

Attachment 3

Summary of Online and In-person Engagement Activities and Findings of the City-wide Toilet Strategy

Summary of On-line and In-person Engagement Activities and Findings

Community engagement for the City-wide Toilet Strategy began in January 2025 with the launch of an online survey hosted on Be Heard New West to gather input from residents on their experiences accessing toilets in New Westminster. In-person focus groups were held in partnership with local organizations serving seniors, people living with disabilities, people living with health conditions, families with young children, and people who are unhoused.

Throughout the engagement process, 580+ residents and interest holders provided their input, contributing valuable insights to inform the development of the City-wide Toilet Strategy. Below is a high-level summary of the engagement findings from all activities. The comprehensive Engagement Summary Report was published on March 31, 2025 and can be found on the [Be Heard project page](#).

Engagement on Be Heard New West

An online survey was available on Be Heard New West from January 10 to February 2, 2025. A total of 495 residents participated. The survey was designed to explore residents' experiences and priorities in accessing toilets across New Westminster. The questions covered a range of topics, including current experiences accessing toilets, priorities in future public toilet provision, and neighbourhoods in need of more toilet access. Details from each section of the survey are shared below, along with a summary of the results from each question.

Key findings from the Be Heard Survey Included:

- The **availability** of public toilets was a major concern, with only 36% of respondents indicating that toilets are available when and where they need them;
- **Cleanliness** was a serious concern: only 34% of respondents indicated that they are either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the cleanliness of public toilets;
- In regards to **accessibility**, 58% of respondents were either satisfied or somewhat satisfied that toilets are meeting their or their family's physical needs;
- When asked **where additional access to toilets** is needed, the Downtown (56%), Brow of the Hill (18%), and Sapperton (18%), and Quayside (16%) were the neighbourhoods that were most commonly cited;
- Regarding **information and communication**, 54% of respondents indicated that they rely on local knowledge, 47% indicated that they follow signage, and only 1% of respondents indicated that they use the City of New Westminster's online map to locate a toilet when they need one;
- The top challenge that respondents wanted the City-wide Toilet Strategy to address was **not being able to find a public toilet when needed** (32%), followed by **cleanliness and maintenance** (21%), and **safety concerns** (14%);
- When asked to rank potential options that could improve toilet access, most respondents were interested in the City exploring "**Clear signage** with directions to existing public toilets," followed by "**Extending hours of operation** of existing toilet facilities," and "Constructing **more new public toilets**";

- When asked about 24/7 access to toilets, 55% of respondents felt that **24/7 access to toilets was very important**, and respondents overwhelmingly felt that additional access to 24/7 toilets was needed in the Downtown (71%), Brow of the Hill (21%), and Moody Park (15%) neighbourhoods. To operationalize 24/7 toilets, increasing the frequency of cleaning and maintenance schedules was the most highly ranked option by respondents.

Qualitative comments in text boxes throughout the survey highlighted the need for additional access to toilets in all neighbourhoods, but particularly in the Downtown and Uptown. There was a desire for additional communication, signage and wayfinding; extended hours of operation in parks to increase seasonal availability; and for toilets near Skytrain stations and bus loops. Comments throughout the survey highlighted the need to ensure toilets are well-maintained, clean, safe, and dignified.

Focused Engagement Activities

In addition to the online Be Heard Survey, staff conducted focused engagement activities between January 10 and March 11, 2025. Activities included focus groups, interviews, and workshops. In general, participants were grouped by demographics based on the recruitment method, which relied heavily on existing relationships with community-serving organizations. The following focused activities were held:

- **Focus Groups**
 - People with lived or living experience of being unhoused (x2)
 - Seniors (x2)
 - People living with disabilities
 - Families with kids
- **Interviews**
 - Virtual interviews with people living with underlying health conditions and people living with disabilities
- **Workshops**
 - Kids New West
 - New West Welcoming and Inclusive New Westminster - Local Immigration Partnership
 - City of New Westminster Accessibility Advisory Committee

Participants were asked to share their experiences accessing publicly available toilets in New Westminster. This includes sharing perspectives on:

- where toilets are located;
- their hours of operation;
- features that are important to them;
- strategies they use to find a toilet when they need one;
- the importance of publicly available toilets on their health, well-being, and independence; and

- potential solutions or strategies to address gaps in toilet access, including partnerships and wayfinding strategies

Themes from Focused Engagement Activities

The focused engagement activities revealed important insights about community members' perceptions of publicly available toilets in New Westminster. Five core themes and one overarching theme are described in the table below.

OVERARCHING THEME: Additional resources and ongoing dialogue are needed	
<p>Participants in the focused engagement activities expressed that more needs to be done to meaningfully address the toileting needs of all community members. Participants repeatedly described gaps relating to location, hours of operation, availability, signage, wayfinding, and communication. Participants expressed desire for additional staff resources for cleaning and maintenance, security or attendant services, while others simply felt that more toilets need to be made available, either through construction, extended hours of operation at existing toilets, or through community partnerships. Participants also felt that additional resources for education, awareness, and stigma reduction initiatives are needed.</p> <p>Nevertheless, participants in all focused engagement activities were appreciative of the fact that public toilets are complicated, expensive, and resource-intensive to build, operate, and maintain. Most participants were open to the City exploring innovative solutions, including partnerships and advocacy to increase the overall availability of toilets to the public. Participants also expressed a desire for continued dialogue and action beyond the initial engagement phase of the City-wide Toilet Strategy.</p>	
THEME	SUBTHEME(S)
THEME 1: Lack of toilets has wide-ranging impacts	<p>Health Impacts</p> <p>Participants shared that avoiding drinking fluids or “holding it” could have health implications. Among people with underlying health conditions, unclean facilities present a risk of infection. People who are unhoused shared that being denied access to toilets, laundry and showers, presented a risk to their health.</p>
	<p>Social Impacts</p> <p>Not having access to toilets was seen to impede an individual's ability to fully participate in their community. Seniors, people living with disabilities, and people with underlying health conditions shared that attending community outings is dependent on if toilets are available.</p>
	<p>Economic Impacts</p> <p>Participants shared that a lack of publicly available toilets limited their economic participation in the community as it prevented them from accessing commercial districts for extended periods.</p>

<p>THEME 2: <i>Toilets need to be available, open, and locatable when nature calls</i></p>	<p>More Toilets need to be Available There were frustrations that toilets may be present, but not reliably available. Participants shared stories of finding toilets closed, out of order, and/or requiring a purchase to access. The latter was seen as cost-prohibitive for some people on fixed incomes.</p> <p>Location, Location, Location Participants across user groups said that toilets need to be located in high use areas to facilitate mobility about the city. Overwhelmingly, participants expressed a desire for toilets at transit hubs like Skytrain stations or bus loops. Densely populated areas like Uptown and Downtown, as well as parks, were locations where increased toilet availability is needed. For safety, toilets should be located in well-lit areas.</p> <p>Hours of Operation and Seasonal Availability Participants agreed that access to toilets was more challenging in the evenings and in winter. Others expressed some safety concerns about accessing toilets in the evenings in areas that are not well-lit.</p> <p>Wayfinding, Signage, and Communication Participants across groups shared that they are unsure where to find publicly available toilets in the city. There was support for consolidated and comprehensive tools, such as a map, app, and/or additional signage showing where toilets are, their hours of operation, and accessibility. Importantly, participants said information should be accessible, visible, and clear, and universal (i.e. using a toilet icon instead of text).</p>
<p>THEME 3: <i>Washrooms are not reflective of diverse needs</i></p>	<p>Built Environment Needs Participants shared that accessibility considerations need to go “beyond the stall” and include consideration of wayfinding and surrounding areas. Participants shared experiences of not being able to enter washrooms due to missing or broken automatic door buttons, or inaccessible pathways leading to facilities. Within washrooms, accessible stalls are too small to accommodate a caregiver, and adult changing tables are needed.</p> <p>Parents and caregivers shared that many places lack room for strollers and changing tables. Men’s washrooms often do not have changing tables, which creates challenges for guardians and adds to inequitable child-care responsibilities. The height of features such as soap dispensers, sinks, and hand dryers are not accessible for children or people living with disabilities. Many expressed concerns that confusing signage, dim lighting, and slippery flooring can present</p>

	<p>safety concerns for seniors and people with dementia. Participants shared a desire for storage within washroom stalls, such as shelves to accommodate hygiene supplies, or hooks to hang mobility equipment like walking sticks.</p> <p>Neurodiversity and Social Needs Participants suggested that additional consideration be given to the needs of people who require low stimulation spaces, for whom bright lights, automatic flushing systems or loud hand dryers can cause distress.</p> <p>Families, people living with disabilities, and seniors stated that they faced challenges when providing care for a child or parent of a different gender. Participants shared concerns that gendered facilities can create barriers for non-binary individuals. Other participants acknowledged the importance of universal washrooms but noted that there may be barriers for religious or cultural groups. In general, participants said that single-room universal toilets were preferable to multi-stall universal facilities.</p>
<p>THEME 4: <i>Shifting narratives: education, awareness, and stigma reduction</i></p>	<p>Participants stressed the importance of publicly available toilets, and felt that messaging needs to emphasize the role they play in fostering autonomy, community participation, and in promoting health and wellbeing. Participants across groups shared experiences of stigma, including discomfort in having to ask to use the washroom in businesses. Others noted that access to toilets varies based on how someone is perceived. For instance, several unhoused participants felt they have been denied access to toilets because of their appearance.</p> <p>Participants recommended training or education for both City staff and the wider community to raise awareness on diverse needs.</p>
<p>THEME 5: <i>Welcoming, dignified, and safe environments</i></p>	<p>Relationships with Toilet Operators Participants emphasized that publicly available toilets need to feel welcoming, dignified, and safe. Relationships with staff that oversee toilets can greatly impact experiences. In locations where people described feeling less welcome or safe, participants were supportive of more frequent cleaning and monitoring, attendants, or security.</p> <p>Maintenance and Cleanliness Participants noted inconsistency in the cleanliness of various facilities, with high-use areas requiring additional cleaning. Participants expressed a desire for a consistent way to report maintenance concerns.</p>

	<p>Toilet Misuse, Vandalism and Safety</p> <p>Many participants described instances of publicly available toilets filling gaps in other social supports, such as housing, health, or hygiene services. Participants shared that increased access to housing would address concerns about people sheltering inside toilets or in washroom stalls overnight.</p> <p>Attendant Services and Responding to Crisis</p> <p>Participants expressed significant concerns about responding to emergencies in public toilets, such as mental health crises, toxic drug poisonings, and falls. There were also concerns about improper disposal of harm reduction supplies. Participants suggested technologies like timed doors, motion sensors, or apps for crisis response. There was support for attendant services to respond to crises, re-stock supplies, and assist when needed. In addition to these solutions, people who use substances called for more disposal options, including additional sharps containers, as well as public health campaigns on safe disposal of harm reduction supplies.</p>
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