

Council recommends providing free menstrual products in Town facilities, fighting period poverty?

By Zachary Roman

Free menstrual products might soon be available for Caledon residents in Town-owned facilities.

A local youth-led, grassroots non-profit called The Red Mvmnt recently delegated to the Region of Peel, City of Brampton and City of Mississauga asking them to provide free menstrual products, as part of their mission to advance sustainable menstrual equity and reduce period poverty.

Since Brampton (in 2021) and Mississauga (in April 2022) have approved free menstrual product programs, Town of Caledon staff are recommending the Town follow suit. With the exception of products in a few coin-operated dispensing machines, no menstrual products are available in Town facilities at present.

According to the United Nations, period poverty describes the struggle many low-income women and girls face while trying to afford menstrual products.

It notes the issue impacts women not only in developing countries, but in wealthy, industrialized countries too. Period poverty also refers to the increased financial burden women must carry due to the cost of menstrual supplies.

At Caledon Council's June 21 General Committee Meeting, lawmakers passed on consent a recommendation to approve a proposed program to provide free menstrual products in Town facilities. It also recommended that staff be authorized to procure and install product dispensers to provide free menstrual products in washroom facilities operated by the Town as selected by Staff, with an unavoidable 2023 operating budget impact of \$40,515.

According to a report prepared by Town staff, offering free menstrual products throughout Town facilities will help fight period poverty' in our community by providing greater access, increased quality of life and overall comfort to our residents and visitors.

Staff have identified 47 sites across the town, such as community centres, libraries, and park washroom facilities, where a total of 74 dispensing units will be installed. They said each dispensing unit is \$400, so buying all 74 will be a one-time cost of \$29,600 to the Town.

In researching similar programs, estimated costs per product is \$0.30 and at an average of five per day, per unit, the ongoing operating costs are estimated to be \$40,515 annually, the staff report reads.

Town staff will be exploring partnerships as a possible way to help fund the free menstrual products program, and its implementation is targeted for this Fall.

A final decision on the program will be made at Council's June 28 meeting, where Council is recommended to give it the green light.