

DATE OF MEETING FEBRUARY 17, 2021

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SUBJECT PROVISION OF BARRIER-FREE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS IN CITY
FACILITIES

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide the Finance and Audit Committee with information regarding the provision of barrier-free menstrual products in City of Nanaimo facilities.

Recommendation

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to:

1. Initiate a pilot project in 2021 funded from the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve for the supply, install, and stocking of dispensers in 26 female and universal washrooms at these locations:
 - a. the major recreation facilities:
 - i. Beban Park, including Arenas, Pool, and Social Centre;
 - ii. Bowen Park;
 - iii. Nanaimo Aquatic Centre;
 - iv. Nanaimo Ice Centre;
 - v. Oliver Woods Community Centre;
 - b. Caledonia Park for shower program access;
 - c. Northfield Tourism Visitor Centre, and also,
2. Review use at the end of 2021 and return to Council with an update and recommendations.

BACKGROUND

At the Regular Council Meeting held 2020-NOV-02, the following motion was made: "That Council direct Staff to prepare a report outlining options to provide free menstrual products in City facilities in the Spring of 2021, including:

- A list of City facilities and the cost and feasibility to provide barrier-free menstrual product distribution at each location; and,
- Outline how the lessons learned from the pilot projects undertaken by the cities of Coquitlam, Port Moody and Victoria (in their civic facilities) can benefit a similar program in Nanaimo and evaluate partnership opportunities such as with the United Way's "Period Promise" campaign and provide future recommendations to Council as part of an ongoing program sustainment."

The current program in place for the provision of menstrual products is that they are available upon request at front desks at the City of Nanaimo's pools, arenas, and gymnasium facilities.

The Nanaimo Women's Resource Centre, who have partnered with the United Way in the past, provides menstrual products for free at their office and at their outreach program. The partnership with United Way is currently on hold due to the pandemic but they continue to offer products out of their operating budget. They plan on re-evaluating the partnership with United Way post-pandemic.

Several municipalities across Canada have partnered with the United Way through their Period Promise Campaign and other municipalities have established their own programs. All programs aim to assist people with accessing menstrual products to remove the stigma of Period Poverty.

Period Poverty is a problem faced by many people and is defined as the lack of access to menstrual products due to financial limitations. For some, it is a decision between food, rent, utilities or menstrual products. Lack of access to menstrual products can lead to serious health risks when other products are substituted for the pricier menstrual products.

PERIOD PROMISE CAMPAIGN

The United Way operates the Period Promise campaign to support menstrual equity, destigmatize menstruation, and reduce period poverty. They assist municipalities and other organizations through fundraising efforts (Attachment A).

The Period Promise Program outlines three ways to partner with the United Way, including:

- a) Run a workplace campaign to collect tampons, pads, cups, and other menstrual products to support vulnerable people in our community;
- b) Make a financial donation support the campaign and allow agencies in our communities to have funding to purchase menstrual products for their clients; or,
- c) Sign on to the Period Promise Policy Agreement and commit to providing menstrual products to staff and clients.

EXAMPLES FROM OTHER MUNICIPALITIES AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Examples from several municipalities from across British Columbia are outlined on Attachment B.

CITY OF COQUITLAM

The City of Coquitlam introduced their program as a pilot project in 2020. Locations included three recreation facilities and two park sites. They received positive feedback about the program but also experienced misuse. There has been no long-term decision made as of yet.

CITY OF PORT MOODY

The City of Port Moody partnered with the United Way in 2019. They installed dispensers in eleven washrooms across four recreation facilities.

CITY OF VICTORIA

The City of Victoria introduced their own program in 2019 and they provide products at the City Hall, the Crystal Pool and at downtown public washrooms. They did not partner with the United Way. They have had no issues with vandalism to date. Their budget is for \$3,000 in product, per dispenser, per year.

NANAIMO-LADYSMITH SCHOOL DISTRICT #68

The Nanaimo-Ladysmith School District #68 (SD68) introduced menstrual products in all schools' washrooms in 2019. Dispensers were installed in female and universal washrooms, as well as first aid rooms. Initially, they had issues with abuse of free product with lots of product scattered on floors, stuck to walls and put in toilets. After the novelty wore off, they still experience some abuse but to a much lower extent. |

DISCUSSION

|Most municipalities introduced their programs under pilot projects to allow time to review use, cost and any issues. Under the current pandemic conditions, running a pilot project would not return useable data due to restricted access to facilities. In April / May 2021, Staff could install dispensers in all recreation facilities and monitor.

PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, all City of Nanaimo facilities are currently operating under restricted access due to safety protocols in place and in adherence to Provincial Health Orders. There is no City facility that is open to the general public for washroom use, outside of the public washrooms in parks.

CIVIC FACILITIES

Civic facilities, ones that are City-owned but operated through agreements, are not publicly accessed unless attending an event or program under current pandemic restrictions.

SHOWER PROGRAM IN CALEDONIA PARK

The free shower program, operated by the Nanaimo Unitarian Shelter, is continuing to be offered at Caledonia Park five days a week. The program does supply menstrual products upon request but demand is minimal. Supplying barrier-free product at this location will provide access for vulnerable people.

PARKS WASHROOMS FACILITIES

Staff are hesitant about introducing dispensers into the majority of parks washrooms facilities due to the high level of vandalism and destruction that they are currently experiencing. The amount and severity of vandalism has been on an upward trend for several years. The Wharf Street Loo could be an option but anything installed at this location would have to be diligently monitored.

COSTS

Supply and install of dispensers would cost \$750 each. Dispensers would be refilled by custodial staff. Supply of stock for machines is estimated between \$2,000 and \$3,000 per dispenser annually based on budgets of other municipalities.

A full inventory of washrooms, both public and staff, in City facilities is outlined in Attachment C.

ALTERNATIVE OPTION – MENSTRUAL CUP CAMPAIGN

A Menstrual Cup Program is an alternative option for the supply of barrier-free access to menstrual products for people in need in Nanaimo. Elsewhere, cup campaigns have provided a supply of menstrual cups to non-profit organizations for distribution to vulnerable populations. While menstrual cups are initially more costly than traditional products, and require a bit of education regarding sanitization, one cup can have a lifespan of five to ten years. Due to a cup's lifespan, the environmental impact is significantly lower than traditional menstrual products.

A menstrual cup campaign would allow for a targeted approach to vulnerable populations and enable people to be free of the need of acquiring more product when supplies run out. This option, while not focused on City facilities, would instead need to focus on a targeted population-based approach. The cost per cup is in the range of \$30 to \$50.

OPTIONS

1. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to:

1. Initiate a pilot project in 2021 funded from the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve for the supply, install, and stocking of dispensers in 26 female and universal washrooms at these locations:

a. the major recreation facilities:

- i. Beban Park, including Arenas, Pool, and Social Centre;
- ii. Bowen Park;
- iii. Nanaimo Aquatic Centre;
- iv. Nanaimo Ice Centre;
- v. Oliver Woods Community Centre;

b. Caledonia Park for shower program access;

c. Northfield Tourism Visitor Centre, and also,

2. Review use at the end of 2021 and return to Council with an update and recommendations.

- The advantages of this option: Meets the desire for providing access to barrier-free menstrual products across the city. Installation would focus on publicly accessed washrooms and not in staff areas.
- The disadvantages of this option: Under current pandemic restrictions, access to public washrooms is limited and will not provide useable data for a review of the program.
- Financial Implications: Cost of supply and install of 26 dispensers is \$19,500 and estimated budget for product supply during the pilot is \$52,000 for a total pilot project cost of \$71,500. The estimated budget does not account for dispenser failure or vandalism. \$71,500 for the pilot will be added to 2021 of the 2021 – 2025 Financial Plan funded from the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve.

2. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to add to the 2021 – 2025 Financial Plan the provision of barrier-free menstrual products at 26 universal and female washrooms at the following locations:
 - a) the major recreation facilities:
 - i. Beban Park, including Arenas, Pool, and Social Centre;
 - ii. Bowen Park;
 - iii. Nanaimo Aquatic Centre;
 - iv. Nanaimo Ice Centre;
 - v. Oliver Woods Community Centre;
 - b) Caledonia Park for shower program access; and,
 - c) Northfield Tourism Visitor Centre.
 - The advantages of this option: Meets the desire for providing access to barrier-free menstrual products across the city. Installation would focus on publicly accessed washrooms and not in staff areas.
 - The disadvantages of this option: Under current pandemic restrictions, access to public washrooms is limited and will not provide useable data for a review of the program.
 - Financial Implications: The 2021 – 2025 Financial Plan will be amended to include \$71,500 in 2021 for the cost, supply and install of 26 dispensers and product supply and \$78,000 ongoing annually funded from Property Taxation. The estimated budget does not account for dispenser failure or vandalism.
3. That the Finance and Audit Committee provide alternative direction.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Several municipalities across BC are providing free menstrual products in various civic facilities.
- Barrier-free provisioning could be achieved by installing dispensers in washrooms open to the general public at facilities like the recreation centres.
- All City of Nanaimo facilities are currently operating under restricted access due to safety protocols required through Provincial Health Orders during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Handout for United Way Period Promise Campaign

ATTACHMENT B: Outline of programs for several other BC Municipalities

ATTACHMENT C: List of City of Nanaimo facilities public and staff washrooms

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