The Community Toilet Scheme

a public restroom option for needed areas of downtown Washington DC

A Report of the Public Restroom Committee
People for Fairness Coalition (PFFC) Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative

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SUMMARY

Between April and June 2018 Marcia Bernbaum, mentor and advisor to the People for Fairness Coalition (PFFC) Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative, carried out research designed to obtain additional information about the Community Toilet Scheme (CTS). The CTS is one of three options that the PFFC Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative is recommending that the DC government consider. Bill 22-0223, Public Restroom Facilities Installation & Promotion Act of 2017, which was inspired by our Initiative, recommends that a working group composed of representatives of relevant DC government agencies explore options for: (1) installing clean, safe stand-alone public restrooms available 24/7 where they are needed in Washington DC; and (2) introducing a program similar to the Community Toilet Scheme in needed areas of Washington DC.

Four Councils in England participated in the study: The City of London (for which we already had some information, Richmond Upon Thames, Wealdon and Merton – each with different demographic characteristics (Section 3 provides for a brief profile of each). As is indicated in the report below, the one that most approximates downtown DC in terms of its characteristics is the City of London.

Takeaways from the review of the experience in these four Councils for Washington DC include:

- The Community Toilet Scheme is a low cost, low maintenance way of rapidly expanding restroom availability in areas of DC that have high levels of pedestrian traffic.
- The CTS is appropriate for areas where there is a great deal of pedestrian traffic during the day/hours the businesses are open.
- In areas with high levels of pedestrian traffic late at night[1] the DC government should consider installing clean, safe stand-alone public restrooms that open 24/7.
- There is no need to reinvent the wheel: models, including contract wording and decals, are available for the DC government agency assigned to implement a program similar to the CTS.
- The DC government, emulating cities in England, Germany, and Australia (as well as perhaps other countries) should post on its website an interactive guide to restrooms available to the public. DC may want to, as the City of London has, develop its own restroom app.

[1] For example where there are bars, pubs, and restaurants with liquor licenses open way past midnight; a large number of people experiencing homelessness sleeping in parks/along sidewalks.

This report is divided into five sections as follows:

1. Background
2. Rationale and methodology
3. Profile of the four Boroughs/localities for which we have information
4. Summary of findings
5. Takeaways for Washington DC

There are three attachments. The first provides examples of decals that businesses in each locality participating in the Community Toilet Scheme are asked to post on their windows. The second provides, in table form, what we learned from interviewing each Council. The third provides information on the other two options under consideration both of which are stand-alone public restrooms: the Portland Loo and Automated Public Toilets. Copies of the contracts that each of the four Councils sign with participating businesses are available upon request.

Further information about PFFC's Downtown DC Public Initiative, including other studies that we have carried out; powerpoint presentations we have delivered further information on the other two options recommended; testimonies presented at DC City Council hearings may be found at: www.pffcdc.org/what-we-do-public-restrooms.

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1. **Background**:

The People for Fairness Coalition (PFFC) Downtown DC Public Restroom Initiative, for which the author of this document is mentor and adviser, was launched in early 2015 out of a concern that Washington DC lacks clean, safe public restrooms available to everyone. The Initiative's goal is to convince the DC Government to install and maintain clean, safe public restrooms available for everyone in needed areas of downtown DC.

The Initiative's approach is research based. We started by carrying out a feasibility study to identify lessons learned and best practices in other cities in the US that, in recent years, have been successful in installing and maintaining clean, safe stand-alone public restrooms open 24/7. We also carried out an inventory to identify public restrooms in downtown areas and their hours. And we tracked 85 businesses in 5 areas of downtown DC with high levels of pedestrian traffic over a three-year period to identify trends in making their restrooms available to the public.

The following were our key findings:

- Two models are available for stand-alone public restrooms open 24/7: one that originated in Europe and is in use in a few cities in the US (Automated Public Toilets or APTs) and a second (the Portland Loo) that originated in Portland OR and has now spread to 20 cities throughout the US and growing. We have a great deal of information on the Portland Loo (www.theloo.biz) which is our preferred option given its lesser cost and track record for safety and cleanliness (for more information on each and criteria for siting stand-alone public restrooms see Attachment 3).
- Off the Mall, Washington DC has 5 restrooms in public buildings in its downtown areas that are open to the public. With one exception, their hours are limited and there are no signs to tell you where they are.
- There are only two restrooms open 24/7 in all of Washington DC: -- the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials -- again with no signage. In order to get to them in the early hours of the morning when everything else is closed you would have to walk between 1.5 and 3 miles from downtown areas that have bars, nightclubs, and restaurants.
- Businesses in downtown commercial areas where there is a lot of pedestrian traffic are increasingly limiting restroom access to the public. In 2015 half (43) of the 85 businesses that we visited permitted individuals who weren't customers to use their restrooms. A year later, in 2016, the number had dropped to 28 (or 33%). In 2017

only 11 businesses (13%) permitted individuals who weren't customers to use their restrooms.

- Access to clean, safe public restrooms is a human right; everyone deserves to be able to find a clean, safe restroom when nature calls. People who are restroom challenged (among others: seniors, diabetics, pregnant women, people taking diuretics for high blood pressure), when they need to go to the restroom have to go urgently. Tourists need access to clean, safe restrooms as do bikers and joggers. Businesses also benefit from having clean, safe public restrooms nearby (less demand to use their restrooms, less poop to scoop).
- Recognizing how important ready access to clean, safe public restrooms is for both personal and public health, European and Asian capitals have found ways to make restrooms with these characteristics readily available for those that need them in their commercial areas.

About a year into our Initiative we learned about the Community Toilet Scheme (CTS) which originated in the early 2000s in Richmond Upon Thames in England. In return for opening their restrooms to the public and putting a decal on their window indicating that their restrooms are available to anyone who wants to use them, businesses receive a financial incentive from the local government. Richmond Upon Thames's government web page contains an interactive map which show where the toilets are located: their hours, and the facilities they have to offer (men, women, unisex, baby changers). When we learned about this option we included it as one of three options in the presentations that we began giving to a wide variety of audiences.

In November of 2016, as a result of a presentation that we gave to DC Council Member Brianne Nadeau, she -- along with Council Members Grosso, Silverman and Robert White -- introduced legislation encouraging the DC government to install clean, safe public restrooms in needed areas of DC.

Bill 22-0223, Public Restroom Facilities and Promotion Act of 2017 (http://lims.dccouncil.us/Legislation/B22-0223?FromSearchResults=true) introduced in April 2017, directs a working group of DC Departments to recommend: (1) up to 10 sites appropriate for installing clean, safe stand-alone public restrooms available 24/7; (2) based on the Community Toilet Scheme experience in England, recommend an approach for providing incentives to private businesses located in areas of DC with high levels of commercial traffic to make their restrooms available to the public during the hours they are open. A hearing was held for Bill 22-0223 in January 2018. A mark-up and Committee vote are anticipated in the Fall of 2018.

2. Study rationale and methodology

When we presented the Community Toilet Scheme as an option to Council Member Nadeau as one of three options when we met with her in November of 2016, our information was based exclusively on the experience of the City of London, a one square mile area of downtown London that launched the CTS several years ago based on the experience of Richmond Upon Thames.

We decided in the Spring of 2018 to broaden our knowledge of the CTS experience in England by identifying other Boroughs/districts in England that currently are using the Community Toilet Scheme. We developed a 12-topic interview protocol and were able to apply it in three additional localities: Richmond Upon Thames (where the program began), Wealdon, and Merton. The topics included in the interview protocol may be found in the text box below:

Interview Protocol

1. Who administers the Community Toilet Scheme in your Borough/locality?
   - If you contract this function out can you describe how this works?

2. How do you identify businesses to participate or that want to participate in the Community Toilet Scheme?

3. Can you send us a copy of the contract each business signs with your Borough?

4. Are there provisions in the contract that permit a business participating in the scheme to opt out at any time they deem appropriate?

5. What is the monetary incentive you provide to private businesses?
   - Do incentives vary based on (a) the hours the facility is open; (b) how many toilets the business has?

6. How do your staff, or the organization you contract oversee the program in order to ensure that the businesses are applying it correctly?
   - How often is each facility visited?
   - Do you keep a log of visits and, if so, can you send us a sample?

7. Is there a mechanism for recording how often toilets are used daily at participating businesses?
   - If so, can you send us a sample?

8. Have you encountered instances where participating businesses have found that their toilets are being used inappropriately (for drug use, prostitution, other) or where individuals are soiling the facilities?
   - If so, what action is taken when this situation arises?

9. When, as a result of your inspections, you see that a given business is not adhering to the terms of the contract (e.g., is not keeping toilets clean, is turning people away) what action(s) do you take?

10. Have you had to terminate contracts and, if so, what have been the primary reasons?

11. Do you have a mechanism whereby users can send feedback regarding whether the toilets were clean, how they were treated by the staff at a given facility that participates in the Toilet Scheme?

12. Can you send us an image of the decal you ask participating businesses to put on their windows?

3. Profile of the four Boroughs/localities for which we have information

City of London

Of the four, the city of London is the one that has the most in common with downtown Washington DC. Taking up one square mile, relatively few people live there (9,200 as of the last census). Most of the buildings house companies, stores, restaurants and coffee shops. Over 300,000 individuals either commute to the City of London to work or visit as tourists (the City of London has, among others, the London Bridge, the Tower of London and St. Paul's Cathedral). With the exception of one area that has a large concentration of pubs and bars, the remainder primarily cater to people who come to this area to work

The City of London has: 4 attended public restrooms that are open daily from 8 am to 6 pm, 8 stand-alone public restrooms (APTs) that are open 24/7, and 4 urinals that come up in the bar/pub area at night. In 2008, the Council had a budget cut. Inspired by Richmond Upon Thames which was the first to do this, the City of London decided to start its own Community Toilet Scheme as it was an attractive lower cost option for supplementing its existing public restrooms. When the interview was carried out 75 businesses were participating in the CTS.

The City of London's website (https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/services/transport-and-streets/clean-streets/Pages/Public-Toilets.aspx) contains an interactive map that shows locations and characteristics all restrooms available to the public, including businesses participating in the Community Toilet Scheme. In addition, the City of London also has its own App that provides information on all of its restrooms that are open to the public.

Richmond Upon Thames:

The Borough of Richmond Upon Thames, south of London, encompasses 22.1 square miles primarily stretched out along both sides of the Thames River. Richmond Upon Thames is primarily residential with a population of 195,000. It is considered the wealthiest Borough in England. There are many restaurants and coffee shops primarily located along the river and very few bars.

As of the time of the interview, Richmond Upon Thames had 10 libraries with restrooms open to the public during the day and 79 private facilities participating in the Community Toilet Scheme. Like the City of London, Richmond Upon Thames has an interactive map (https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/spendapenny) showing where all their restrooms are and the characteristics of each.

Merton

Merton is an outer south west Borough of London. It has 19 Districts; a residential population of 205,000; two town centers; and it encompasses 14.7 square miles. The District of Wimbledon, which is closest to downtown London, is relatively affluent; most of its resident's commute to downtown London to work. By way of contrast, the majority of the residents living in three districts farther from downtown London have low incomes and high levels of unemployment; 75% are from an ethnic minority. The world-famous Wimbledon tennis tournament takes place in the district of Wimbledon. The district of Morden has the largest Mosque in Western Europe.

Merton has one public toilet in a downtown area which is apparently not being serviced. Six businesses (formerly up to 8) participate in the Community Toilet Scheme: https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/community-toilet-scheme

Wealdon

The District of Wealdon, encompassing 323 square miles in south east England, is the most rural area of England; it is visited frequently by tourists for its coastal beauty. The District

includes among its population of 158,000; farmers, retirees, and people who work in London. Wealdon contains six villages ranging in population from a little less than 8,000 to 20,000. Each has a variety of restaurants, bars and pubs catering to residents and tourists.

The District of Wealdon lists on its website 3 public restrooms open during the day and 22 businesses that participate in the Community Toilet Scheme by village/town (http://www.wealden.gov.uk/Wealden/Residents/Community_and_Safety/Public_Conveniences/Waste_Community_Toilet_Partners.aspx.

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4. Findings

The narrative below summarizes what the author learned during interviews and reviewing documents. More detail on each location may be found in Attachment 1.

- The Council of each locality is responsible for administering the Community Toilet Scheme. This includes reaching out to identify businesses as well as providing supervision/oversight.
- Businesses are invited to apply to participate in the Scheme. Two factors included in each Council's decision to accept a business are: (1) whether it is located in an area with a high level of pedestrian traffic; (2) whether or not there is already a business in that area that is part of the Scheme.
- All Councils ask participating businesses to sign a contract; their length and detail vary from Council to Council
- Contracts for all Councils specify that the participating business is to let everyone use it; only in exceptional cases can they bar entry to someone who wants to use their restroom.
- All Councils permit participating businesses to leave the program if they are not satisfied; to date two have. One business was concerned because somebody overdosed in their restroom. The other business was overwhelmed by all the people wanting to use their restrooms.
- All Council have provisions in their contracts to terminate relationships with participating businesses if they do not meet the specifications in their contracts; to date no contracts have been terminated.
- Participating businesses in the City of London receive supervisory visits once a month; in the remaining localities supervisory visits take place an adhoc basis twice a year. No record is kept of visits; one Council is considering developing a mechanism for recording visits.

- Businesses participating in the Scheme do not keep logs of people who use their restrooms.
- All four Councils were attracted to the Community Toilet Scheme because it costs much less to maintain than restrooms with attendants.
- There is not a formal system for users to direct complaints. However, if they have a complaint they can provide it in person or send it to the Council via email.
- Each Council designs a decal that participating businesses are required to put on their windows. The cover of this report contains a decal that businesses in the City of London are required to put on their windows. Attachment 2 shows the decals for 6 localities, including the four reviewed in this report. Some have an all-purpose decal used by all participating businesses. Others provide decals tailored to the characteristics of the restrooms(s) available at the participating businesses.
- All of the Councils have interactive maps on their websites that provide the following information on each available public restroom, including those available through the Community Toilet Scheme: hours of operation; male, female, unisex toilets; provisions for disabled persons; availability of baby changer.
- There is a wide variation among the Councils in the incentive provided to participating businesses:
  - City of London: each business receives 600 Pounds, regardless of number of toilets or the hours it is open.
  - Richmond Upon Thames: the incentive varies depending on the number of toilets the participating business has and the hours that it is open. The Council is in the process of modifying the incentive policy to make it easier to administer by establishing a flat rate that applies to all participating businesses, regardless of numbers of toilets or the hours the business is open.
  - Wealdon: businesses receive an incentive of between 500 and 1,200 Pounds depending on the nature of restroom(s) and the hours it/they is/are open. Those open on Saturdays receive an additional 10%, those that re open Saturday and Sunday receive an additional 20%.
  - Merton: the amount of the incentive depends on the number of toilets the business has regardless of the hours it is open: one toilet = 400 Pounds; two = 600 Pounds.

5. Takeaways for Washington DC

- The Community Toilet Scheme provides a low cost, low maintenance way of rapidly expanding restroom availability in commercial areas of DC that have a great deal of pedestrian traffic during the day and early evening when participating businesses are open.
- Options for putting the program in place and administering it include: a DC government agency or a Business Improvement District (BID).
- There is no need to reinvent the wheel: models, ideas for decals, and contracts are available through the four Community Toilet Schemes contacted as well as others.
- If DC decides to look closely at this option, we recommend that one or two employees from the implementing agency visit England to see how the program works in different localities.
- This option is highly recommended for commercial areas that have heavy foot traffic and where demand for restroom use coincides with the hours participating businesses are open.
- In areas with high level of foot traffic late at night (for example where there are bars, pubs, and restaurants with liquor licenses that are open until 2 or 3 am); a large number of individuals who are homeless sleeping in parks/on sidewalks/in alleys) it would be more appropriate to consider a stand-alone public restroom open 24/7.
- Regardless of whether the DC government decides to adopt this scheme, the DC government should develop and post on its website an interactive map that lists restrooms available to the public (in museums, libraries, community centers) according to: hours they are open, nature of restrooms (male, female, unisex), baby changing table.
- As new restrooms become available (including businesses that receive incentives to open their restrooms to the public, new stand-alone public restrooms available 24/7 should the DC government decide to adopt one or both options) these should be added to the website.
- Washington DC might also want to consider, as the City of London has, developing its own App.

Attachment 1
Community Toilet Scheme Decals

City of London	**Merton**	**Wealdon**
Colne	**Richmond Upon Thames**	**Ashford**

Attachment 2
Responses to Interview Topics

	City of London	Richmond Upon Thames (Borough)	Merton (Borough)	Wealdon (district)
Background information				
Characteristics	Population of 9,100 in one square mile with 300,000 commuters, major tourist district, 300,000 coming/day, London Bridge, St Patrick's Cathedral	Population of 195,600, 22.1 square miles along both sides of the Thames River south of London. Primarily residential, highest income borough	Population of 205,000, outer SW Borough of London, 2 town centers, 14.7 square miles. The population of one district, Wimbledon has primarily high income; this is where the annual Wimbledon tennis match takes place. Three districts farthest from downtown London inhabited primarily with people of low incomes who are belong to ethnic minorities. Has the largest Mosque in Western Europe.	District in South east England, 323 square miles, population 158,000, six villages with populations ranging from 8,000 to 20,000. Residents include farmers, retirees and people who work in London
Number of businesses participating in Community Toilet Scheme	75 businesses	Almost 70 businesses	Six businesses, at one point up to 8.	22 businesses in different communities
Stand-alone public toilets	4 attended: 8 am – 8 pm 8 APTs open 24/7 4 urinals open at night	In 10 public libraries	One in town center, not serviced	3 open from 8 am to 6 pm

	City of London	Richmond Upon Thames (Borough)	Merton (Borough)	Wealdon (district)
Questionnaire answers				
Who administers	Council	Council	Council	Council
How identify participating businesses	Not too many concentrated in one area	They need to be well maintained and clean and spaced out around the Borough	Areas with high level of footfall.	In Villages where there is a need.
Contract available	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provisions for opt out by businesses	Yes	Yes	Yes, At end of one-year contract.	Yes
Monetary incentive	Flat amount of 600 Pounds	Varying amounts depending on number of toilets and hours open	Depends on number of toilets regardless of hours. One toilet = 400 Pounds; two toilets – 600 Pounds	From 500 – 1,200 Pounds depending on nature of facility and hours open, with increase in % for 6 and 7 days
How often visit facilities	Every four to six weeks	Ad hoc and not announced	Random, twice/year	Random, twice/year
Log kept, record of daily use	No	No, but planning to	No	No
Instances of inappropriate use, actions taken	Yes, in two instances: One getting too much usage, A library where people were coming in and destroying the restroom	Nothing yet	One business opted out when someone overdosed on drugs	Nothing yet
Actions taken if businesses don't adhere to contract terms	None yet	None yet	None yet	None yet

	City of London	Richmond Upon Thames (Borough)	Merton (Borough)	Wealdon (district)
Contract termination & reasons	Not yet	Not yet	Not yet	Not yet
Mechanism for user feedback	Can contact Council if have any complaints	Can contact Council if have any complaints	Can contact Council if have any complaints	Can contact Council if have any complaints
Decal images (see Attachment 2)	One decal for all participating businesses	Four different decals, also signage to tell where they are	One decal for all participating businesses	Three different decals
Contract	Available	Available	Available	Available
Application	No	Provided copy	Provided copy	No

Commented [KC1]: Contract is also above

Attachment 3
Stand-Alone Public Restroom Options

LESSONS LEARNED/BEST PRACTICES

Key considerations in selecting sites for stand-alone public restrooms

1. Located in visible areas,
2. High level of pedestrian traffic,
3. Input and support from the surrounding community,
4. Near water and sewer facilities,
5. Provisions in place for both community and police monitoring.

Key considerations in selecting stand-alone public restrooms

1. Designed with safety considerations in mind
2. Include provisions to discourage illicit use
3. Encourage users to spend a limited amount of time in the facility in order to maximize restroom use
4. Kept clean
5. Reasonable in price

PORTLAND LOO

	Designed to avoid being used for illicit activities and for easy maintenance. Installed and successfully maintained in 12 cities in US and Canada; number of cities in US growing. Attractive Open 24/7 Clean Safe $94,000 purchase/transport. $32,000 - $38,000 installation if close to water/sewer lines $12,000 -$ 20,000/yr. maintenance

AUTOMATED PUBLIC TOILET

	Found in New York City, San Francisco, many cities in Europe & Asia Attractive Open 24/7 Cleanliness issues in some locations Safety issues in some locations $250,000 - $1,000,000 purchase $25,000 - $35,000 installation if close to water/sewer lines $100,000 - $150,000/yr. maintenance