urinal had not curtailed the urination which was still occurring in the adjacent alley.

The exception was the Vogue strata complex above Mountain Equipment Coop at 1450 Government Street. The following responses were received from Vogue residents prior to the trial.

*"I am a property owner in the Vogue Building on the corner of Pandora and Government and yesterday I received notification of the City of Victoria's intent to locate a public urinal on that corner.*

*First I am in favour of public urinals. I am not however in favour of the chosen location. Any public bathroom should be located AWAY from all housing and privately owned condo units. The reason for this as I see it is: smell; noise; increases the number of people hanging out; and property owners are tax payers and they should be accorded priority concerning their need for quiet enjoyment of their property.*

*I think that locating the urinal on the Centennial Square area away from all housing units would be a great compromise. So, on the square, away from all living units."*

*"I have just heard that the city is planning to install a urinal at the corner of Government and Pandora Streets.*

*As a resident of 995 Pandora (the Vogue Apartments) I object strongly to this proposal on noise, safety and aesthetic grounds. The noise levels on Government Street at night is already a problem and will be compounded by the location of this facility, it will be noisier and later at night than it currently is, making it harder for resident of our building to sleep! A collection of inebriated individuals concentrated on that corner will also present a safety issue for residents entering and leaving our building after dark. However well designed the urinal is it will still look like a urinal, not something most people would like to have located outside their home!!!*

*I do not understand why the city has selected this particular location for the urinal. This block is the only block in this area where there are significant numbers of apartments (i.e. The Vogue and The Monaco Apartments). Why not locate it in the square adjacent to city hall or behind city hall, or on one of the green areas adjacent to the Johnson Street Bridge, or anywhere else which is predominantly commercial rather than residential and therefore not occupied at night.*

*How would you like to have a urinal located outside your home?"*

Although there were no concerns reported by residents during the trial period, their responses following the pilot program had not changed from their original perspectives. The strata council president reported that the consensus from the strata as well as owners he had spoken to was that, although they applauded the city for thinking creatively about a solution to public urination, placing it in the open in front of their homes was "unappealing and extremely distasteful". They did not support the project and felt that it negatively affects the

quality of living in our building. They would therefore seek to have it removed or relocated to a different location. The following are specific comments from apartment owners.

*"As owners and part time residents in the Vogue (Suite 205) we are not happy with the location and the aesthetics of the urinal. Our guests have been unimpressed as well.*

*The urinal certainly serves a purpose but is also an attraction for problems associated with the establishment next door. Our guests are quite taken aback by the partial view of people using the urinal and of those that don't use it properly.*

*If it has to be there then my suggestion is an enclosed system similar to what the City of Seattle uses on their waterfront."*

*"As a follow-up to my letter to the City of Victoria, I wish to reiterate that I do NOT support the location of the Downtown Urinal on Government and Pandora. I do not believe that any public toilet should be located within the direct vicinity of peoples' residences. There is no problem with the concept, but the location is WRONG.*

*Public toilets should be located on properties owned by the City and away from any residential buildings; such a location could be at the north end of Centennial Square, by the parking buildings.*

*None of the City of Victoria Councillors would like a public toilet on their front lawn, what makes them think we would like it!"*

*"We had quite a bit of trouble selling our condo in the Vogue building because people didn't like looking out across from their living room onto the urinal. Easily 10 prospective buyers were turned off by that (of course, other downtown related factors as well) -- but specifically the urinal outside was mentioned again and again. We did end up selling - at a much lower price than anticipated and after 8 months on the market. So my only comment is that it may affect property value of the homeowners living directly across the street."*

*"I did request the city when I went to a meeting prior to the construction of this urinal to come and take a look at where the urinal would be---my living room over looks this--as does my roof top deck look straight down on this. The lights really aid in being able to see into the urinal at night--and groups of men hanging around this adds to the noise that we experience here in the Vogue. That is the units that front onto Government St.*

*I would like to say as a resident of downtown (it is what I wanted) however I feel the city is forgetting the residential component of city life. I have lived and worked in major cities, noise is part of that life style. However I would like to see more of a balance between commercial need and residential need.*

*This morning at 4:59am the city truck was emptying the garbage bins---the back up beeper was so loud and the dumping of the cans into the truck--so now it means I have to sleep with my window shut. Same with the night club across the way --after 10pm the city bylaw allows the noise level to increase. As does when it closes this is when there is even more noise around this urinal.*

*Surely there can be a positive balance---so when I went to the meeting about the urinal--feed back was not required as the decision had been made.*

*I do not want to create a conflict --but to enhance the residential component of city life there must be a balance. There could be a win-win here.*

*If this input is really looked at, you are invited to come and see the view."*

The resident providing the last comments above was visited by staff to make observations from her location. This residence (307-995 Pandora Avenue) has the clearest view of the urinal.







The photographs show that there is a clear view of the urinal. It is relatively small in scale vis a vis the view and appears well-maintained. Its form suggests consideration for aesthetics and not one typical of a conventional utilitarian washroom facility. Though users of the urinal are no more visible from here than they would be at ground level, their purpose in approaching the urinal is clear from this vantage point and this may be considered distasteful. One resident, however, suggests that an enclosed urinal would be acceptable, which implies that it is the *visibility* and not the *act* that is disagreeable.

One resident observes that the urinal contributes to loitering outside the adjacent bars. This has not been noted by others. As the urinal is not likely to provide the basis for more than passing interest, disturbances are likely periodic and short term events. While this still may be frustrating to residents, it is likely relatively minor in comparison with activity associated with the two Liquor Primary bars with 450 seats and closing hours of from 1:30am to 2:00am.

It is difficult to assess the effect of the urinal on the value of the residence as it is claimed by one resident.

Comments of the residents at the Vogue strata complex suggest that they:

- Are supportive of the urinal in principle
- Do not favour the pilot location due to its visibility to some residents and its perceived role in increasing late night noise and disorder
- Comment about technical details – illumination

## **IV. Analysis**

### **Performance of Urinals**

Based on the feedback provided by the internal review and comments from the public, it is clear that the public urinal prototype has been considered successful in terms of its design and the service it provides. The appearance is considered attractive and it received a wide amount of use at all hours of the day by males of all demographics. Maintenance and cleaning have not presented any challenges and costs are consistent with expectations. Overall costs to install and operate the urinals are estimated to represent good value for the city in comparison to alternatives.

Issues raised over the review involve a number of technical improvements for consideration. These include the colour of the enclosure, hard surfacing around the pilot urinal location, reduction of flushing sound and illumination. Signage was also identified as inadequate and an improvement to this would likely result in significant increases in use by visitors to the City who typically do not recognize what they are.

The two following additional issues are of concern when considering the deployment of more urinals and the retention of the existing location.



## 1. Universal Access

Feedback received from females indicated that they recognize males are the primary perpetrators of the late night urination problem and that they appreciate concerns with safety. Still, the lack of equality for access to facilities was frequently raised.

It was the intention of the pilot project to enable females to use the urinal if they elected to do so in situations of pressing need. Handles were incorporated into the design and various urine receptacle options were reviewed. Promotion of disposable personal "adaptors" was also considered.

Further evaluation with City staff concluded that encouraging female use of the urinal in any fashion would not be advisable with regards to the personal safety of female users and the associated level of legal risk to the City. Modifications to the urinal design that would render them acceptable for females would compromise design features that are integral to the urinals success as an unsupervised facility. Therefore, while the urinal design may be very successful for its intended purposes in providing a good facility for addressing male urination, other means would have to be investigated if there was a desire to provide a service for females.

A further issue with access for persons with disabilities was raised by staff. Regardless of plans to provide alternative facilities with greater access, the City may be subject to Charter of Rights challenges by not providing such access to the urinals.

These issues need to be addressed through broader consideration of options for washroom facilities in the downtown, as originally presented in the 2006 discussion paper.

## 2. Proximity to Vogue Strata Complex

Residents above 1450 Government have expressed their desire to have the pilot urinal location removed. As discussed above, one of the concerns is late night noise. This is confounded by the location of a two late-closing bars which generate a significantly higher amount of noise than use of the urinal. The other is the offensiveness of the visibility of urinal users during the daytime. The visibility is no greater than it would be at ground level where it is possible to discern the silhouette of a figure using the facility.

Raising the height of the urinal would not improve the screening of the user and increasing concealment of the urinal interior would compromise safety features of the design. Assessing and addressing management issues with the neighbouring bars may be pursued to help reduce late night issues in general, but there are few other options to address residents' concerns with the urinal other than its relocation.

Retention of the site offers several positive features, while the removal of the location entails staff time and costs associated with identifying and establishing an additional urinal location.

<b>Retain</b>	<b>Remove</b>
Good access to underground services	Challenging to meet site criteria elsewhere
Proximity to entertainment district	Loss of site with strong demand
Volume of tourist traffic	Cost of relocation and loss of installation investment
Sightlines and visibility	
Suitable size of site	
Investment made in site	

In a previous report to Council, staff noted inadequacies of the location and configuration of the Centennial Square washrooms and that improved facilities should be established with the redevelopment of the eastern section of the square. Retention of the pilot urinal location may therefore be considered a short term option until such time as the full service public washrooms in Centennial Square are replaced with a more satisfactory facility.

## **Consideration of Other Locations**

Site selection for the urinals involves several considerations. They must be situated close enough to late night travel corridors to be convenient, yet not so close to businesses and residents that they are considered offensive. Underground services (i.e. water, sewerage, electricity) must also be in proximity to service the urinals.

Several candidate sites on public property have been identified as possible permanent locations pending the outcome of the pilot program. These and if necessary other suitable sites will be reviewed in greater detail for consideration.

## **V. Recommendations**

Staff recommend further deployment of two public urinals with consideration for minor technical improvements. The current trial urinal location should be retained until such time as a new full service washroom facility is established in Centennial Square.

Staff recommend the assessment of any options that may be developed to safely provide greater washroom access to females and individuals with disabilities in the downtown.

### **Option 1:** Recommended

- Direct staff to identify suitable locations for two additional permanent freestanding urinals

### **Option 2:** Recommended

- Retain the existing urinal site until washroom facilities in Centennial Square are replaced.

### **Option 3:** Recommended

- Direct staff to assess means of providing washroom access in the downtown entertainment district for those who can not reasonably use the urinal.

### **Option 4:**

- Retain existing portable urinal program