Date October 5, 2020

Mayor Jim Watson and Councillors

110, Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, ON K1P 1J1

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

Re: public toilets as essential public health infrastructure

The GottaGo! team, in partnership with the undersigned organizations, is asking the City of Ottawa Mayor and Councillors to adopt a policy to include a network of safe, clean and accessible public toilets as part of essential public health infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic has made clear that public toilets are fundamentally a public health issue while highlighting the highly inadequate situation of public toilets in Ottawa. Other cities in Canada (Edmonton, Vancouver, Montreal, Nelson, Smithers and Victoria) offer models for how to do this.

**Our Proposal**

Signage for existing public toilets

There are a few toilets open to the public in the city core (parks, public and commercial buildings) but there is *no signage*. The cost of putting up signs would be relatively modest – either as permanent signs or street level ‘sandwich signs’ when open. All city parks need to include information about the availability of toilets in print, signboards and websites.  At present, information about public toilets in all parks listed on the city’s website is difficult to find.

Subsidies to existing businesses

Many businesses may be willing to open their toilets to the public with a small subsidy from the city. The subsidy will support businesses in supplying and maintaining clean, hygienic toilets with signage. Currently, most limit usage of toilets to ‘customers only’ (except a few de-facto public toilet providers).

Examples of some successful subsidized public toilet programs include:

* [Nette Toilette, Germany](https://www.facebook.com/bbc/videos/10155275840632217/).
* [Community Toilet Scheme, UK](https://www.richmond.gov.uk/community_toilet_scheme).
* [Highland Comfort Scheme, Scotland](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/283/community_life_and_leisure/814/highland_council_public_toilets/2).

Permanent public toilets

Ottawa urgently needs to install stand alone public toilets in strategic locations where there are no nearby public toilets (for example: parks; Park and Ride locations; and high pedestrian traffic areas). The cost could be offset with advertising. For instance, Victoria, Smithers and Nelson in British Columbia have installed Portland Loo toilets that are operational year round at $150,000 each, with the cost partially offset by advertising (on the outside walls). They are accessible, easy to install and clean, and it comes with safety features. Other examples include Pierrefonds, a suburb of Montreal, has installed 3 composting toilets at approximately $50,000 each. Edmonton is currently developing a city wide public toilet strategy.

Cost of NOT having accessible, clean and safe public toilets

There is also the cost of not having public toilets. People with medical conditions or who are unhoused need ready access to public toilets. Many people hesitate to go outdoors risking their physical and mental wellbeing because of the lack of public toilets. There are also the ongoing financial costs of cleaning human waste in alleyways, streets and parking garages.

We urge you to take a much needed leadership role in making a network of public toilets part of our essential public health infrastructure. Such a policy is a most tangible way to show that Ottawa is indeed a world class, liveable city.

Sincerely,

Lui Kashungnao Name and title:

Core Team, GottaGo! Campaign Organization: