

Downtown Winnipeg BIZ

INNOVATION

The bright, highly visible design of the Pop-Up brought public attention to the dearth of public toilets in downtown Winnipeg, Manitoba and generated enthusiastic media coverage plus considerable social media flurry. The Pop-Up featured a social incubator, or social enterprise, for at-risk youth who were referred to as ambassadors for the kiosk and the public toilets. The kiosk sold water, snacks, t-shirts, bags, artwork and newspapers, but could also have been extended into another business (e.g., a florist shop). All proceeds from the sales went to Siloam Mission. Safety and oversight of the maintenance occurred through the presence of two ambassadors, the support of a third party that leased the portable toilets installed within the Pop-Up Winnipeg Public Toilet, as well as regular site visits from the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ Watch Team.

OUTCOME

Lobbying for accessible public toilets in Winnipeg continues. The Pop-Up Winnipeg Public Toilet is the latest incarnation of that lobbying, notable for its aim to incorporate creative and quirky design, community-building ideas, cross-sectoral partnerships (public, private and non-profit), support of youth-at-risk, and potential for commercial opportunities (e.g., the kiosk helps promote local businesses/artisans, orients visitors to the city, and discourages vandalism, etc.). All of these elements make the pilot Pop-Up Winnipeg Public Toilet unique. Although the project was conceived as a relatively low-cost summer pilot project, it offers promising directions for more permanent facilities. The Pop-Up garnered positive responses on the part of the public, and generous and supportive media coverage. Upwards of 35-40 people used the Pop-Up daily during the summer of 2018. Dramatic improvements in cleanliness and decreased vandalism were observed in the areas surrounding the Pop-Up. The Pop-Up has now also led to discussions with a local downtown church keen to “host” the Pop-Up for a six-month period (spring to autumn) each year, until funding is secured for a permanent public washroom.

EXECUTION

The project was developed over the course of a ten year collaboration between the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ and BridgmanCollaborative Architecture on public washrooms. The idea for the Pop-Up Public Toilet was conceived at the 2017 Placemaking Summit hosted by Downtown Winnipeg BIZ. The Summit involved many stakeholders and participants who discussed placemaking needs and a vision for the downtown community. Funds were then raised for the project through the CEO Sleepout in the fall of 2017. In 2018, the project developed into the public awareness campaign that included “My Winnipeg Includes Public Toilets” bus shelter posters. The Pop-Up toilet design received approval in the spring of 2018, was constructed and the permits approved in time for the June 1, 2018 opening at the first of four locations in downtown Winnipeg. The built project was extremely robust and will continue to be used in the future by the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ. What sets this project apart, is the human component of interaction with the public in the Pop-Up provided by the ongoing partnership of the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ and the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ funded services of Siloam Mission.

REPRESENTATION

Partnerships were essential. In this case, they involved members of local businesses and community members, architectural and graphic designers, social enterprise advocates and outreach workers, supportive municipal officials, and supportive city Councilors, among others. Community services and outreach were also a key part of the project. Ambassadors, as part of Siloam Mission’s employment-readiness program, played a key role in oversight and maintenance, distinct from potential alternative approaches (e.g., automated and self-cleaning toilets, security cameras, etc.). Human contact and building relationships were crucial. One article praised the involvement of youth: “...beyond the experience and the money, it’s a job that provides [the youth] with dignity. A job that shows them they are valued enough to be on a team – that someone trusts them enough to represent their organization. A job that allows them to contribute positively toward society.” The Downtown Winnipeg BIZ also provided other services to ensure the

success of the Pop-Up, such as the Enviro Team and the Community Homeless Assistance Team (CHAT), who were on-site daily to engage with community members. The interest was in investing in people, as opposed to investing immediately in, for example, the technology associated with a self-cleaning toilet.

REPLICATION

The easily replicable design, based on a shipping container, captured the public imagination, and the Pop-Up became a destination in its own right. The politicized public art campaign, which linked events, media exposure, and strong public presence effectively magnified the message that *Great Cities Have Great Public Toilets*, a rallying call for cities across the continent.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

The project is in essence an elegant solution prototype to a very complex urban problem. We used a third party toilet operator to take care of the mechanics of the washroom so that the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ and Siloam Mission could provide public outreach. The structure itself (visually arresting, iconic and fun) became something of a sensation. Public toilets went from the place where no one wanted to go – to a happening place in Winnipeg. The bright orange shipping container sharing half and half outreach with service became a symbol in Winnipeg of a civic amenity in an equitable city.

PRESS LINKS

Winnipeg Free Press: August 21, 2018: <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/winnipeggers-pumped-about-public-toilets-survey-491402591.html>

Winnipeg Free Press (opinion): July 17, 2018: <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/analysis/jobs-provide-dignity-and-purpose-488357241.html>

Winnipeg Free Press: June 4, 2018: <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/when-you-gotta-go-downtown-pop-up-toilet-project-offers-free-public-facilities-484518963.html>

Winnipeg Free Press Feature: May 12, 2018: <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/special/randy-turner/going-downtown-flushed-with-excitement-482398093.html>

CTV Winnipeg: July 12, 2018: <https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=1438167>

CTV Winnipeg: June 4, 2018: <https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/new-public-toilet-popping-up-in-downtown-winnipeg-1.3958395>

Global TV Winnipeg: July 13, 2018: <https://globalnews.ca/news/4328792/winnipeg-pop-up-toilets-relocate-second-downtown-location/>

Global TV Winnipeg: June 4, 2018: <https://globalnews.ca/news/4247269/practical-and-thought-provoking-pop-up-public-toilets-open-in-winnipeg/>

CBC Winnipeg: June 4, 2018: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/pop-up-portable-potty-sets-up-downtown-1.4691295>