



JACQUELINE YOUNG/STATIONPOINT PHOTOGRAPHIC

A PUBLIC CALLING

TEXT Wins Bridgman and Rae St. Clair Bridgman

MAKING A PLEA FOR THE URBAN OUTHOUSE

We need more public toilets now. We cannot rely on private businesses and the few-and-far-between public toilets in parks. A great city is only as great as its public toilets. This credo is even enshrined in a United Nations commitment made by our country in 2012: *Canada recognizes the human right of everyone to safe drinking water and basic sanitation as essential to the right to an adequate standard of living.*

That is why we designed the Pop-Up Winnipeg Public Toilet.

Although our Pop-Up toilet is a relatively low-cost pilot summer project, it offers a model for permanent facilities. The project's quirky design arose from a cross-sectoral partnership between our firm, Bridgman-Collaborative Architecture; the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ; and Siloam Mission, a local charity. The Pop-Up supports at-risk youth through Siloam Mission, which offers them employment as kiosk attendants. At the kiosk, the youth sell T-shirts, bottled water and newspapers, and offer orientation services to visitors. Such a people-centred approach

is distinct from automated self-cleaning washrooms and technically-driven tactics.

The Pop-Up's highly visible and bright orange iconic structure, accessible street furniture, plays literally on "pop up." It features a sloped walkway and acrylic glazed double walls, which slide "up" smoothly when the facility opens. When closed, the acrylic walls slide back "down."

The basis of the form is the shipping container, whose familiar bold-orange hue inspired the Pop-Up's own bright façade. We designed the Pop-Up to be moveable and robust, migrating to one of four different sites every month to heighten downtown visibility.

In tandem with the Pop-Up, Bridgman-Collaborative has mounted a publicity campaign on downtown bus shelters. A dozen posters display quotes and images of ordinary people shown in tightly cross-legged poses that express the urgent need for public toilets, with the display copy emblazoned below: *My Winnipeg includes Public Toilets.*

Public response has been enthusiastic since

ABOVE Temporarily built in the heart of downtown Winnipeg, the Pop-Up Winnipeg Public Toilet presents a model for clean, accessible, well-monitored and well-maintained public washroom facilities.

the Pop-Up went up in June. Vandalism around the sites has decreased significantly. Young people are gaining valuable work experience, and Winnipeggers in general are excited about the prospect of permanent year-round facilities.

Securing a public-funding commitment for future Pop-Up public toilets—let alone permanent facilities—remains a challenge. But as health and public-policy advisor André Picard once noted, every kilometre of road costs a million dollars to build and then more money every year after that to clear it of snow and potholes and vandals and speeders. "Why is building and maintaining roads for cars considered an unquestionable necessity and legitimate expense," asked Picard, "but having public washrooms is deemed a superfluous luxury?"

That's what we're wondering too.

Wins Bridgman is an architect and visual artist, and Rae St. Clair Bridgman is a Professor in the Department of City Planning at the University of Manitoba.