

PFFC TO LAUNCH/SUPPORT A WASHINGTON DC PUBLIC RESTROOM INITIATIVE

Feasibility Study Results and Recommended Next Steps (updated January 18, 2015)

***ACCESS TO ADEQUATE TOILET FACILITIES IS A HUMAN RIGHT
LACK OF ACCESS IS AN AFFRONT TO HUMAN DIGNITY***

TOPICS ADDRESSED BELOW:

- A. The problem: the economic and social costs of the demise/lack of public restrooms
- B. What the PFFC Public Restrooms Committee has done to assess the feasibility of PFFC's launching a public restroom initiative
- C. Findings/what we've learned thus far
- D. What PFFC's role should be/next steps

Attachments

- 1. Reasons why there should be public restrooms
- 2. Who uses public restrooms
- 3. The restroom challenged

A. THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COSTS OF THE DEMISE/ABSENCE OF PUBLIC RESTROOMS¹

Decline of public restrooms

- In the early 1900s American cities acknowledged the need for public toilets and started building facilities that were clean, comfortable and well marked. By 1940 there were restrooms in all of New York City's 1,500 parks while the subway had 1,676 toilets and conducted regular inspections. Today there are a mere 78 public toilets in New York's 468 subway stations. Sometime after mid century, the public restrooms of the nation's cities started into a precipitous decline.

Economic costs

- Portland's version of BID responded to 6000 calls a year from people who call for emergency clean up services in public areas at a cost of \$10,000 a month.²
- Add to this the cost to individual business and building owners whose bottom line is impacted by public urination and defecation.

¹ Text from tools for advocates made available by PHLUSH at phlush.org

² "Public Restrooms for Old Town Chinatown: A Report to the Community." February, 2007. We can probably get comparable data for Washington DC from Downtown BID

Social costs:

- Human dignity is compromised: no person should have to relieve himself or herself in a public place.
- Abuse is compounded when a person is also subjected to public harassment, law enforcement or a potentially physically threatening situation.
- In the absence of public toilets, laws against public urination and defecation effectively criminalize a basic human function.
- Those people caught breaking “civility laws” are arrested and fined. When they cannot pay the fine, they suffer added indignities and consume judicial resources.

B. WHAT THE PFFC PUBLIC RESTROOM COMMITTEE HAS DONE THUS FAR

1. An internet search to identify recent history installing/maintaining public restrooms
 - Found the Portland Loo model to be the most successful/promising.
2. Learned about the Portland Loo experience in cities where it has been installed through: telephone interviews with one or more persons involved in each; document reviews:
 - **Portland, Oregon** 600,000+ population (2008): 7 Loos strategically placed in downtown area (with 7 more requested in next year’s budget)
 - **Victoria, Canada:** 330,000 population, (2011): 1 Loo downtown
 - **Esquimalt, Canada:** 16,000 population (2014): 1 Loo along trail
 - **Ketchikan, Alaska:** 8,000 plus population (2014): 1 Loo by port
 - **Nanaimo, Canada (Vancouver Island), 83,810 population (2011), 1 Loo**
 - **San Diego, California:** 3,095,313 population (2014) 2 Loos installed in December, 2014.

In the process of being installed (further information pending)

- **Cambridge, Massachusetts:** 1 Portland Loo to be installed in September.
 - **Seattle, Washington:** after a highly negative and well-publicized experience with automatic public toilets (APTS), the city is have approved the purchase of 2 Loos.
3. Identified public restroom advocacy groups and interviewed leaders.
 - American Restroom Association (Bob Brubaker)
 - Public Hygiene Let us Stay Human (PHLUSH) – (Carol McCleary)
 4. Did a preliminary examination what would be involved in carrying out a similar initiative in Washington, DC in terms of dealing with bureaucracy/obtaining permits
 - Contacted Downtown DC BID person in charge of capital projects
 - Downloaded information from internet on steps required in order to get approval from: DC Office of Planning, DC Department of Transportation, National Capital Planning Commission
 - Tried unsuccessfully to contact relevant people at: National Parks Service, DC Office of Planning.

- Spoke with and received documents from Bob Brubaker, founder of American Restroom Association, who has advocated for but only had limited success opening up restrooms at Metro stops and getting public restrooms installed on the Mall.

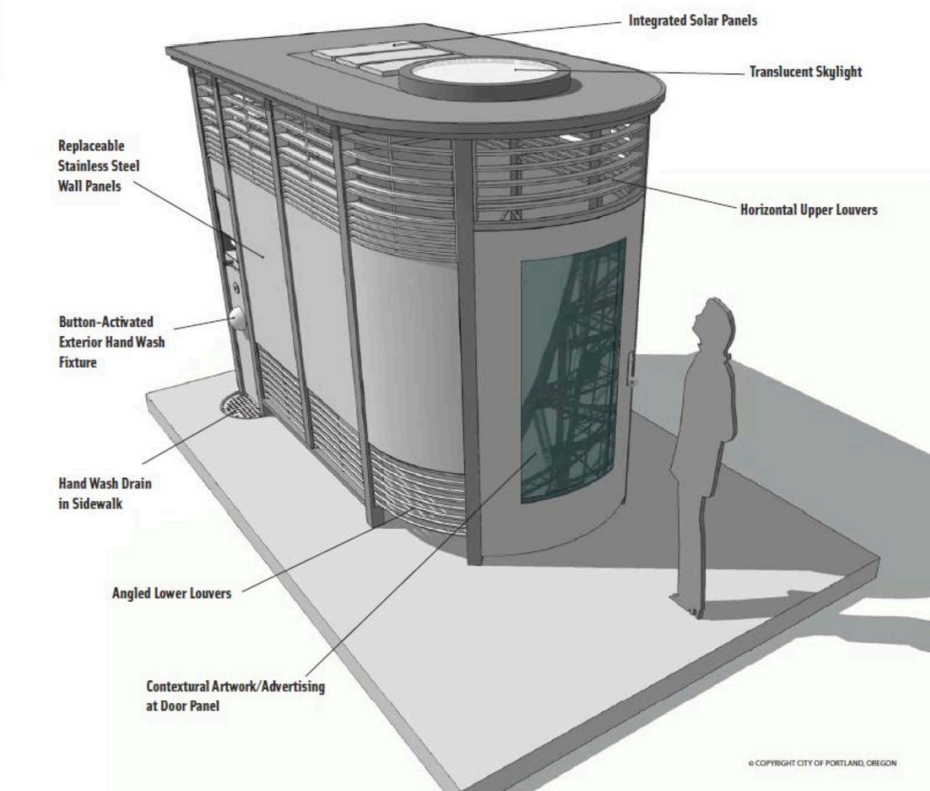
C. FINDINGS: WHAT WE'VE LEARNED THUS FAR

1. Extensive history/experience in US with public restrooms; the beginnings of a resurgence
 - Public restrooms, once quite widely available in cities and on subways, shutdown due to cost and concerns about security.
 - Several recent attempts to install public restrooms using other models: Seattle (5 self-cleaning toilets) shut down and being removed; San Francisco has installed 25 self-cleaning toilets and is encountering similar problems; a New York City toilet, recently installed, require payment to enter,
 - Portland Loo is the only model that has reported no problems; also costs less to purchase and maintain.
2. The Portland Loo



Why Portland's Public Toilets Succeeded Where Others Failed

- Designed to promote public safety
- Defense-first design
- Highly durable/vandal resistant
- ADA-accessible
- Designed to be open 24/7 without attendant
- Solar-powered LED lighting
- Advertising/art/ sponsorship panels included



The Portland Loo

- Open 24/7 in all locations ³
- Angled louvers at the bottom make it possible to see if there is someone inside (person's legs and how many of them).
- Blue light inside makes it difficult for people shooting drugs to find their veins.
- Lights up when someone is inside which makes it easy to know if it is occupied.
- Outside sink can be used to fill water bottles.
- Surrounding community keeps an eye out and reports if there are problems.
- Maintained twice a day or more
- No major problems reported thus far.
- Requires water and sewer connection (solar powered for electricity)
- Costs: \$90,000 to purchase; \$4,000 for transportation to site; \$25,000 up to install⁴; \$20,000 annual maintenance.

3. Who the Portland Loo serves:

- Homeless, tourists, bar patrons, public in general (Portland, Victoria, Ketchikan, San Diego, Monterrey)
- Hikers/bikers on trail (Esquimalt)

4. Obtaining support/funding for Portland Loo

- Experience elsewhere: it requires 2 -3 years if starting from scratch
- Must involve/obtain ongoing support and buy in from: relevant government agencies that will be involved; Mayor and City Council; citizens groups in vicinity of Loo; business organizations and businessmen in vicinity of Loo; ideally homeless population.
- In some cities, once having obtained buy-in from a variety of interested organizations, advocates have conducted studies whose recommendations have lead to the formation of a city initiative and/or a Task Force.
- Critical to identify the locations(s) of the Loos ⁵
- Need funding for purchase, installation and ongoing maintenance.
- DC we would be the first location where the homeless would take the initiative.⁶

5. Funding for the Loo

- In most cases the city government funds purchase, installation, maintenance
- In some cases businessmen (through their taxes channeled through the local BID) finance maintenance.
- *Need to learn more about this....*

³ Exception is Esquimalt where the Loo is on a park trail and closed at night.

⁴ Installation price depends on: (1) how close the Loo is to water and sewer connections; (2) conditions that might complicate making the connections.

⁵ Factors involved in selecting locations(s) of Loos: (1) area that is highly population with people on the streets: (2) local support (businesses, residents near the Loo, citizens associations)

⁶ Just learned about The Girls Think Tank in San Diego, California, which has spearheaded an initiative, which will lead to installing two Portland Loos this fall. The Girls Think Tank is dedicated to helping the poor, especially the homeless. The initiative doesn't come from the homeless but they are closely involved in the coalition that has lead to installing the Loos.

6. Benefits of available public restrooms: (see Attachment 1)⁷
 - Public restrooms help revitalize downtown neighborhoods.
 - Public restrooms get people out of cars and onto their feet, bicycles and mass transit
 - Public restrooms promote both fitness and public safety.
 - Public restrooms contribute to public health.
 - Public restrooms serve the “restroom challenged”.
 - Public restrooms provide a place where individuals who don’t have access can go (homeless, others).

7. Strategies that seem to have worked for obtaining support and funding for the Portland Loo, maintaining funding and support once installed and operational
 - Begin by developing a public restroom strategy.
 - Launch a visible public restroom initiative with informative website and media outreach.
 - Build a coalition: from the beginning involve/obtain the buy in of key parties (City Council, relevant government agencies, businessmen in the vicinity and business associations (including the BID), community associations, homeless.
 - Emphasize that restrooms serve a broad variety of populations: (see Attachment 2)
 - Show that toilet access is fundamental to human dignity. *“Lack of access to toilets is an affront to human dignity: no person should have to relieve himself or herself in a public place; people need to relieve themselves in facilities that are designed for proper sanitation and health.”*
 - Show that you have done your homework: do appropriate research up front, prepare excellent talking points, prepare and deliver top quality presentations.
 - Be prepared to respond to the concerns of those that are initially skeptical/initially against the idea.
 - Identify and empower individuals who are committed/have a personal self - interest to maintain the support/momentum required.
 - Maintain visibility/fanfare: frequent articles in local media (newspapers, TV, magazines, etc.); widely publicized celebrations to celebrate important benchmarks along the way.
 - Place Loos in/near busy public areas where they will be seen and used.
 - Make outside of Loos attractive and possibly lucrative (engaging large posters, paid advertisements).
 - Once installed prepare visible and attractive signs that make it clear where the Loos are and that they are open 24/7.
 - Mark the opening of the Loo with a public celebration and media event.
 - Monitor and report on: (a) how many use the Loo daily; (b) incidents where there are problems/police have been called in.

⁷ <http://www.phlush.org/public-restroom-advocacy>

8. National restroom policy:

- A policy issued by OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration of the Department of Labor) requires employers to provide adequate restroom facilities for all employees.
- Department of Health and Human Services, under whose purview would be mandating public restrooms, has not yet issued a policy.

D. PROPOSED PFFC ROLE AND NEXT STEPS

1. Decide whether PFFC wants to commit to public restroom advocacy

- Recognize that, while extraordinarily valuable, this is an enormous undertaking that will require dedicated person power as well as access to funding; PFFC to be one of many actors.
- Start with the idea that PFFC will be the catalyst; once PFFC has successfully “launched” the initiative, determine what PFFC’s role will be from there on (*could be formation of a task force to take this on, funding for a study leading up to developing a strategic for public toilets in downtown DC, or something else*).
- Consider whether PFFC has “what it takes” to launch such an initiative.

2. Recommended next steps (assuming PFFC has decided to take this on): determine how to advocate and educate:

- Identify PFFC members/others who are willing to commit to Phase one (serving as a catalyst), form a working group, and decide who will lead it.
- Prepare an excellent presentation that will be used (with adjustments) to approach individuals/organizations that we identify as critical to making this a reality.
- Schedule and carry out presentations with the idea of building a coalition.
- Pause to reflect after each presentation what worked/didn’t and what adjustments need to be made for the next presentation.
- Assuming momentum builds up and we begin to have a sense of the “landscape” assess/reassess our role; continue doing this as events unfold.

ATTACHMENT 1

WHY PUBLIC RESTROOMS⁸

Public restrooms help revitalize downtown neighborhoods. People are comfortable strolling in downtown when there are public facilities. For visitors to a neighborhood or to an establishment, the restroom is often the place where first and lasting impressions are made.

Public restrooms get people out of cars and onto their feet, bicycles and mass transit. Commuters need restrooms along their route. Without facilities that serve public transit systems, people will drive.

Public restrooms promote both fitness and public safety. One of the attractions of private gyms is access to toilets. Restrooms in public parks and other areas promote fitness, activate space and provide natural surveillance that helps everyone feel safe.

Public restrooms contribute to public health. Adverse health effects result from involuntary urinary retention. Mental health suffers when people want to be out with their families and friends but restrooms are not available.

Public restrooms serve the “restroom challenged”. The American Restroom Association uses this term for two types of people. First are those who have to go frequently - every hour or so. Second are those whose need to go comes suddenly and urgently. “Restroom challenged” people may have normal conditions – pregnancy, young age, old age etc. – or medical conditions, many of which are invisible.

People avoid strolling in downtown areas that lack public facilities. Businesses have drifted out of downtown to malls in outlying areas. One of the appeals of enclosed malls is a dependable restroom. Asking permission to use a restroom at a food establishment where one is not a customer is no longer acceptable.

Let’s restore civility and human dignity in our cities. Ensuring availability of clean, comfortable, well-designed public restrooms is a way to defend our shared values and to meet common requirements of urban livability.

The economic and social costs of the demise of public restrooms

In the early 1900s American cities acknowledged the need for public toilets and started building facilities that were clean, comfortable and well marked. By 1940 there were restrooms in all of New York City’s 1,500 parks while the subway had 1,676 toilets and conducted regular inspections. Today there are a mere 78 public toilets in New York’s 468 subway stations. Sometime after mid century, the public restrooms of the nation’s cities started into a precipitous decline.

Portland, Oregon was no exception. The city’s historic comfort stations served everyone. Workers in the mills along the river and farming families who came into in the heart of the city on streetcars could relieve themselves and clean up before attending to business. As late as the 1950s Portland boasted public restrooms staffed by friendly

⁸ From phlush.org

attendants, who also received tips. Old Town Chinatown's Howard Weiner has childhood memories of the one in Pioneer Courthouse Square. "You'd get done, they'd hand you a towel — everybody left happy," he says. "I don't know about you, but I miss that."

Economic costs Portland's Downtown Clean and Safe cleans downtown public restrooms and responds to clean up calls. In 2005, PHLUSH reported that Clean and Safe responded to 6000 calls a year from people who call for emergency clean up services in public areas at a cost of \$10,000 a month.

Add to this the cost to individual business and building owners whose bottom line is impacted by public urination and defecation.

Lack of toilet access is an attack on human dignity.

Even more important than the economic cost of urban toiletlessness are the unspeakably heavy social costs. Human dignity is compromised: no person should have to relieve himself or herself in a public place. Abuse is compounded when a person is also subjected to public harassment, law enforcement or a potentially physically threatening situation.

The best way to understand the affront to human dignity that accompanies limited restroom access is to listen to the citizens who have experienced homelessness. The following conversations were recorded at Sisters of the Road. in the course of research for the book *Voices from the Street: Truths about Homelessness*.

I don't know what the laws are here, but I know when I gotta go, I gotta go, and I'm gonna find a tree to go behind. And every time I do it, I say, "Oh boy. Please don't let me go to jail tonight.

But what is a woman to do when she has to use the restroom at night-time, in the middle of the night, when everything's closed up? And then, she goes and squats and uses the bathroom, what are you supposed to do? "Oh! You're urinating in public!" Thousand-dollar fine. What am I supposed to do, hold it 'til five or six o'clock in the morning, when something opens up? I mean, this really needs to be taken a look at it, it really is, and it's something really serious... it's time to sit at a table and look at it, and do something about it.

Basically, I...I would not eat or drink because I was afraid that that I would not have a place to the bathroom, that is...that is another really terrible thing when you are homeless. I have been kicked out of places, even a bar, I was about to go into the bathroom and they came and grabbed my arm and said, "You're out of here, you're not a client here, you can't go to the bathroom here," and I was told in quite a few places... that I could not come in there anymore even though I used to phone also, so it is pretty humiliating.

Those people caught breaking "civility laws" are arrested and fined. When they cannot pay the fine, they suffer added indignities and consume judicial resources. When homelessness is criminalized, people striving for a better life suddenly face new obstacles to finding employment and housing. Leaving citizens in poverty is an affront to the human dignity of everyone in society.

ATTACHMENT 2⁹

WHO NEEDS PUBLIC RESTROOMS

Access to public restrooms is a crosscutting issue. Everyone needs access to a restroom when away from home or work. Portland's Central City is used by a very diverse population. The Central City hosts a large amount of office space, countless retailers and restaurants, several educational institutions, and numerous tourist destinations. Central City restroom needs are as diverse as the number of users. Specific populations identified as having particular need for public restroom facilities include:

- Tourists
- Shoppers
- Homeless
- Nightlife crowd
- Events attendees – parades, farmer's markets, festivals
- Transit riders
- Bicyclists
- Pedestrians
- People with medical conditions
- Pregnant women
- Outdoor sports players
- Homeless
- Park users
- Families and children
- The elderly
- Restroom challenged

⁹ Taken from: Going Public: Strategy For Meeting Public Restroom Need In Central Portland City, 2006

ATTACHMENT 3

THE RESTROOM CHALLENGED ¹⁰

Middle age women (NAFC) *

Pregnant women *

Parents touring with young children *

Children in School *

Women experiencing an irregular menses *

People suffering certain congenital defects *

Those with bladder cancer (2) *

Some wounded Combat Veterans *

Victims of abdominal or nerve trauma *

Women being treated for Vaginal Candidiasis *

10 to 40% of Stroke victims *

Otherwise healthy persons suffering bowel incontinence *

People with Interstitial Cystitis *

Those suffering Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Ulcerative Colitis *

The Elderly (Functional capacity is halved as we age.) *

Patients suffering the diuretic effect of blood pressure medicine *

Men suffering an enlarged prostate *

Diners experiencing the diuretic effect of coffee or alcohol * P

Patients on medications that act as bowel or bladder irritants *

Ostomy pouches require prompt attention when at capacity

¹⁰ From American Restroom Association website.