

January 25, 2024

Mayor Josh Morgan and Council,

I am writing to you in support of **Business Case #P-41 – Washroom Hours – Dundas Place Fieldhouse and Victoria Park** and the importance of washrooms as a basic human right.

Council's decision to fund the additional washroom hours at Dundas Place and Victoria Park from the London Community Recovery Network's action item was a positive step forward in addressing the dignity and needs of those without access to private washrooms, and all people who use our downtown spaces. We learned through Covid-19 just how important public spaces are for people's wellbeing and how a lack of basic need amenities like washrooms adversely impacts people's use of these spaces. We also saw just how many people really have no other choice and rely on public washrooms to meet their basic need to go. I want to commend Council for acting on this important issue. By doing so you demonstrated a commitment to the dignity of those who are most marginalized and in fact all Londoners. We are now at another decision point, and I hope you will show that same commitment to those who need it most.

Open public washrooms serve the needs of everyone. The United Nations deems access to washrooms in public spaces as a human right (1). Everyone needs to use a washroom at some point and without access to reliable, quality public toilets, the literature shows that people will alter their routes and decisions about where to visit. This is particularly true for people who need washrooms more frequently including women, those who menstruate, people with disabilities, older people, children and caregivers (most of whom are women) (2,3,4,5) If as a city, we want people to come downtown we need to be sure we are meeting the basic needs of all people, and that means regular access to washrooms.

People who would be most impacted by reduced hours in these locations are those who are homeless or street involved. There is good evidence that those who are homeless would benefit when they have access to reliable public toilets (7,8). Without this basic service, people are forced to urinate and defecate in public spaces which can be humiliating and creates a health and sanitary issue for them personally, and in streets and parks. Going in public is particularly difficult for women, trans and gender diverse people who menstruate. They may have to expose their bodies publicly and are at increased risk of violence (7,8). None of us would like to be forced to use a toilet outside, particularly if it meant exposing ourselves to others. Regular, longer hours in public toilets is an issue of dignity, a human right, and contributes to the City's strategic goal of being a safe city for women, girls, and gender-diverse and trans people.

The amount of money needed for this business case is \$350,000/year and \$1,400,000 over 4 years. Cities like Vancouver, Toronto, Edmonton are undertaking public engagement strategies and commitments around public washrooms, recognizing the service they provide to all residents, visitors, and those who are unhoused. The risk in not committing this money to more open hours in these sites will likely mean additional clean-up costs when people are forced to go on sidewalks, in parks and other places downtown that they would prefer not to. It is a much

better investment to put that money into sanitation that is dignified, healthy and serves everyone's needs. This investment addresses the needs of the most marginalized and supports visits and tourism downtown, contributing to the city's strategic goals of reconciliation, equity, accessibility and inclusion; along with economic, growth, culture and prosperity.

I ask that you vote in favour of Business Case 41 and continue providing a basic need such as access to public washrooms for those who need it most and those who would choose to use it if they knew it was available and reliable.

Thank you,


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Refences

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- (3) Herman, Jody L. 2013. "Gendered Restrooms and Minority Stress: The Public Regulation of Gender and Its Impact on Transgender People's Lives." *Social Policy*, 17.
- (4) Hartigan, Siobhan M., Kemberlee Bonnet, Leah. Chisholm, Casey. Kowalik, Roger R. Dmochowski, David Schlundt, and W. Stuart Reynolds. 2020. "Why Do Women Not Use the Bathroom? Women's Attitudes and Beliefs on Using Public Restrooms." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17 (6)<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17062053>.
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- (6) Sommer, Marni, Caitlin Gruer, Rachel Clark. Smith, Andrew Maroko, and Kim Hopper. 2020. "Menstruation and Homelessness: Challenges Faced Living in Shelters and on the Street in New York City." *Health and Place* 66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2020.102431>.
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