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NIAGARA NEWS

# In a first for St. Catharines, smart, self-cleaning public loo being installed

Downtown washroom will provide access for people on the go who need to go

By **Karena Walter** Standard Reporter

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A self-contained public restroom is being installed at the intersection of St. Paul, Geneva and Niagara Streets.  
Bob Tymczyszyn / Torstar

The City of St. Catharines' first smart toilet is expected to clean itself for less money than what the city normally forks out on its public washrooms.

The pre-fabricated, all-season, self-cleaning bathroom was lowered by crane onto a patch of land at Geneva, Queenston, Niagara and St. Paul streets in front of fire station headquarters this week.

Project manager Vince Covatta said under normal conditions, staff shouldn't have to clean the automated public toilet, but there may be times where they go in to do checks.

“This is obviously the city’s first one and they’ve been installed successfully in other parts of the country and the U.S. and I think they do work well,” he said.

“There’s always going to be that odd time when you want to make sure everything’s in order.”

The building is 6.3 metres by 3.6 metres and has one universal washroom with a toilet, sink and fold-down change table, plus a service room. It’s expected to be up and running by the end of February.

Covatta said the washroom’s cleaning system has a series of jets mounted along the perimeter of the floor close to the wall. When it goes through a clean cycle, the jets spray the floor which is slightly sloped. Water runs through a gap into the service room, where it then drains into the public sanitary system.

Made by Quebec company Urben Blu, the washroom can be programmed to the city’s preferences, such as how long a person is allowed to use the space, hours of operation and how often the cleaning cycle happens. Those details are still being determined.

“There is some programming and education that we have to do on how it functions,” said Anthony Martuccio, director of engineering, facilities and environmental services.

“We just received delivery of it on Tuesday and they’re hooking it up to all the utilities. They’re completing some of the concrete work on the site before we can actually open it up for public use.”

The need for public restrooms became increasingly apparent when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and many washroom facilities normally accessible in public buildings and in private sector businesses like coffee shops were closed.

The Queenston Community Roundtable asked council in a letter in November 2020 to prioritize public washroom facilities in its budget deliberations because of a lack of access for the homeless that were forcing people into bushes and

dark corners.

City council agreed to add a \$500,000 single-unit washroom to its 2021 capital budget — with former Mayor Walter Sendzik at the time noting it will create access for everyone in the area who needs a bathroom break, including cyclists, runners and pedestrians.

After research and community consultation, staff reported back in April 2021 comparing three models of washrooms with the recommendation the city get the self-cleaning, automated public toilet.

It had the highest initial capital costs, but the lowest operating costs.

The other models — a conventional washroom building and a portable minimalist Portland Loo-style toilet— required staff to clean them.

An area on the eastern edge of the downtown was chosen for the location. City-owned property within the area was then looked at more closely and put through a crime prevention through environmental design review with Niagara Regional Police.

Martuccio said they looked at what's in the area and how open it is to public viewing.

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“They took multiple considerations into affect to help us locate the washroom in an area where it minimizes the risk of unfavourable activities happening,” he said, adding that includes criminal activities and damage to the unit.

“It doesn’t say that stuff won’t happen, it just says this location is probably where you’re going to have the least amount of that activity happening.”

Martuccio said the location has a lot of vehicular and pedestrian traffic and is close to the fire station.

“It’s in a very prominent location where there’s going to be many eyes on the facility at all times.”



**Karena Walter** is a reporter with the St. Catharines Standard, primarily covering City Hall.

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