

PHLUSH

Public Hygiene Lets Us Stay Human

Public Toilets for Old Town Chinatown

A Report to the Community by PHLUSH

Portland, Oregon

February 7, 2007

PHLUSH Members

Tom Carrollo, Beardsley Building Development

Nikki Jardin, Sisters of the Road Café, Inc.

Barbara Lescher, Our Peaceful Place

Carol McCreary, Steel Bridge

Lan Nguyen, Orchid Salon

Christopher Yarrow, The Monkey and the Rat



PHLUSH

c/o Old Town Chinatown
Neighborhood Association
115 SW Ash Street #400G
Portland, OR 97204
503.227.3278 x222

www.oldtownchinatown.com

Acknowledgements

PHLUSH gives special thanks Jon Swae, Kartik Srinivas, and Sarah Selden for their interest in the project and technical assistance for our presentation. They have created maps, donated photographs, produced a slide show and help raise the general level of enthusiasm. It is our hope that this talented team of graduate students from Portland State University School of Urban Studies and Planning and their colleagues will take forward some of the options PHLUSH has outlined for their final academic project.

We'd also like to thank the American Restroom Association for standing by us and for introducing us to public toilet advocates throughout the world. Special thanks to Bob Brubaker who has answered our questions day and night for the past month and created a special PHLUSH webpage at www.americanrestroom.org/phlush/

PHLUSH also thanks Gavin Shettler and the Portland Art Center for hosting the February meeting of the Old Town Chinatown Neighborhood Association and our presentation.

Finally, we thank our friends on the Old Town Chinatown Visions Committee for their encouragement and the board members of the Old Town Chinatown Neighborhood Association for letting us consume a good portion of their February meeting to present our findings.

Preface

Availability – or lack of availability –of public toilets in the Old Town Chinatown (OTCT) neighborhood has been an open issue for years. The need for public toilets has consistently shown up on needs lists, in visions plans, and in development requirements for neighborhood projects.

In early 2005, the OTCT Neighborhood Association invited newly-elected Portland Mayor Tom Potter to visit the neighborhood. In preparation for that visit, the neighborhood prepared three briefing papers on cross-cutting issues affecting all constituents in the local community. One of these issues was the need for community services – especially public toilets. As a result of the ensuing dialogue with Mayor Potter, the neighborhood took on the challenge of engaging this issue of public toilets as a part of a collaborative process with the city. The PHLUSH initiative was launched May 2005 by a dedicated team of OTCT community leaders. This team – made up of local residents, business owners and staff of human services organizations – has focused on raising the quality and substance of this dialogue.

Quite frankly, this issue is not going to go away. We are indebted to the PHLUSH team for their commitment to moving this issue forward on behalf of the neighborhood and our visitors.

Robert Granger

Board Member, Old Town Chinatown Neighborhood Association
Member, Old Town Chinatown Visions Committee
Board Member, Outreach in Burnside

February 1, 2006

Contents

Part I: The Case for Public Toilets	5
The Economic and Social Costs of Cleaning up Human Waste	5
Meeting People’s Basic Needs Requires Discussion of Public Toilets	6
Policy Environment, Legislation and Enforcement	7
Public Toilets are a Human Rights Issue	8
The Unappreciated Benefits of Public Restrooms	9
Part II: Types of Facilities and Management Alternatives	11
Management and Maintenance Related to Facility Design	11
Types of Facilities	11
Existing Public Toilets in Downtown Portland	11
Automatic Public Toilets	16
Portable Sanitation Units	18
Toilets in Public Buildings	18
Storefront Rest Stops	18
Innovative Designs: waterless, composting and artist-designed toilets	19
Facilities in Old Town’s Social Service Organizations	20
Management Alternatives for Public Restrooms	22
Management of APTs in Major US Cities	22
Construction and Upgrade of Traditional Public Restrooms	24
Commercial Management	25
Community Employment Opportunities	25
Management by Volunteers	25
Privatization and Innovative Public-Private Initiatives	25
Part III: Options for Public Toilets in Old Town Chinatown	27
Six Actionable Options	27
Option 1 Upgrading Public Toilets and Keeping them Open	28
Option 2 Portable Sanitation Units on Parking Lots	29
Option 3 A Storefront Rest Stop	30
Option 4 Automatic Public Toilets	31
Option 5 Private Initiative to Revitalize an Historic Comfort Station	32
Option 6 An Artist-Designed Restroom	33
Part IV: Next Steps	34
Promote public discussion of public restrooms	34
Formulate citywide public restroom policy	34
Encourage working groups to research options	34
Explore private and public funding sources	34

Part I: The Case for Public Toilets

The Economic and Social Costs of Cleaning Up Human Waste

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.¹

Many Portlanders have childhood memories of downtown restrooms such as the one in Pioneer Courthouse Square. They were used by everyone and staffed by friendly attendants, who also received tips. "You'd get done, they'd hand you a towel — everybody left happy," remembers Old Town Chinatown's Howard Weiner while speaking to a journalist. "I don't know about you, but I miss that."²

Today Portland's Downtown Clean and Safe program is responsible for cleaning downtown's remaining public restrooms and well as for responding to clean up calls. This program of the Portland Business Alliance has a contract from Portland Parks and Recreation and puts people to work providing a valuable service to city and citizens. Clean and Safe maintains public restrooms at 1) just south of Burnside opposite the North Park Blocks; 2) Pioneer Courthouse Square; 3) under the west end of the Hawthorne Bridge, 4) on South Waterfront at Riverplace, 5) on SW Clay opposite the Ira Keller Fountain 6) in Lowndale and 7) Chapman parks, which are bounded by SW 3rd, Madison, SW 4th and Salmon.

Clean and Safe cleans these restrooms three or four times a day and pressure washes them once a week. The facilities are open from about 6am to 11 pm all week. Keeping restrooms clean is an ongoing challenge at all sites. Staff checks the restroom in the Information Center at Pioneer Courthouse Square every 15 minutes yet it's still hard to keep it clean. The restroom gets very heavy use with many people stopping not only to relieve themselves but for personal grooming.

Apart from scheduled maintenance of public restrooms, Clean and Safe responds to 6000 calls a year from people who call for emergency clean up services in public areas. About half of all calls are in regard to human waste throughout downtown and about 75% of these calls are in the Old Town Chinatown area.

There are approximately 2250 requests per year from citizens for clean up of urine and excrement in public places in Old Town Chinatown. And these calls probably represent only the tip of the iceberg; they are from the people who know whom to call and take the time to do so.

Both the scheduled maintenance of public restrooms and emergency clean-ups are expensive. Clean and Safe currently run their work program with twenty full time employees and at a cost of \$10,000 per month.³

The need for emergency clean up of human waste is largely due to a lack of access to public restrooms. Old Town Chinatown is the transportation hub for the entire city and the Heart of Portland in all senses of the word. Our businesses – from our renowned social service organizations to our lively clubs and restaurants – serve a 24/7 clientele. It is the nature of a pedestrian and bicycle friendly neighborhood that people are continuously moving through public spaces. Visitors, customers, residents and workers all need access to sanitary facilities, just as they do to amenities such as sidewalks and street lighting.

In sum, the lack of public restrooms engenders a spiral of economic costs ranging from clean up costs to the loss of foot traffic that hurts business. In addition to these economic costs, there are heavy social

¹ See "Potty daydreams ... Council takes aim at public-toilet issue" *Philadelphia Daily News*, March 24, 2004. "Why the fear?" Letter to the editor. *Newsday* (Long Island, NY)

² Howard Weiner, quoted by Jacob Quinn Sanders in "City could get more flush with toilets Old Town-Chinatown activists start project to augment public facilities" *The Portland Tribune*, Oct 11, 2005.

³ Carla Thayer of Clean and Safe, interviewed by Nikki Jardin of PHLUSH. October 2005.

costs. Human dignity is compromised: no person should have to relieve himself or herself in a public place and be 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:

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."⁴

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, it's something really serious..... it's time to sit at a table and look at it, and do something about it."⁵

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."⁶

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

Meeting People's Basic Needs Requires Discussion of Public Toilets

In talking to people and carrying out this research, members of the PHLUSH group became aware of how little attention is paid to public toilets in the United States. There is little academic research and no consolidated body of literature. Public restrooms appear marginalized by most of the urban planning, architecture and design communities. While Americans are building larger houses with more – and more elaborate -- bathrooms they are not talking about their needs when they are away from home. While travellers are demanding new levels of comfort in hotel bathrooms, they have not yet effectively registered their complaints about not being able to find a public restroom en route to the hotel.

This is not the case everywhere. Great Britain and several nations in Asia have national non-profit groups that advocate for comfortable, safe toilets. Academics in these countries study attitudes and behavior and entrepreneurs respond with an array of options in facilities and management. The Summit of the World Toilet Organization in Beijing in 2004 explored facilities design, maintenance, water conservation, toilet codes of practice, and the social and economic returns on investments in restrooms.⁷ The annual World Toilet Expo and Forum⁸ attracts thousands of visitors and suppliers of public restrooms. Other countries have national standards for public toilets, annual national awards, ways to involve citizens and forge public-private partnerships, such as the celebration of International Toilet Day on November 19.

Says Jack Sim, the President of the Restroom Association of Singapore⁹:

⁴ Crossroads research index # 364293689, Sisters of the Road, 2004-5.

⁵ Crossroads research index # 1924556808

⁶ Crossroads research index # 955195709

⁷ www.worldtoilet.org/events/events_WTS2004.htm

⁸ The next forum is in Bangkok from 16-18 November 2006. www.worldtoiletexpo.com

⁹ Sophisticated social marketing promotes attitude change. Consider these tag lines in Singapore's three principal languages.

English: "It's Everybody's Business!" has two meanings: a) Everyone has a duty to care for the toilet. b) Everybody needs to visit

We must learn to treat our toilets with greater care, to reduce our dread and increase our love for them; to accept and acknowledge that our daily bodily function is a natural process. It is as normal as eating, drinking and breathing. We now have the courage to proclaim that we are all toilet users. Just as other social taboos are fast fading, toilets too will disappear as the last taboo of the 21st century.

The fact that attitudes toward sanitary facilities are different in the United States is probably due to a range of factors beyond the scope of this report. But unless we want to privatize everything and abandon our tending of the commons, citizens and local governments need to pay attention to private amenities that are used by all. We need to start this discussion and not be afraid to talk about the basic human needs that we can meet.

When we engage the public in discussion of their priorities, we need to realize that they likely will not initiate talk about their need to use a bathroom when they and their families are away from home.

An interesting example comes from Arlington, Virginia. This community across the Potomac River from Washington, DC is renowned for its small family-friendly parks and miles of bike trails used by joggers, recreational cyclists and bicycle commuters alike. For years, park officials and citizen activists conducted research to find out what services people wanted in the parks. Public restrooms were rarely mentioned. It was not until researchers designed a questionnaire that asked respondents to rank priorities, that “year round restrooms” shot up to second place (after drinking fountains) on a long list of priorities.¹⁰

By overcoming survey bias, Arlington was able to mobilize funding for more restrooms. Because the survey specified the otherwise “unspoken” issue of toilet access, authorities were able to get support for winterization of public restrooms, year round use and additional restroom signage.

This is one of the most important lessons learned for public toilet advocates: make sure that surveys allow people to use their voices in favor of something they really want but have been conditioned to not talk about.¹¹

Policy Environment, Legislation, and Enforcement

In some areas of life, there is strong legal protection for the rights of restroom users. In the workplace: OSHA requires adequate restroom facilities on work sites. In food establishments, the law requires restrooms. For special events, local regulations require temporary sanitary facilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) offers protection to disabled people in retail establishments and in local and state government facilities.

In other areas, particularly in the public sphere, legislation is weak or non-existent. These include public transit systems, pedestrian areas of the city, pedestrian and cyclist commuter routes and office buildings that receive visitors.

Citizens trying to determine guidelines for public restroom use usually turn to county health officials or law enforcement. According to Robert Brubaker of the American Restroom Association, one place to start is with building codes. While this national advocacy group focuses primarily on conveniently-located public toilets to serve pedestrians, joggers, cyclists and transit riders, they are also studying issues of public access to toilets inside privately owned buildings.

Throughout the United States, building codes specify the number and placement of common toilets. The American Restroom Association (ARA) is working on the legislative and regulatory fronts to ensure that restrooms in commercial buildings provide the required public access to restrooms. They are looking at commercial code enforcement. This applies to all “buildings of public assembly”, or “mercantile

the toilet. Mandarin: "Ren Ren You Fen" has two meanings: a) Everyone has a duty to keep toilet clean. b) Everyone has to visit the toilet. Malay: "Perlaburan Untuk Semua" two meanings: a) An investment by everyone. b) A deposit by Everyone.

¹⁰ American Restroom Association, see “parks” <http://americanrestroom.org/pnr/index.htm>

¹¹ Robert Brubaker, American Restroom Association, personal communication, January 2006.

establishment". This means any building where the public has access for any commercial reason; any building where business of any kind takes place, whether or not a transaction is completed. This is building-related, not related to health or other codes.

Consequently, there should be public restroom access in any commercial building. As Brubaker explains, "When you as a member of public are in a commercial establishment and ask an employee for a rest room and hear 'we don't have public restrooms' or 'our toilet is out of order', this should raise a red flag. This is the time to persevere and make a complaint. It is through official complaints to commercial code enforcement officers that action happens."¹²

The section of the building code that applies to toilet facilities is the plumbing code. Individual states follow one of three code models: the International Plumbing Code, or IPC; the Uniform Plumbing Code, or UPC; or the National Standard Plumbing Code, or NSPC. These codes are set by three associations whose members include government officials and building experts. The associations meet every five years or so to amend the code with improved specifications. Oregon and most of the states in the West use the UPC. In Oregon the UPC applies state-wide. The Uniform Plumbing Code defines restroom requirements and provides rules for access as well as for construction and plumbing.

Building codes and other commercial codes are essentially the same in California and Oregon. The head of building codes in California recently broadened the definition of customer. When you are legitimately in a store looking at goods you are a customer whether you buy anything or not. While in the store you may realize that you need to use the bathroom; therefore, the store needs to provide the use of their facility.. People that retailers may do business with (e.g. postal or UPS staff) are given automatic access. However, the code is based on the building rather than the business.

For this reason, the ARA's Public Restroom Initiative is working to inform the public that they already have the legal right to go to the bathroom. A recent report describes the enforcement mechanism: *While the Code is typically adopted at the state level, Building Code is most often enforced at the local level. Violation is often an administrative matter (i.e. not criminal) and is typically handled by a Municipal Commercial Building Code Enforcement Office. A complaint leads to an inspection of the facility. Any Code violations found may lead to warnings, fines or the closing of the business until the violation is resolved. Municipal commercial code enforcement persons prefer citing violations they can inspect. They typically lack the interest or forte to follow up on a 'not allowed to use' complaint.*¹³

Experienced public restroom advocates concede that businesses have been effective in deeming homeless individuals as non-customers and therefore denying them the access enshrined in the building codes. They also look at situations where customers need to ask for keys and where toilets appear to be permanently out of order. The advocacy group has put forth a code change request in an attempt to alter the uniform plumbing code.

It should be noted that establishments that serve food have an additional set of regulations beyond those that apply to buildings. Regulations regarding restaurant restrooms are related to health codes because food handlers and diners need restrooms with adequate hot water hand washing facilities.

The town of Arlington Heights, Illinois has leveraged the building code to establish local regulations which deem it unlawful to deny public use of bathrooms in businesses, hotels, restaurants and even public schools regardless whether or not someone purchases anything. Municipal employees regularly explain the law to retailers after people register complaints about being denied restroom use. If a business doesn't comply, it can face fines up to \$750.¹⁴

Brubaker also reports a recent movement to require signage of toilets and directional signs to toilets at various points within a building. In the most recent code amendment cycle, a very comprehensive toilet signage provision was considered as an "emergency temporary interim measure". Brubaker reports

¹² Robert Brubaker, personal communication, January 2006.

¹³ Schmidt, Jasmine and Robert Brubaker. "The Code and Practice of Toilets in the United States of America" Presented to the World Toilet Summit, Beijing, China, 2004.

¹⁴ "At last, downtown Geneva visitors will have place to go" By Rhonda Sciarra Daily Herald Staff Writer Posted August 07, 2003 © 2003 Daily Herald, Paddock Publications, Inc.

partial success: the amendment passed on merit but it could not be put into effect because it was not considered an emergency. He hopes that toilet signage regulations can be put into the regular code amendment cycle in 2009.

A related development in the IPC deals with the plumbing portion of the building code. A Maryland state legislator has contacted the ARA for assistance in putting a toilet signage provision into current legislation.¹⁵

Public Toilets are a Human Rights Issue

PHLUSH research shows that successful advocacy for public toilets in US cities often emerges from a common scenario. A weak economy leads to a tattered social safety net through which more and more citizens fall. Homeless people seeking emergency services become a more visible presence on the streets. The business community reacts by pressuring city councils to pass legislation that restricts the presence of the poor in downtown areas. Such legislation, or the threat of it, leads to citizen advocacy. This advocacy is successful when property owners, retailers, social service providers, health officials, tourism boards, mass transit authorities, pedestrian and cycling advocates and downtown workers and residents all realize that public toilets are in their own best interest.

The main challenge of course remains management of the facilities and to a lesser extent innovations in the design and changes in the construction of the restrooms themselves. The provision of well managed cost effective toilets is catalyzed by attitude change. This change invites reflection on our shared values of human rights, comfort and dignity as well as on practical need of all people to have access to restrooms when they are away from home.

For an issue as universal and human as public restrooms, there are huge gaps in research and policy. According to the American Restroom Association's Robert Brubaker, these result from the difficulty of getting people to report on individual need related to incontinence. Successful advocacy is often leveraged by an individual who steps forward to report an embarrassing accident. Embarrassment about incontinence is universal and the public reacts with a deep sense of identification, compassion and outrage.¹⁶

The Unappreciated Benefits of Public Restrooms

Public Restrooms play an unrecognized role in the revitalization of downtowns because they get people out of cars and onto mass transit while enhancing overall public health and serving the largely invisible population of "restroom challenged".

Public toilets help revitalize downtown neighborhoods. 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.

Just as graffiti causes a negative spiral in urban areas, so does the smell of urine. Both keep people away. Yet the best policing won't stop public urination when facilities are unavailable. Cities with well thought-out placement of public restrooms and portable toilets have few 'civility law' violations.

For visitors to a neighborhood or to an establishment, the restrooms are often the place where first and lasting impressions are made.

Public toilets help people out of cars and onto mass transit. A study by a Chicago-based advocacy group shows that people who have any concern about possibly needing a restroom on the way to work feel more comfortable in their cars. If traffic slows on a highway, motorists can exit and find restrooms. Mass Transit with restroom-less terminals can give commuters a trapped feeling: there is no emergency pull-off. Therefore, access to convenient toilets is a factor in converting people to mass transit.

¹⁵ Robert Brubaker, American Restroom Association, personal communication, Jan 2006.

¹⁶ Personal communication, 12 January 2006.

Bicycle commuters and walkers typically experience extended commute times. The restroom challenged map amenities along the way. If not available, they are forced to drive.¹⁷

Public toilets improve the public's health. Medical studies show the importance of regular urination, with women generally needing to void more frequently than men. Adverse health effects that may result from voluntary urinary retention include increased frequency of urinary tract infections, which can lead to more serious infections and, in rare situations, renal damage.

Public toilets can promote fitness. As obesity becomes a national health issue and the benefits of exercise are demonstrated in medical terms, imply promoting exercise is not useful if the impediments to it are not explored. The lack of public toilet facilities should be seen as an addressable 'impediment to fitness'. Obese people, those with a wide range of medical conditions and parents with children are less willing to participate in recreational activities when toilets are not available.

One of the attractions of private gyms is access to facilities. Putting toilets outside in public areas can bring people out of the gyms to re-animate public areas and provide safety-enhancing "eyes" on the street.

Public toilets serve significant, sometimes invisible populations who are "restroom challenged". The American Restroom Association uses the term "restroom challenged" to refer to those who have to go frequently or at times urgently. These include people with an array of normal and medical conditions.

There are higher numbers of "restroom challenged" among older and younger Americans. The American Restroom Association claims that functional capacity is halved as adults age. School children and toddlers out with their parents access restrooms more often than the general population, as do pregnant women, women who experience irregular cycles, otherwise healthy persons suffering bowel incontinence and restaurant patrons who consume coffee or alcohol.

Patients experiencing the diuretic effect of blood pressure medicine, men suffering enlarged prostate or the impact of prostatectomy, and patients on medications that act as bowel or bladder irritants need facilities more frequently. Others include people suffering certain congenital defects, those with bladder cancer, victims of abdominal or nerve trauma, women being treated for vaginal candidiasis, a significant minority of all stroke victims, people with interstitial cystitis, those suffering irritable bowel syndrome Ulcerative Colitis and some wounded combat veterans. People with ostomy pouches need a place to empty them.¹⁸

Issues of restroom access are of course compounded for wheelchair users. The increasing presence of family and handicapped unisex stalls recognize that bathroom access for many people requires the assistance of an attendant, who may be of the opposite sex.

American society appears to have be wearing blinders when it comes to the "restroom challenged, as the American Restroom Association points out.¹⁹

No modern commuter transit system would intentionally design a station to preclude use by someone in a wheel chair. The same philosophy must be applied to the 'restroom challenged'. Transit stations without public restroom access have toilets for their staff. Staff will occasionally honor a customer request; unfortunately, there's no guarantee. Changing system policy to require honoring all customers' toilet requests is a no-cost interim solution.

¹⁷ Public Restroom Initiative is an advocacy coalition for the many people who hesitate to participate in outdoor activities or who avoid travel that puts them out of range of toilet facilities. Established by the non-profit organization Metroped, Inc in early 2003, the Initiative was transferred to the newly -founded American Restroom Association in late 2004.

¹⁸ The websites of the American Restroom Association and The International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders have good discussions of incontinence.

¹⁹ See Robert Brubaker and Jasmine Schmidt, "The Code and Practice of Toilets in the United States of America" Paper delivered to the World Toilet Summit, Beijing, 2004. 2004

Part II: Types of Facilities and Management Alternatives

Management and Maintenance Related to Facility Design

In the course of their investigation, PHLUSH looked at a number of types of public restroom facilities: Portland's existing public restrooms, self-cleaning automatic public toilets, portable sanitation units, storefront rest stops with bathrooms, and innovative designs such as waterless, composting and artist-designed toilets.

We also considered the more crucial issue of public toilet management. We looked at various management alternatives and combinations of them: commercial management by a multi-national advertising firm, a public sector agency, a non-profit work program or through a commercial contract, by volunteers or private enterprise

Then we combined the Management Alternatives with Types of Facilities to identify promising combinations. Eventually these led to the six options we are proposing for further exploration in Part III of this report.

Options Identification Matrix		Management Alternatives					
		Multi-National Advertising Firm	Public Sector Agency	Commercial Maintenance Contract	Non-profit Work Program	Volunteer Management	Privatization Private Enterprise
Types of Facilities	Existing Public Toilets	?	4	4	4	X	4
	Automatic Public Toilets	4	X	4	X	X	X
	Portable Sanitation Units	X	X	4	4	X	?
	Storefront Rest Stop	X	X	X	4	4	?
	Innovative Design: Art-focussed or Environmental	X	?	X	X	4	?

Types of Facilities

Existing Public Toilets in Downtown Portland

Downtown Portland has public toilets at 10 locations. Four of these are free standing restroom buildings, four are incorporated into other buildings and one is built into a stairway of the Hawthorne Bridge. The tenth restroom, which is essentially a private restroom made available for public use, consists of a pair of large portable sanitation units. An eleventh toilet in Waterfront Park – near the river opposite Ankeny Square -- has been closed for several years, presumably because of construction of the "Big Pipe".

PHLUSH collected data for all public toilets and made additional spot checks to see if they were open. Adequate signage is lacking on the restrooms themselves and there are no street signs to indicate their location to visitors. This means that only those who know about them use them. Essentially, we observed very few people using public restrooms, even the more safe and comfortable ones, such as those at Riverplace. In spite of these awareness issues, the physical infrastructure of Portland's

restrooms is relatively good in certain parts of Portland. PHLUSH feels that with relatively simple modifications, existing public restrooms can be made safe, comfortable and inviting to the general public, including families with children and tourists.

In terms of physical distribution, most of the toilets are east of Broadway, leaving large areas of the city underserved. The entire Pearl District, which accommodates significant numbers of visitors to its streets and parks, does not have a single public toilet.



Old Town Chinatown has public toilets at three locations.

NW Davis at First Ave The heavily used public toilet at NW Naito and Davis is built into the parking garage where access can be observed by the parking attendant. It currently has longer hours than any other public toilet in the downtown area. It is open Mon-Wed from 7 am to 12 midnight and on Thurs-Sat from 7 am to 3 am. Sunday hours are 9 am to 10 pm but the toilet is closed Sundays from Christmas to March. It is maintained by the Portland Bureau of General Services and their contractor CleanScapes, a Seattle-based company that provides streetscape maintenance services to property owners, municipalities, and business improvement districts.



Saturday Market Inaugurated in 2000 by Mayor Vera Katz, the portable sanitation units that serve Portland Saturday Market function as public toilets during market hours. Two multi-stall units are mounted on large trailers, semi-permanently installed and attached to the sewer system. They resemble an L-shaped building. However, the attractive, well-lit, multi-stalled interiors and porcelain fixtures have more in common with bathrooms in buildings than with freestanding public restrooms. They are not designed for heavy public use and are not vandal resistant. Saturday Market engages male and female attendants who ensure that restrooms are checked and cleaned every 30 minutes and their regular security guards also monitor them. Security and staffing cost nearly \$13,000 annually.



Saturday Market owns the \$262,300 restrooms and pays about \$8,400 to lease the space on which they stand. The purchase was facilitated by grants of \$55,000 from the City and \$5,000 from TriMet with the agreement that restrooms serve the public as well as Saturday Market customers during market hours.

The Market is open from March to December from 10 am to 5 pm on Saturdays and from 11 am to 4:30 pm on Sundays and every day from mid-December through Christmas Eve. Some local retailers find the sudden closure of the restrooms on winter weekends troublesome as they get increased requests from visitors, walkers and joggers to use their facilities.

Waterfront Park opposite Ankeny Square (Closed) This purpose-built, freestanding public toilet has been closed since the beginning of the Big Pipe construction.

Public Toilets near Old Town Chinatown

Eastbank Esplanade near the Steel Bridge A single stall portable sanitation unit enclosed in a steel cage is owned and serviced by Honey Bucket. Adjacent to it but empty is a second, larger cage suitable for an ADA-compliant portable unit. The door of the cage can be locked open or closed. The grillwork of the cage is bare but could be landscaped with attractive flowering vines. PHLUSH found this practical, inexpensive facility clean and being used by joggers and cyclists





North Park Blocks at SW 8th and Ankeny This pair of brick buildings at the south end of the park blocks is in poor condition. Its superbly attractive location and fine architectural detail, however, argue for its careful preservation. The twin buildings of approximately 500 sq feet each are joined by a raised, grass-covered plaza flanked by a balustrade with an attractive two-sided fountain of decorative plasterwork. It is maintained by Portland Parks and Downtown Clean and Safe. Apart from largely obliterated icon signs on the doors of the western building, this historic "public comfort station" has no signage. There appear to be four individual entry toilet stalls but only the one on the east side has been found open for use. It contains a stainless steel toilet bowl and no washing facilities.

Pioneer Courthouse Square Public toilets are located within the Information Center under the Square at SW 6th and Morrison. Toilets are administered by Pioneer Courthouse Square, Inc. for Portland Parks and maintained by Downtown Clean and Safe. These well-equipped restrooms are open Mon-Sat from 8:30 am to 5:30 pm.²⁰

Lownsdale and Chapman Parks Lownsdale Park has a freestanding historic brick men's facility facing SW Salmon Street between 3rd and 4th Avenues. The large tiled room contains a large concrete sink, a urinal and two open stalls. The entry faces the street in a well-travelled area. The next block to the south is Chapman Park. It has a similar facility for women, though the restroom occupies only half of the structure. A tiled room contains two open stalls, a sink, and an unbreakable mirror. The entry faces SW Madison and is near a bus stop. Both are operated by Portland Parks Downtown Clean and Safe and reported to be open seven days a week from 6:30 am to 10 pm. There is no signage apart from the brass letters embedded in the sidewalk indicating "MEN" and "WOMEN". Both are wheelchair accessible and include taps for pressure washing; neither has a refuse bin or options for hand drying. On the sidewalk opposite the entrances are parking meters, which bring increased activity to the area.

Hawthorne Bridge A pair of unmarked restrooms are cleverly built under the stairs leading from the walkway to the bridge span. Each is tiled and fitted with a stainless wall-hung toilet bowl and corner sink, grab bars, toilet paper rod, and a (sometimes non-functional) air dryer. There is a faucet near the floor for power washing. Proximity to the walkway enhances safety. Operated by Portland Parks and maintained by Downtown Clean and Safe, restrooms are reported to be open between 6:30 am and 10 pm. However, from the outside it is impossible to verify if they are in use or locked. Restrooms that open onto the sidewalk or an activity area should be fitted with dual locks, only one of which is operable from inside and signals "occupied" or "vacant." A gap of six inches under the door and motion-activated lighting would provide additional safety and deter people from camping inside. The lack of a sign has led to the restrooms serving only homeless people and those "in the know"; signage would attract tourists and visitors and might improve the overall situation.



Ira Keller Fountain The restroom is entered from SW Clay Street across from the fountain. It is built in to the Auditorium Parking Garage. The contoured floors and the walls covered with bright orange tile are attractive and easy to pressure clean. On the women's side of the compact facility are regular and accessible stalls with lockable partial doors, a washing area with a sink and hand dryer. The men's side

²⁰ Opening times listed are from "Public Restroom Study" prepared by Vanessa Mayer and presented at the September 13, 2005 meeting of the Citizens Action Committee for the TriMet Mall Revitalization.

features a urinal and a toilet stall, both without doors, and a sink area. There is also a hydrant-type faucet for pressure washing and a closet for supplies. While very cleanable, this facility's primary drawback is its poor safety. The women's and men's room are far too close to one another and hidden out of view down a narrow, curving, ramped corridor leading from the street. Lighting is artificial and, as is the case with all observed restrooms, there are no emergency call buttons. Operated by Portland Parks and maintained by Downtown Clean and Safe, the facility is reported to be open daily from 6:30 am to 10 pm except during cleaning.

South Waterfront Park Public restrooms are located in an attractive freestanding building just south of the Riverplace Marina opposite several retail businesses. The newest of the purpose-built downtown restrooms, they have natural light and are well equipped with stainless steel fixtures, mirrors, hand dryers, trash bins, and baby-changing tables in both the men's and women's sections.

They also inspire a feeling of safety and comfort because of their location. Next-door on one side is a coffee stand with outdoor tables, and on the other a new condominium is being built. Directly in front of the doors is a parking meter, which helps put additional eyes on the location.



Operated by Portland Parks and maintained by Downtown Clean and Safe, the Riverplace restrooms are open every day from 6:30 am to 10 pm. They serve a diverse clientele, including those who use the marina. Portland Parks and Recreation allows boaters to moor on the public dock and sleep on their boats for an extremely modest fee per night. Consequently, it makes sense to have these facilities open all night and to add the shower facilities typical to Columbia River marinas.



PSU Urban Center PSU maintains public restrooms at SW 6th and Mill. They also serve the coffee and bento shops that are tenants in the building that opens onto the plaza in front of the School of Urban Studies and Planning. The two unisex restrooms are building quality, rather than vandal-proofed, and in good condition. They contain the only self-flushing toilets we saw. Doors are full size but have two locks, the user-activated lock indicates "vacant" or "occupied" and can be opened from the outside in an emergency. The self-contained bathrooms are located side by side at the end of a short, poorly lit corridor. Safety could be enhanced with motion activated lighting in the hallway and in the units themselves. Security guards patrol the area.

What is remarkable is that the toilets are entirely without signage, either in the Urban Plaza, on the door into the building, or on the doors of the two toilets themselves. The only way a member of the public can learn about them is by asking someone who knows. The restrooms are open Saturday through Thursday from 7 am to 8 pm and Friday from 7 am to 7 pm.

Automatic Public Toilets (APTs)

Automatic Public Toilets (APTs) have become part of the streetscape in many other parts of the world. In 2001, it was reported that more than 600 cities had automatic public toilets: Singapore alone had 750, London 678, and Athens 500.

Since that time US cities have adopted the already well-tested units. Cities with APTs include Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, New York, San Antonio, Atlanta, San Diego and Pittsburgh. The experiences of other urban areas offer Portland a variety of physical models, management best practices, and cost recovery options.

APTs are self-cleaning units that cut labor costs but still require some maintenance. Typically, they are managed through service contracts with suppliers. The contracting arrangements used by different US cities in the United States fall into one or more of the following categories: 1) a line item in the municipal budget; 2) the sale of advertisement space; or 3) per use charges. Note that charging for restroom use was practically unknown in the United States before the advent of APTs within the last decade.

Among the most recent models of APTs are those made in Germany by Wall AG. The units recently installed in Boston cost \$250,000 each. The cleaning process happens in just 50 seconds: the toilet bowl swivels and a cap comes down to blast the bowl with disinfectant. The floor folds up and is jet sprayed. The seat is dried with a big blower. The floor then folds back down and the bowl swivels back, ready for the next person. Doors are timed to open after 10 minutes to limit extended use.



Portable Sanitation Units (PSUs)

The advantages of portable sanitation units that are not connected to the sewer system are their flexibility and low cost. They are resistant to vandalism and can be enclosed in wooden, brick or metal structures.

According to a leading supplier, under normal conditions most persons will use sanitation facilities once every four hours. Each portable restroom facility should accommodate a maximum of 125 uses. Weather conditions and the consumption of food, liquids, beer and other alcoholic beverages will increase usage by 30-40%.

One Honey Bucket will accommodate up to 10 workers per 40-hour workweek when serviced once per week. This rate of 1 to 10 is also the ANSI standard for the industry.

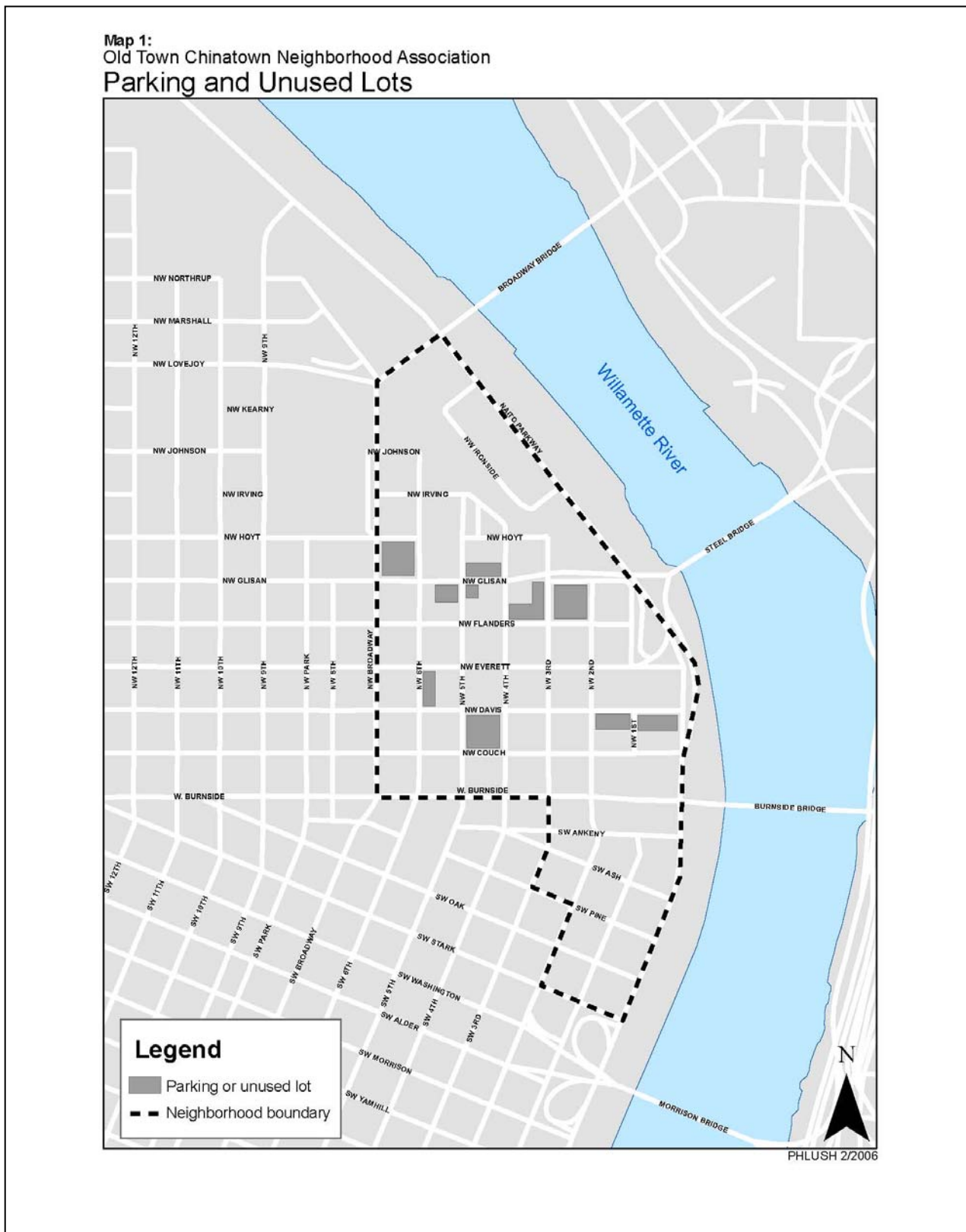
Total number of patrons	Males			Females	
<500	3	8	2	13	2
<1000	5	10	4	16	4
<2000	9	15	7	18	7
<3000	10	20	14	22	14
<5000	12	30	20	40	20

Source: FEMA guidelines for events where alcohol is served. 2001

Figures above are based on events of at least 8 hours. Fewer toilets are required for shorter events, with 6-8 hr events at 80%, 4-6 hrs at 75%, and less than 4 hrs at 70%. There must be at least one unisex toilet for the disabled. Food handlers need separate toilet and hand washing facilities. PSUs have been adopted by some communities specifically to provide restroom facilities for people with disabilities.

While PSUs are found at all construction sites and outdoor events, they are infrequently used in retail areas. The advocacy group Metroped is advocating changing regulations regarding portable units, claiming a portable sanitation contract is the easiest and simplest approach to providing restrooms with which the public is comfortable.

PHLUSH has looked at unbuilt areas in Old Town Chinatown with a view to placing APTs or porta-potties. Possible locations include parking lots along NW Davis and Flanders Streets, which serve as east-west pedestrian and bicycle corridors and the entertainment district on Second Avenue north and south of the Burnside Bridge.



Toilets in Public Buildings

The toilets in Portland State University's Smith Center serve the South Park Blocks, which have no toilets of their own. The presence of these toilets (maintained at University expense) means the Portland Farmers' Market does not need portable sanitation units. This remarkable precedent might guide a good neighbor agreement between the Old Town Chinatown Neighborhood and the University of Oregon, which hopes to establish a presence in the block just north of the Burnside.

In planning for the construction of a new Fire Station on Block 8, the Station Advisory Committee, the Neighborhood Association and the Arts, Culture and History Group, among others, have made a public access toilet in the Fire Learning Center a priority. Portland Fire and Rescue and the architects and planners who are working on the project appear to have taken these recommendations seriously.²¹

Storefront Rest Stop

A Storefront Rest Stop is a practical, locally grown solution to providing access to public toilets. Rest stops typically house a restroom, a telephone, chairs and a table, a bulletin board and information about services and retail businesses in the neighborhood. There may an attendant, who could be either a paid employee or a volunteer. Coffee and newspapers may also be offered.

From the 1880s Old Town has been a place where people sought and found sanitary facilities. For example, the Merchant Hotel housed a Japanese laundry, with toilets and public showers nearby.



Many visitors to the Old Town Chinatown neighborhood need to tidy up for meetings or job interviews, change a baby's or toddler's diaper, make phone calls, or even change their clothes or leave their bags for a short time. Lessons can be learned from Seattle's Urban Rest Stop.²² Funded by the city's Department of Housing and Urban Development and private businesses, churches and individuals, the rest stop offers a range of services, free-of-charge. There is welcoming access to toilets as well as to showers, laundry and personal hygiene supplies.

While there is a need for full day shelters for homeless people, this type of facility is beyond the scope of PHLUSH focus. But the "Storefront Rest Stop" concept that has already been piloted in Old Town can be broadened to meet the needs of a broader clientele.

The Storefront Rest Stop envisioned by PHLUSH would primarily be a public restroom and would serve a much broader clientele: tourists, school children on outings, office workers, delivery people, construction workers, residents, and individuals who are in the neighborhood to access social services. The community bulletin board would be a positive attractor. Just as APTs impose a time limit per use, the Storefront Rest Stop could request visitors to limit their visits to 20 or 30 minutes.

²¹ See notes of Joint Special Meeting of the Old Town Chinatown Joint meeting of the Visions Committee and Neighborhood Association, "A Neighborhood Discussion on Fire Station One Relocation Project", January 31, 2006.

²² The Urban Rest Stop is at 1924 9th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98101 (On 9th Avenue between Stewart and Virginia) 206.332-0110 www.lihi.org/pages/RestStop.htm

Case Study: A Public Toilet at “Our Peaceful Place”

Personal dignity is validated when someone is welcomed to use a bathroom. When “Our Peaceful Place” moved, the Board of Directors agreed that a public bathroom would be one of the criteria used for deciding on a new site.

When we settled into our new location, we suspected that because there are few public bathrooms in Old Town Chinatown and because most of our guests are homeless, the bathroom would be well used. There was a steady stream of people using the facilities and occasionally two or three people waiting but typically this occurred only when we first opened in the morning, as we were preparing to close in the evening or in between videos on the days we showed movies. We kept the bathroom locked and staff had bathroom keys on lanyards. We monitored the bathroom between uses to ensure cleanliness and to keep adequate toilet paper stocked. We did a quick cleaning of the bathroom several times a day and did a thorough cleaning every night after closing.

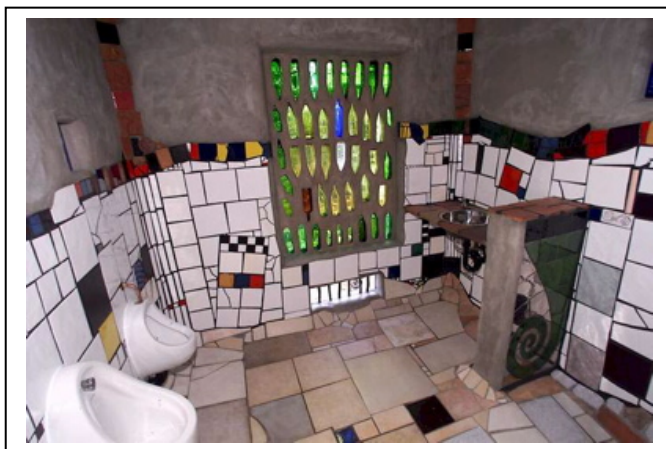
The bathroom was in close proximity to our service counter so we were able to keep an eye on the traffic. We had a sign posted asking folks to keep their bathroom visits as brief as possible and only allowed them to enter one at a time unless there was a child. If it seemed someone was in the bathroom for an extended period of time a staff member would gently knock on the door and courteously ask if help was required. This would remind guests that others were waiting. On one occasion after stating we were going to do so, we used the key to enter and give assistance.

Our experience with a public use bathroom was a positive one. The fact that we had one was well appreciated by our clientele and it gave us great satisfaction to know we were providing such a great service. The cost to us included paper products and a higher water bill, but the payoff was well worth the expense.²³

Innovative Designs

This category groups toilets of different physical types of interest to very different communities.

Artist-Designed One-of-a Kind Toilets: Visitors enjoy interesting and attractive toilets. Two superb examples of artist-designed toilets are Monica Bonvincini’s Mirror Cube in front of London’s Tate Gallery and Frederich Hunderwasser’s public toilets in rural New Zealand.



The Kawakawa Public Toilets in Northland, New Zealand, have become a significant tourist draw and leveraged the economic development of a small town. Designed by renowned Austrian artist Frederich Hunderwasser, the building is a work of art, from the grass roof, to gold balls, ceramic tiles, bottle glass windows, mosaic tiling, copper handwork, cobblestone flooring, individual sculptures and a living tree integrated into the design structure. The new building resulted from the need of the local council to upgrade the 40 year-old public toilets. The artist contributed the design and the community contributed the labor and materials. Students at a local school prepared the tiles and bricks from a former Bank of New Zealand building.²⁴

Italian Artist Monica Bonvincini’s acclaimed work entitled “Don’t Miss a Sec” is a toilet in a glass pavilion

²³ Barb Lescher, OPP Executive Director and PHLUSH member, Jan 2006.

²⁴ Source: On line Encyclopedia of New Zealand. www.teara.govt.nz/Places/Northland/NorthlandPlaces/9/ENZ-Resources/Standard/5/en

erected on the sidewalk opposite London's Tate Gallery. Made from stainless steel and reflective glass, the temporary installation served construction workers who spent a year transforming the London Institute Millbank into the Chelsea College of Art and Design. From inside users have a panoramic view of the site. Pedestrians passing by see only their reflection and that of surrounding urban landscape.²⁵ There is a toilet in Houston inspired by Bonvinci's innovative design.

Waterless Urinals Waterless "No-Flush" urinals are used at Liberty Island in New York and the Jimmy Carter Center in Atlanta. They have also been tried at Oregon State University, Crater Lake National Park, Lane Community College and the Eugene Water and Electric Board building.²⁶ Endorsed by the US Green Building Council and winner of many awards, these urinals resemble conventional fixtures and attach to the regular waste lines, but they eliminate flush water supply lines, flush valves, sensors, handles to touch and all moving parts. Cleaning procedures are the same as for flushed urinals. A special disposable trap is inserted in the urinal outlet in place of the trap drain on a conventional water-filled urinal. A layer of immiscible liquid floats on top of the urine layer to block out sewer gases and odor. The manufacturer claims that a 3-oz. dose of the liquid BlueSeal® lasts over 1500 uses, replacing at least 1500 or up to 4500 gallons of potable quality flush water!

Composting Toilets The goal of composting toilets is zero environmental impact. These installations use no water and work with nature to produce fertilizer and evaporate liquids. The units are produced by small firms throughout the world and are generally used in natural and rural areas. Local environmental groups may be interested in building and maintaining innovative composting toilets along Portland's extensive network of hiking, cycling and paddling routes.

Composting toilets, however, are now appearing in urban areas, including in large building complexes. An example is the C.K. Choi Building at The University of British Columbia in Vancouver. This 30,000 sq. ft. office complex uses composting toilets and urinals for human waste disposal. The new building, which houses the Institute of Asian Research, is not connected to the city's sewer system. As well, a subsurface greywater recycling system with phragmite (tall grasses) plant varieties, cleanses the greywater which is then used for on-site irrigation.²⁷

Facilities in Old Town's Social Service Organizations

In addition to the public toilets, are a number of facilities operated by Old Town Chinatown's non-profit organizations that provide a variety of vital services to Portland's poor citizens.

Transition Projects, Inc has restrooms that are open from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm but closed for an hour at noon. People are buzzed in one at a time. TPI also manages public shower facilities. Blanchet House has an unlocked restroom monitored by a single person. Officially, it is always open but clients say it depends on who is working the floor that day. Rose Haven's center is open to women and children only from 9 am to 12 noon. The public restrooms are monitored and located in the back of the community room. To use them women have to go through an intake procedure. Old Town Clinic used to make its facilities available. When the Clinic merged with the Portland Alternative Health Center, the central Old Town area lost a restroom location as Portland Alternative Health Center relocated to the North Park Blocks at 8NW 8th.

The restrooms at St. Vincent de Paul Downtown Chapel are open 9:30 am to 2:30 pm. Salvation Army Harbor Light restrooms are linked to meal service. In late 2005 meal service ceased for want of funding and there were no public toilets. Guests of members of Outreach in Burnside can use restrooms if escorted by an Outreach member, all of whom are housed elsewhere. The Tacoma Café restroom is available from 6 am to 9 am for breakfast and sometimes is open later. Sisters of the Road Café customers request keys for the two bathrooms from one of the workers on floor. Street Roots news office provides access during business hours.



²⁵ Newsletter of the Broadway Project Trust and other reviews. <http://www.broadwayprojects.com/essay.html>

²⁶ Sylwester, Eva, "Waterless Urinal takes a trial run in restroom." News Reporter, April 13, 2005.

²⁷ <http://www.cityfarmer.org/comptolet64.html>

There are best practices in toilet management to be observed, recorded and replicated from all of these experiences. However, two neighborhood organizations offer broader public access. At Portland Rescue Mission restrooms are available to the public 24 hours a day, seven days a week. People ring and are buzzed in. At Union Gospel Mission the restrooms are unlocked. The main mission is open from 9:30 am to 5 pm and 7 pm to 9 pm. They have an after-hours knock system that is part of their culture and works.

Map 4:
Old Town / Chinatown Neighborhood Association
Social Service Agencies in Old Town Chinatown

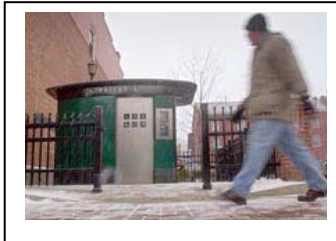


Management Alternatives for Public Restrooms

Management of Automatic Public Toilets in Major US Cities

Management by multi national advertising firms Management of APTs by a multi-national advertising firm is a preferred option in the largest markets. Boston's eight APTs are supported by advertising and require a \$0.25 per-use fee. The Mayor claims that they will generate \$20 million over the next 20 years. The city holds a contract with the US subsidiary of the German firm Wall AG.

The New York City Department of Transportation is currently in contract negotiations with Spain's Cemusa for a large order of street furniture. According to a NYCDOT news release, Cemusa will provide at no charge to the City the following: 20 APTs, approximately 3,300 new bus stop shelters, 330 new newsstands and up to 20 APTs. Cemusa expects to create over 100 new jobs in New York City and has committed to using local vendors for the fabrication and installation of the project. The contract is thought to be worth \$1 billion over the next 20 years. The city will recoup about 40 percent of this total.²⁸



Pittsburgh has installed the first of two \$250,000 public toilets, which was installed in a parking lot near entertainment venues. At the insistence of historic preservationists, the restroom was landscaped with a wrought iron fence. Users pay \$0.25 per use. Pittsburgh's APT is open 11 am to 2 pm and has a 20-minute limit. When the second toilet is operational, the two are projected to generate \$100,000 in income by the end of the city's 10-year contract with Clear Channel Adshel.

San Francisco's 25 toilets were produced and are managed by J C Decaux Co of France and are supported by advertising as well as a fee-pay system. San Antonio's 15 APTs were installed and are managed by Clear Channel Adshel, which is headquartered there.

San Diego has two APTs which are maintained at an average annual cost of \$151,261 each. The San Diego City Council has been required to take action on public restrooms by the county grand jury, a Superior Court appointed independent panel of volunteers. They have recommended exemption from the city's ban on advertising in order to support maintenance costs of APTs.²⁹

Public sector administration Seattle may be unique among US cities in installing automatic public toilets that are free to the public and free of advertising. This is because Washington State law forbids charging for public toilets and local codes restrict advertising. The five German-made APTs are leased. They are located at Pioneer Square, near Pike Place Market, in the International District, at Pier 58 and in the 1800 block of Broadway on Capitol Hill. The city is raising the \$600,000 required for annual maintenance from sewer revenues. Seattle Public Utilities staff program the automatic features of each toilet. APTs at some locations provide verbal greetings, and instructions are in English and Spanish. Those in the International District include announcements in Chinese as well. Time limits can also be adjusted, with recorded voices signalling that the door is about to open.³⁰ Seattle's APTs are reported to get an average of 600 visits a day, which is many times the traffic of European toilets.³¹

Atlanta is the first US city to adopt APTs for its transit system. Twelve self-cleaning units have been purchased from the German firm Herring Bau at a cost of \$1.1 million. The system, MARTA, has completed recent expansion and is able to make the purchase from its capital fund. The state places a budgetary cap of 55% to be spent on transit operations, with the remainder going for capital improvements.

Five regular and one handicapped APT are being installed at each end of the platform at MARTA's Five Points transit station in early 2006. They are free but available only once passengers have paid fares. Regular stalls are 32 x 60 inches and 70 inches high. MARTA's two-year trial run of an APT from another

²⁸ Zaitchik, Alexander. "Sidewalk Sale" *New York Press*, March 9-15, 2005

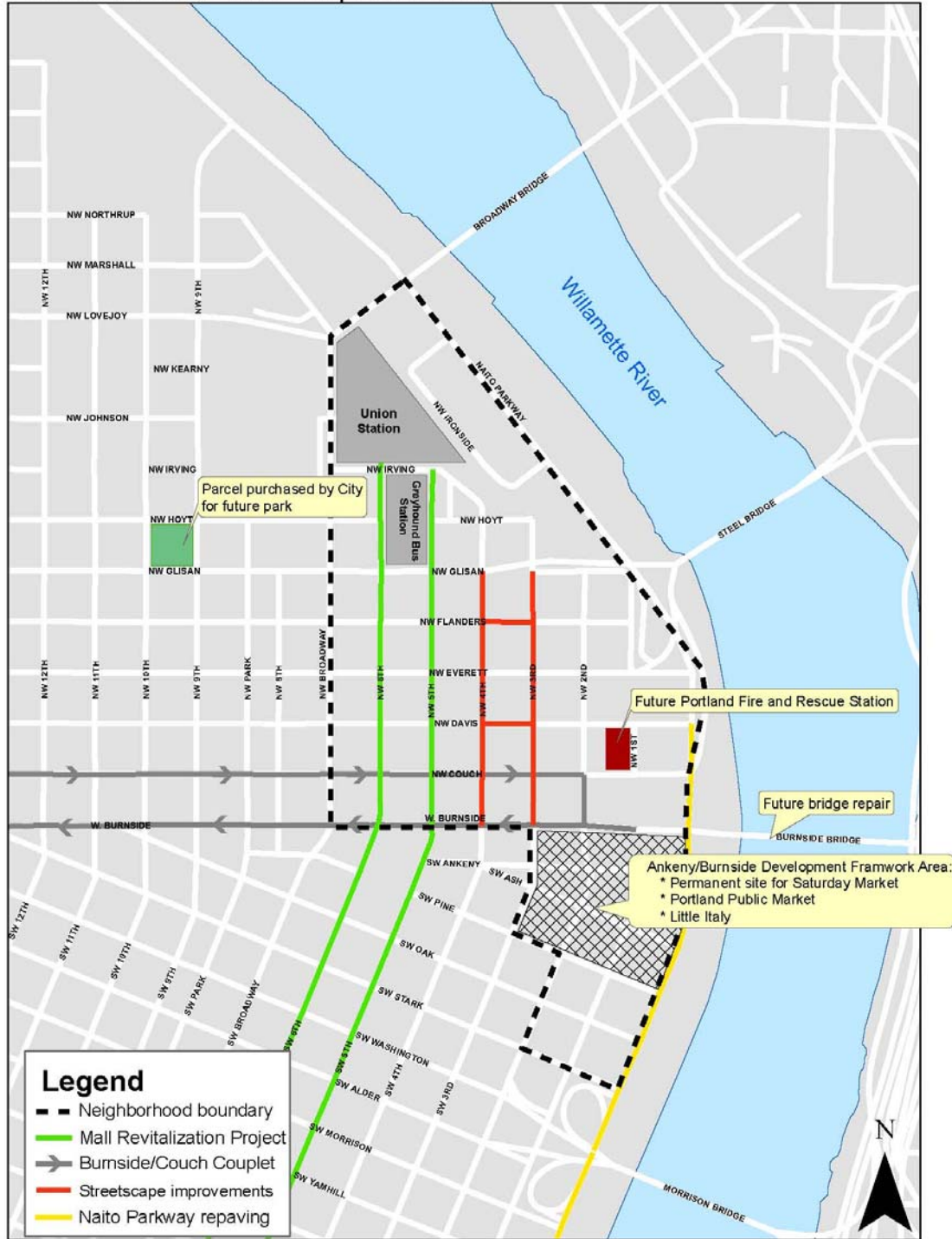
²⁹ "Grand Jury Looks into Toilets and doesn't like what it sees." *The Union Tribune*, June 7, 2005

³⁰ Mulady, Kathy. "At last relief is in sight as plush public potties open downtown." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* March 2, 2004

³¹ Mulady, Kathy. "Seattle's shiny space-age potties are highly popular, report says." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* December 15, 2004

manufacturer served 400 people a day. Washington DC's Metro transit system is still experimenting with APTs but has made no decision about purchase.³²

Map 2:
Old Town Chinatown Neighborhood Association
Planned and Future Improvements



Construction and Upgrade of Traditional Public Restrooms

PHLUSH has communicated with the British firm InterPublic Urban Systems UK, Ltd, which works with local governments to construct or renovate traditional freestanding brick public toilets. InterUrban bases all designs on the following best practices:

- Direct Access: “the toilet ONLY has doors on the elevation of the building that faces out onto the street or area of activity.”
- Each door accesses a single cubicle containing a minimum of a toilet, toilet paper dispenser, hand wash and sanitary waste chute.
- Family cubicles are 6’6” square and have a baby change table and a jump seat where an active toddler can be strapped in.
- Slightly larger cubicles for disabled people have special fittings and include a baby change table and jump seat.
- Men’s toilets are one large cubicle with three or four urinals and two or three hand washes. Under urinals is a flushing system in stainless steel grating. Large extract fans control odors.
- Toilets are brightly lit and use bold color.
- Users control locking the door and cannot get locked in.
- Housing for toilet paper and refuse bins are steel so that any fires are controlled.
- Vandal resistant lights and fans are mounted in ceiling. Both have motion-activated sensors.
- All stainless fixtures with wall hung toilet bowls.
- A wash down channel at the back of each cubicle facilitates draining following cleaning.
- Behind cubicles is a service corridor where vulnerable equipment is hidden. From here, soap and toilet paper can be replenished and the trash bin emptied.
- Toilets lock and unlock automatically at the beginning and end of the day.

The new construction of a four-cubicle with two unisex stalls, one handicap and one urinal is about \$250,000. InterPublic Urban Systems Ltd has won numerous awards for its public restrooms, including awards for Best Unattended Semi Automatic Public Toilet, and the Loo of the Year recognition awarded by the British Toilet Association.³³



A restroom in La Jolla, California approaches traditional bricks and mortar in an original way. The design by Mary Coakley incorporates local architectural features with an innovative layout. The freestanding building consists of a series of single stalls with a men’s washroom with urinals at one end and a women’s washroom on the other. The doors of the unisex stalls in the middle open directly on an area near pedestrian activity. The stalls are so narrow that they accommodate only one person. Wheelchair accessible stalls are provided separately. The \$593,000 restroom was opened in June 2005 following years of advocacy by citizens of this beach town.³⁴

³³ Letter from Alistair Humphreys of January 4, 2006. The firm is located at Horsehay House Suite 16, Horsehay, Telford, Shrops, TF4 3PY. Tel: 01952 502012 Fax: 01952 502022 sales@interpublicurbansystems.co.uk

³⁴ The team of graduate students from Portland State University who have provided technical assistance to PHLUSH are working with Mary Coakley to understand this innovative design with a view to adapting it for Portland.

Commercial Management

For port-a-potties and other types of PSUs, commercial management appears to be the only viable approach. Weekly maintenance requires specialized equipment and skills to 1) evacuate the holding tank; 2) remove debris; 3) scrub and sanitize all surfaces including the walls, urinal, toilet seat, and floor; 4) add fresh water and deodorant solution to tank; 5) replace urinal cake (as needed); 6) replenish supplies; 7) complete or schedule needed repairs; and 8) sign and date service log sticker in each unit.

Community Employment Opportunities

Sanitation provides opportunities for small business development. Likewise, full-time maintenance and cleaning jobs can provide individuals living wage employment with a minimum of entry barriers. Cleaning services make good community work programs for people who are rebuilding their lives after setbacks. Workers develop employable skills while the costs of supervision are manageable.

Management by Volunteers

When community members recognize that access to restrooms is a widely shared value, they may take "ownership" for public restroom. PHLUSH believes a storefront rest stop can be run by volunteers, or by volunteers supervised and supported by a paid staff member. The Portland non-profit Our Peaceful Place established a hospitality center with restrooms with clients who felt that the need for a public toilet was so important that they offered to serve as volunteer caretakers. Our Peaceful Place is currently partnering with other non-profits to open a more comprehensive center in a NE Portland neighborhood.

In Singapore, volunteer members of the non-profit Singapore Restroom Association conduct toilet audits for a variety of advocacy and outreach tasks.

Privatization and Innovative Public-Private Initiatives

In the current economic environment, cities and counties are struggling to maintain existing services. Additional public toilets are likely to be a hard sell even in communities where residents and public officials see the need for them.

For this reason, there is a need to foster partnerships among those with a stake in public restrooms from the private, public and non-profit sectors. Increased access to public restrooms in downtown Portland will require the creative cooperation of groups like the Portland Business Alliance, business and job creation specialists and social entrepreneurs. As TriMet and the Portland Development Commission must be engaged in the discussion, public advocacy plays a key role. PHLUSH has suggested to the City Club of Portland that they take up the issue of public restrooms and is repeating its request for the next program cycle.

PHLUSH has looked for practical synergies and actionable proposals. For example, the previous map shows that the neighborhood will be home to at least five major construction projects in the coming years. All of these construction projects will set up porta-potties for their workers to use. Why not divert this expenditure to temporary public restrooms for use by visitors, office workers and residents as well? PHLUSH urges public policy makers to explore this possibility and requests contracting agencies to look into details with the community.

While PHLUSH is not in a position to outline mechanisms for the privatization of public property, we are interested in solutions for the historic restrooms on Burnside opposite the North Park Blocks. Despite their architectural charm and superb location, they have been neglected. Now they are only a negative attractor and represent years of lost tax revenue.

PHLUSH urges the city to explore privatization options that specify that the site will have public restrooms to serve the other four, larger North Park Blocks. The block could be sold or leased and existing buildings could house a private business that provides public toilets

Nationwide, almost all projects to preserve historic comfort stations involves those in scenic areas.

There are lessons in restoration of history Vista House, this historic mixed used public comfort station in the Columbia George. There is little documentation of urban public comfort stations.

It is interesting to note that the first community service project of Rotary International was a comfort station built near Chicago City Hall in 1907. The American Restroom Association has contacted Rotary to commend them on their foresight regarding public amenities and to mobilize their support in advocacy efforts. PHLUSH feels that Portland's North Park Blocks location would be an ideal candidate for restoration, particularly if Rotary could be interested in such a project.

Case Study: Warsaw, Poland privatizes Public Toilets.

In Warsaw, existing public restrooms were transformed into businesses. They were leased to business owners at nominal rents on the condition they renovate them and allow the public to use the toilets freely. By law, public toilet sign must remain above the door. Warsaw's public restrooms are now luncheonettes, bars, Chinese restaurants, a veterinary clinic. Of 42 public bathrooms, 28 have been leased and serve the public. The advantage is that public restrooms are maintained at no cost to the public or the city. One problem is that public restrooms are not as always recognized as such despite signage.³⁵

Some American towns are relying on businesses to provide restroom facilities. Walk-in restroom access is prevalent in European cafes as are public private partnerships which formalize such arrangements. The challenge is to ensure that restrooms are clearly designated as public and that people know about them.

In Geneva, Illinois the need for public restrooms was clear but how to provide them was not. So municipal authorities decided to pay a limited number of retailers who would open their restrooms to non customers. Common signage would indicate the location of these toilets throughout the business district.

Case Study: City pays retailers to open toilets to public use.

Residents of Geneva Illinois often ended up at city hall when they could not find a bathroom on Saturdays. The quest for a public bathroom can be difficult in Geneva's downtown. At times, desperation has led some to city hall on Saturdays in hopes someone will answer. "People will say 'I am sorry, I needed to use the restroom,'" Mayor Kevin Burns said. "And I have let them in." But the decades-old issue may see some relief. The city is working with businesses to label their private restrooms public and let the public know. There could be four of these restrooms spaced throughout downtown and noted on maps and kiosks in upcoming weeks. In February, Geneva's city council agreed to pay ... for use of its bathrooms. ...

"It is going to be great to be able to direct people to a public restroom that's not at one end of town or another." The city pays for costs such as supplies and maintenance in exchange for the public designation. "It's the quintessential partnership," Burns said.³⁶

In the end, the businesses that stepped forward to accept the city's offer saw an immediate boost in business. Early assessment of the program shows that retailers are competing for these contracts from the city to provide public restrooms, with the competition driving down the city's costs!

³⁵ Sources: Finn, Peter. "In Warsaw's Public Restrooms, Capitalism Is the Bottom Line." *The Washington Post*. Washington: Dec. 5, 1999. Pasek, Beata. Associated Press. "Good Business is Found in Old Toilets." *freep: Detroit Free Press*. Aug. 19, 1999. <http://www.freep.com/news/nw/qbars19.htm>

³⁶ Sciarra, Rhonda. "At last, downtown Geneva visitors will have place to go" *Daily Herald*, August 07, 2003

Part III: Options for Public Toilets in Old Town Chinatown

Six Actionable Options



PHLUSH has identified six actionable options for increasing access to public restrooms in downtown Portland. For each option we have created a summary sheet. These six sheets follow on pages 29-34.

For each option, we have a “Vision” of what each would look like. Visualization is empowering: it is very difficult to work for something you cannot picture. Following the Vision, we describe “Physical Facilities” and discuss “Management”. Each option sheet ends with a section “How to make it happen.”

We hope that others will come together around one of more of the six PHLUSH options and improve and act on them as they see fit.

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Option 1 | Upgrading Public Toilets and Keeping them Open |
| Option 2 | Portable Sanitation Units on Parking Lots |
| Option 3 | A Storefront Rest Stop |
| Option 4 | Automatic Public Toilets |
| Option 5 | Private Initiative to Revitalize an Historic Comfort Station |
| Option 6 | An Artist-Designed Restroom |



PHLUSHers at work. Clockwise: Christopher, Nikki, Carol, Sarah, Barb, Lan, Tom and Kevin. Photo by Jon.

PHLUSH Option #1

Upgrading Existing Public Toilets and Keeping them Open

Vision: The City of Portland provides clean, safe, welcoming restrooms for tourists and residents, including homeless citizens. Increased use of restrooms has a beneficial effect on level and quality of activities around them and on general standards of cleanliness. Toilets are indicated in tourist information guides and on maps for joggers and cyclists. Per user costs decrease in the successful delivery of a universally accessed public good.

Physical Premises: Upgrade the comfort and safety of all current downtown public restroom by making the following modifications where they are needed.

- Indicate where restrooms are and how to get to them with appropriate signage.
- Light up entrances well at night and ensure they are somewhat open to view in the day.
- Use door locks that indicate “Occupied” or “Vacant”.
- For safety and easy cleaning, put gaps under the door or use short doors or no doors where feasible.
- Use stainless steel or other equipment purpose built for public toilets; i.e. hanging not pedestal bowls. Ensure there are metal mirrors, working hand dryers, and a functioning soap dispenser.
- Don’t use paper towels but do provide refuse bins for disposal of diapers or sanitary napkins. If refuse bins can’t be placed in the wall, put them outdoors near entrance. Inside hang plastic bag dispensers similar to those used by dog walkers.
- Provide a sharps disposal box of the type commonly seen at highway and airport rest stops.
- Increase foot traffic near restrooms. Offer permits to pushcart micro businesses that station near public restrooms. Continue to place parking meters near entrances.
- Ensure there is natural light during the day with skylights or glass bricks. Install supplementary and night lighting that is motion activated.
- Install tap or hydrant for attachment of pressure washing hose.
- Increase hours. Provide 24 hour access at Davis Parking Garage on an experimental basis.

Management and Maintenance:

- Consider employing attendants at some locations. Design attendants’ program built on “the Portland way” of respect, polite friendliness, and hospitality. Mobilize corporate sponsorship of training from the hospitality industry. Market new Portland-specific product as part of overall public space livability package.
- Reopen toilets with a mild campaign for civic awareness of issues of cleanliness and hospitality. Put motivational signage similar to that used in airplane toilets.
- Take a lead from highway anti-littering laws and use enforcement to keep restrooms clean. Divert enforcement resources currently spent on “civility laws” to this.
- Consider enhancing safety with camera surveillance of the area around restrooms and emergency buttons in stalls.

How to make it happen:

- Under top city leadership, reassess the physical premises and upkeep options for each of the city’s public restrooms in light of PHLUSH research.
- Public restrooms are a public good which adds value to surrounding business. Following basic physical modifications, continue to manage and maintain in ways that cap current costs. Review Clean and Safe maintenance practice with a view to improving efficiency and effectiveness.
- Research the possibility of citizen involvement in monitoring and maintenance. Look to lessons in the cities of Asia and in American clean up campaigns. Consider this: When the Adopt a Highway idea took root in Texas in the early 1980s, did anyone predict that citizens would so embrace the program that within 15 years the nation’s highways would essentially be freed of litter? Support the creation of activist “Portland hospitality” groups.

PHLUSH Option #2

Portable Sanitation Units on Parking Lots

Vision: Many pedestrians and cyclists are familiar with and comfortable using the “porta-potties”. Visitors, pedestrians, transit passengers, bicycle commuters, and the men and women who work on construction projects all use these facilities. PHLUSH envisions a single-stall green “Honey Bucket” attractively landscaped with a bench nearby. At another location, we envision a double unit that might be enclosed in a steel cage, like the one on the East Bank Esplanade near the Steel Bridge. Vines climb to the roof from narrow planters placed just within the cage. On the cage door, which is locked open during the day, are a community bulletin board and racks containing brochures, maps and information for visitors. When the unit is closed, the bulletin board and racks are locked inside the cage.

Since not all residents and visitors find porta-potties adequate, we also envision greater use of portable sanitation units attached to the sewer system.

Physical Facilities: Portable sanitation units are rented from vendors. Plastic single-stall units are a low cost option. More elaborate and costly are units that connect to sewer lines. They are enclosed in trailers and look no different from public toilets in buildings. An example of these is at Portland Saturday Market. They have men’s and women’s sections with multiple stalls, adjoining washing areas and porcelain fixtures.

Management: Management of porta-potties is done by the suppliers themselves. Frequency of maintenance depends on intensity of use. Larger, trailer mounted units invite other management options but are more vulnerable to vandalism and abuse than porta-potties. As the experience with Saturday Market restrooms shows, these units need to be supervised or have attendants.

How to make it happen:

- Identify parking lots and non-built land at key locations. Rent space. See Map 3 for a list of parking lots and open space.
 - a. Half block along NW 6th Between NW Couch and NW Davis (purchased by city?)
 - b. Whole block bounded by NW 4th Couch, 5th and Davis (Goldsmith)
 - c. Quarter block on NW 4th north of NW Everett (Fish block)
 - d. Quarter block on NW 4th south of NW Everett (Magic Garden)
 - e. Lot along NW Flanders between NW 3rd and NW 4th Ave (NW Natural)
 - f. Lot along NW Flanders between NW 2nd and NW 3rd Ave (Dirty Duck/PDC/NW Natural)
 - g. U and R blocks between NW 5th and 6th near Union Station and Greyhound
 - h. Quarter block on east side of NW Glisan and 5th (Former 3 Point Oil)
 - i. Quarter block on west side of NW Glisan and 5th (near Harvey’s)
 - j. Half block along NW Davis between 1st and 2nd Ave
 - k. Half block along NW Davis between 1st and 2nd Ave
 - l. Half block along SW 1st between Ash and Pine
 - m. Half block along SW 2nd between Pine and Oak
 - n. Quarter block at SW Naito and SW Pine
- Advocate for city to adopt a placement benchmark similar to that of Beijing: throughout business districts there is always a public toilet within an 8 minute walking distance.
- As a cost recovery mechanism, require construction contractors to use and support the costs of public toilets rather than putting up units for their exclusive use. Construction will be a feature of Old Town Chinatown some time: the 3rd and 4th Ave. Streetscape Improvements, Ankeny/Burnside Development Framework Project, Portland Transit Mall Revitalization Project, Saturday Market Permanent Home Study, Portland Public Market Study, Burnside and Couch Transportation and Urban Design Project, Naito Parkway Redevelopment and Fire Station #1 Relocation.
- Consider combining portable units with European-style portable outdoor urinals.
- Have local community monitor not only the servicing but the toilets themselves between servicing.
- Explore the possibility of extending hours of the Saturday Market restrooms. Have representatives of groups that serve business visitors, tourists, club goers and the poor conduct a feasibility study.

Identify synergies and shared goals among groups and form partnerships if appropriate. Engage attendants through a workforce program or redesign smaller premises that do not require attendants.

PHLUSH Option # 3

Storefront Rest Stop

Vision: The Storefront Rest Stop is the guest bathroom of the Old Town Chinatown Neighborhood.

Physical Premises:

- Attractive, well maintained space with a community bulletin board and a table with maps, brochures, menus and information on local services, businesses, arts, architecture and history.
- Unisex toilet stalls.
- Sinks have easy to manage cost effective soap and lotion dispensers
- Air blowers for hand drying
- Handicap accessible stall is family friendly. There is a changing table and child seat with restraints, so that the caregiver can take care of business hands free.
- A drinking fountain
- A cabinet from which guests can buy bathroom cabinet essentials – pads, tampons, diapers, baby wipes, safety pins, Kleenex, aspirin, condoms, toothbrush/paste, combs, and the like.
- Small office for attendants.
- Supply/storage closet.
- The premises are well lit all hours.
- Signage throughout the neighborhood. Adopting the “restroom challenged” (cross-legged/need to pee) icon can indicate location of rest stop while educating the public with a touch of humor.

Management and Maintenance:

- Daily operations are managed by attendants on duty. Attendants are friendly, know the neighborhood and are recognizable by their uniforms.
- The storefront rest stop is proposed and managed as a community project of the neighborhood association, the business promotion group, a social service agency, a consortium of human services organizations or a combination of the above.
- Hiring and training of personnel is done in collaboration with an employment development program of a social service agency.
- The facility is supported by grants, support from the Old Town Chinatown business community.
- Some costs are recovered through “bathroom cabinet sales” and voluntary user donations collected in a locked box.
- If required, the doorway and common area can be monitored by a security camera.
- Research on neighborhood pedestrian traffic, business opening hours and available resources determine how many hours the rest stop is open. PHLUSH has identified Sunday mornings as a key time of need. Ideally the rest stop would be open and provide eyes on the street 24/7.

How to make it happen:

- Sell idea to community groups. Create effective partnerships by demonstrating that public restrooms benefit everyone.
- Encourage an agency or organization to step forward to take ownership of the project in the name of employment creation and job training. Support this player with business planning, grantwriting, everyday encouragement, public relations, monitoring and evaluation.
- Brief law enforcement officials on plans; get assessment of safety of premises prior to rental.
- Explore funding sources through foundation grants, corporate grants, and city grants to business districts.
- Review and build upon the lessons of Seattle’s Urban Rest Stop, 1924 Ninth Ave (at Stewart) 206.332.0110

PHLUSH Option #4

Automatic Public Toilets

Vision: Portland offers the state of the art facilities found in other major West Coast cities.

Physical Facilities:

- Attractive, modern “street furniture” can be designed to enhance the cityscape.
- Self-cleaning unisex units are ADA compliant
- Include sink for washing
- Units wash after each use. In one model, washing units may move out from the wall over the sink and toilet seat, dry with hot air and then retract, High pressure jets wash floors and walls. In another model the cleaning process happens in just 50 seconds: The toilet bowl swivels and a cap comes down to blast the bowl with disinfectant. The floor folds up and is jet sprayed. The seat is dried with a big blower. The floor then folds back down and the bowl swivels back, ready for the next person.
- One supplier offers special two-stall model that converts to one stall for handicapped users.
- Units are vandal resistant



Management and Maintenance:

- Installation and daily maintenance provided by contracted company or supplier.
- In larger markets that permit street advertising – such as New York, Boston, and San Francisco – costs of maintenance and maintenance are borne by the multi-national ad firms who supply the APTs and accompanying street furniture.
- In Seattle, which restricts advertising and forbids payment for public toilets use, capital and operational costs are covered through city-wide collection of water and sewage fees.
- Smaller cities employ a combination of management and cost recovery options.
- Units should be placed in well-lit, highly visible foot traffic areas such as parking lots, park boundaries or on the bus mall next to bus shelters.
- Use may be free or require a coin for operation but can also function on tokens that may be obtained through social service agencies or tourist-friendly informational booths.
- With APTs getting up to 600 uses a day, there is significant revenue from users fees.

How to make it happen:

- Study the variety of physical models, management best practices, and cost recovery options in other urban areas.
- Work with suppliers such as to explore options for placement of APTs under a leasing arrangement with cost recovery through advertising.
- Conduct a comparative study of the experience of Seattle (publicly supported, no advertising), San Francisco (ad supported) and smaller markets such as Pittsburg and San Diego.
- The City would identify sites for 5 to 10 APTs city wide in cooperation with Trimet, Metro and Portland Parks and Recreation with the participation of the Portland Development Commission, the Portland Business Alliance, POVA, restaurant and bar associations and others.
- Consider APTs for the new South Waterfront.
- Lease one or more APT to conduct a trial at various locations and get customer feedback.

PHLUSH Option #5

Private Initiative to Revitalize an Historic Comfort Station

Vision: The century old public comfort station on Burnside at the south end of the North Park Blocks has been restored to house a retail business that also maintains the public toilets. An entire small block that was formerly the province of drug users and generated no tax revenues now attracts a variety of people and passers by who use the public restrooms or patronize the business. Park users and dog walkers gather on the piazza in front of the working fountain, Drivers pull up into the 30 minute parking spaces on the sides of the block for business pick up or drop off. The block now bridges the cultures

Physical Facilites: The total block measures approximately 7,988 square feet and is surrounded by parking on three sides. The former ladies' and gents' buildings are each about 500 square feet. The only interior space that PHLUSH has seen is the stall behind the graceful east entrance which houses a single stainless steel, wall hung toilet but is usually locked. Between the two buildings, several steps up from the Burnside sidewalk, is a raised lawn of about 1000 sq feet bound by an attractive fountain and balustrade. While the structures are moss covered and run down, especially the west building, the decorative plaster work of the balustrade and front and rear fountains is in fair condition and should be of historic interest.



Management and Maintenance:

- Study the feasibility of sale or rental of the entire small park block to a private entity on condition that restrooms are owned, operated and maintained for the public.
- Look at cases of successful public toilet privatization in Warsaw, Poland and Hamburg, Germany.
- Identify an appropriate tenant such as a pet care business, barber shop, painting or pottery studio, a dry cleaner, a chiropractors' office, or a bikram yoga practice.
- Consider making the space available to a social investment business that provides work to the homeless. An example is Outside In's Virginia Woof Dog Daycare Center several blocks to the west: will they need an annex as their business grows?
- Consider renovating for a food and drink business with outdoor seating to focus eyes on the park.
- Note that location and street parking on three sides makes site ideal for car as well as foot access.
- Use street-facing building entrances for restrooms. Equip the women's with a wash basin, hand dryer, and regular and handicap accessible stalls; the men's with basin, hand dryer, urinal and one accessible stall; both with baby changing stations and built in refuse bins.
- Put signs throughout the park and the surrounding streets to indicate the location of toilets and the fact that the restrooms are open to the public.

How to make it happen:

- Document the origins and history of the North Park Blocks comfort station.
- Forge creative public-private partnerships. The business community, social services, parks, historic preservationists, and an array of civic organizations all have a role to play.
- Talk to Rotary International. Their first community service project was a comfort station built near Chicago City Hall in 1907. Imagine the headline: "Rotary International celebrates centennial of first community service project with restoration of historic public comfort station in Portland, Oregon."
- Contact York, Pennsylvania Mayor John Brenner who would like preserve a historic downtown comfort station used by visitors from the countryside at the turn of the century.
- Seek lessons learned in the restoration of Vista House. Nationwide, most historical preservation of comfort stations involves those in scenic areas.
- Mobilize public support for the project in Downtown and the Pearl District and sharpen the concept in response to feedback. Demonstrate how private initiative, historic preservation, and business creation can support the costs of public restrooms, which meet a universal need and lie at the heart of

walkable, joggable, bicycle friendly communities.

PHLUSH Option #6:

An Artist-Designed Toilet

Vision: Streets filled with bicycles and pedestrians, innovative community-based arts projects, and quality public art distinguish Portland. An interesting one of a kind toilet would fit the environment of Old Town and attract visitors in search of the unexpected.

Physical Facilities: Commercially available, industrial quality urinals and wall hung toilets can be integrated into unique buildings with vibrant artistic interiors that are at once artful, functional, vibrant, and practical. Like Monica Bonvinici's glass cube, public restrooms may stand alone as sculptural elements in the streetscape. Or like Frederick Hunderwasser's Kawakawa Toilets, restrooms may be integrated among other buildings.



Left: Kawakawa Public Toilets, Northland, New Zealand by German artist Frederick Hunderwasser, 1982. The artist collaborated with students at a local art school who incorporated recycled materials into the restroom's distinctive tiled interior.

Right: Mirror cube entitled "Don't Miss a Sec" by Italian artist Monica Bonvinici, London, 2005. Installed opposite the Tate Gallery on a sidewalk near a construction site, the one ways mirrors of the working toilet allow users to see out but not to be seen.

Management: A high degree of community ownership is a pre-requisite for artist-designed toilets. A range of management alternatives is available. Administration by an arts group combined with community-based non-profit management are likely to be viable options here.

How to make it happen:

- PHLUSH has contacted City Repair. They are interested in carrying out a project in Old Town. They work with communities to create comfortable and convivial public spaces with one-of-a kind street furniture. While they have never done a public toilet, they are interested in doing one.
- Obtain a small grant to sponsor a design competition for a public restroom at specific site or sites in Old Town. Mobilize public interest through an exhibit of entries and selection of the best options.
- The Regional Arts and Culture Council or other groups with expertise in design competitions could manage this. Alternately, an organization specializing in green building techniques or use of recycled materials could sponsor the competition.

Part IV: Next Steps

Promote public discussion of public restrooms

Public restrooms are not high on the civic agenda in the United States. There is little academic research and few specialists in the urban planning, architecture and design communities. Our goal is to launch the discussion in Portland, a city recognized nationally for ground-breaking approaches to urban amenities and liveability.

Formulate citywide public restroom policy

We call on policy makers to formulate a city-wide public restroom policy. A talented group from Portland State University's School of Urban Studies and Planning stands ready to assist city officials in this respect. Jon Swae has worked with PHLUSH for most of our existence and made invaluable contributions. He has since been joined by Kartik Srinivas, Sarah Selden and others: they have built on PHLUSH efforts and brought energy and professionalism to the issue of public toilets in Portland. Now they are designing an academic project to meet the requirements of their graduate degrees. We all have a singular opportunity to learn a great deal from them. Public policy makers should take note.

Encourage working groups to research options

We call on city officials, community leaders and grass roots activists to set up short term working groups to consider various aspects of the complex issue of public toilets or to refine the options PHLUSH has proposed.

Explore private and public funding sources

While public restrooms are as much the responsibility of tax-supported local government agencies as sidewalks, street lighting or drinking fountains, a range of stakeholders needs to be involved. Innovative partnerships among players in the private, public and non-profit sectors are the route to increasing public toilet access. We need to work together to explore funding sources for feasibility studies, pilot projects and a sustainable, long term commitment to public restrooms.