

7 Ways You Can Improve Your Public Washrooms

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Introduction

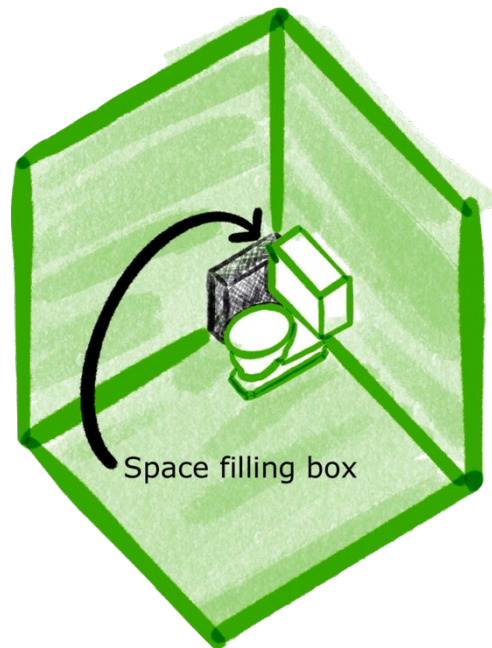
In Winter 2022-2023, City staff and researchers from the University of Guelph visited the 24 public washrooms run by the City of Guelph. You may have seen us in your washroom, taking notes and measuring things!

There are lots of great things about the public washrooms in our city, but we also noticed a few improvements that could help them better serve all of Guelph's residents. Most of the improvements are small and relatively easy to change, some are larger and may take more time and resources. Here are 7 suggestions for how you could improve your washrooms. There is also a sneak preview of other research we're doing as part of the "Access to Public Washrooms in Guelph" project.

1. Fill the space between the toilet and wall

Many washrooms have a very small space between the toilet and the wall where a person could get stuck if they fainted, had a seizure, or collapsed. The University of Victoria's Safer Bathroom Toolkit (University of Victoria 2022) includes a design sheet that suggests adding a tiled box between the toilet and the wall, which could prevent people getting stuck. Check with Public Health to make sure any box you're thinking of installing conforms to existing rules, and make

sure the top of the box is at least 1 inch lower than the toilet seat, to make sure larger bodies can use the washroom comfortably. Also, make sure the box doesn't have any sharp edges that someone doing a pivot transfer from a wheelchair could hurt themselves on. See the illustration here, adapted from the University of Victoria's guide, for an example:




2. Add change tables

About half of the public washroom locations don't have a baby change table at all . If you have space, consider adding a baby change table in every washroom so that parents and caregivers of all genders and abilities can access them. If you have limited space, add a change table in a washroom that everyone can use, but be aware that change tables in accessible washrooms can block access if they're left down, and can cause line-ups if parents don't have other options. (Note: Guelph's Facilities Accessible Design Manual provides guidelines on change tables for older children / adults).

3. Account for different heights

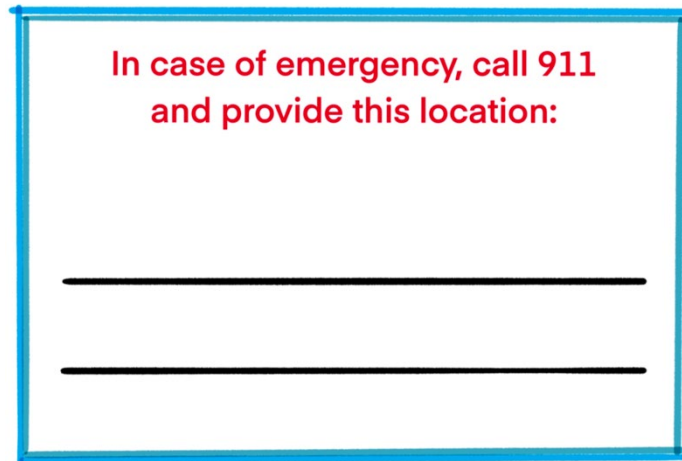
Adults come in all sizes! Sinks, urinals, and other amenities should be included at both average and short heights to account for a variety of accessibility needs. We noticed that most men's washrooms included a lower urinal, but very few washrooms included a lower sink. Replacing a sink or urinal is a higher-cost fix, but could be considered during regular maintenance as units break and need to be replaced. Some washrooms in libraries and community centres made plastic stools available, which is a great first step. The Little People of America produce a list of



guidelines to address height-specific accessibility issues, and guidance can also be sought from Little People of Ontario. Taking a variety of statures into account may also have the additional benefit of making washroom use easier for children.

4. Post emergency info

Attached to this document is a poster that can be filled out and posted in washrooms to help people give accurate information to first responders if they find someone unwell or in need of emergency help. Though newer washrooms require that an emergency button be installed (with an accompanying sign), a simple poster like this one could be a great help in older washrooms. A variety of health problems and conditions could cause a person to collapse at any time. The first person on the scene may not know the address of the building or location details – especially in a stressful situation.



A rectangular poster template with a blue border. Inside, the text "In case of emergency, call 911 and provide this location:" is written in red. Below the text are two horizontal black lines for writing.

5. Double-check signage

Some of the washrooms we saw had stalls with accessibility features, but the signs outside didn't include an accessibility symbol. Consult an accessibility specialist to see if your washroom signage could be changed to better reflect all the amenities available.


6. Make washrooms gender neutral where possible

All single-user washrooms could be gender neutral. The City already has this system at Hanlon Park (see illustration below). This may improve flow of users - there's lots of research to indicate that women tend to need more stalls than men, but people are likely to feel uncomfortable using a washroom signed for another gender. Make your single-user stalls available to everyone and eliminate concerns about gender.



7. Make hygiene supplies more accessible

Most washrooms have sharps bins, but only half of the washrooms labelled accessible included bins that were low enough for a person in a wheelchair or a person of short stature to reach. Similarly, only about half of washrooms marked accessible featured soap containers on the side wall – a much easier-to-reach spot than behind the sink. Double-check that sharps containers, soap and paper towel are accessible for everyone to reach. (Consult Guelph's Facilities



Accessible Design Manual (FADM) for guidelines on where to place washroom accessories). If you're concerned about children tampering with the sharps bin, consider investing in a "high risk" container, which tends to be made of a more durable material like stainless steel.

A preview of the upcoming final report: Washroom opening hours and winter washrooms

The small modifications proposed above are great steps the City can take to improve Guelph's public washrooms.

These suggestions were produced as part of a project exploring access to public washrooms in Guelph. We've mapped the location and opening hours of all the public washrooms. The maps show that there are no indoor public washrooms in Guelph that are open at night, and very few options in the winter. Portable facilities are available, but some people may be reluctant to use these, as they are less comfortable than indoor facilities. This obviously causes issues for people who are out later in the day or taking advantage of the night life, and can put a strain on City workers, shop employees, and anyone else who has to clean up waste on the street. Issues with public defecation and urination are likely to continue without a more robust night-time and winter plan.

The final report will include interview data from a diverse range of residents talking about their experiences with the public washrooms in our city. We'll discuss possible solutions to winter and night-time logistical issues, and bring Guelph resident's voices and opinions forward on this important topic.

If you're interested in learning more about the project, please email edith@uoguelph.ca or cesi@uoguelph.ca

**In case of emergency, call 911
and provide this location:**



Appendix I: References

Gagnon, Marilou, Shannon Riley, Kali-olt Sedgemore, and Trevor Goodyear. "The Safer Bathroom Toolkit - University of Victoria." UVic.ca, 2022.

<https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/projects/active/projects/safer-bathrooms.php>.