

# Design Principles for Public Restrooms

June 2008

## PHLUSH (Public Hygiene Lets Us Stay Human)

c/o Old Town Chinatown Neighborhood Association  
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<http://otctneighborhoodassociation.nexo.com/phlush>



**Background** In early 2005, the OTCT Neighborhood Association invited newly-elected Portland Mayor Tom Potter to visit the neighborhood. As a result of the ensuing dialogue with Mayor Potter, the neighborhood took on the challenges of engaging the issue of public toilets as a part of a collaborative process with the city. The PHLUSH initiative was launched May 2005 by a team made up of Old Town residents, business owners and staff of human services organizations.

PHLUSH issued *Public Toilets for Old Town Chinatown: A Report to the Public* to the Neighborhood Association and to Visions in February 2006. Following on the adoption of the PHLUSH report, a group of PSU graduate students in Urban and Regional Planning formed Relief Works. After partnering with the Office of the Mayor, Relief Works recommended formal policy and practice in their national award-winning June 2006 report *Going Public! Strategies for Meeting Public Restroom Need in Portland's Central City*.

Since then, community members have worked with city officials, Mayor Potter and Commissioner Randy Leonard to implement key recommendations of this plan. PHLUSH participates on the Restroom Implementation Team, the SAFE Oversight Committee, and the Ankeny Burnside Technical Advisory Committee, among other groups. We also brought San Diego restroom designer Mary Coakley to Portland in September 2007 to meet officials and comment on various proposals.

Shortcomings in some current restroom proposals now underline the need for overall design principles for restrooms serving diverse members of the public. These draft design principles grow from recommendations made in previously accepted documents. PHLUSH calls upon Visions to recommend development and adoption of basic public restroom design principles for Portland's Central City and to work through the Joint Land Use Committee and the Old Town Chinatown Neighborhood Association to bring design principles before City Council, the Portland Development Commission and concerned bureaus.

## Public Restroom Design Principles

**Working Goal** Cost effective public restrooms that provide maximum function in minimum space and are safe, accessible, available, attractive and easy to maintain. adapted from LJS2

### Cost Effectiveness

- The high cost of not having public toilets can balance the cost of providing good ones. GP18,OTCT5,CLG32

### Maximum Function in Minimum Space LJS1

- Save space with single door direct entry stalls rather than "gang toilets". OTCT24,RDC4,LJS2,11
- Increase capacity and solve gender parity issues by making stalls unisex. OTCT24,RDS3,LJS10
- Think public comfort station ie a place the public feels comfortable making short stops rather than an interior room for rest. OTCT19,32,LJS4,8

### Safety

- Site restrooms to benefit from natural surveillance by the community. OTCT32,GP30,GP66,RDC10,CLG27,CG173
- Apply Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) in location, layout, lighting, surface, materials, fixtures and hardware. GP91,GP-A34,RDC5,20-26,LJS6
- Protect users, especially children, from inappropriate contact with strangers in "gang toilets" by providing individual direct entry stalls. GP30,RDS,LJS9
- Design doors to ensure privacy with safety: full length with a 1.5 – 2" gap at the bottom and a lock that authorities can open from the outside in emergency. RDC12,13,LJS10
- Activate surrounding area with retail, information kiosks, food carts, street performers, bus stops, or parking pay stations. GP30,GP-A27

## Accessibility <sup>GP31</sup>

- Adhere to standards of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Choose unisex stalls to accommodate families and opposite sex caregivers. <sup>OTCT24,LJS11</sup>

## Availability <sup>GP91</sup>

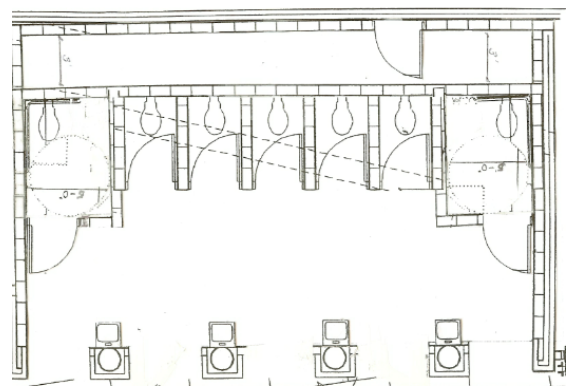
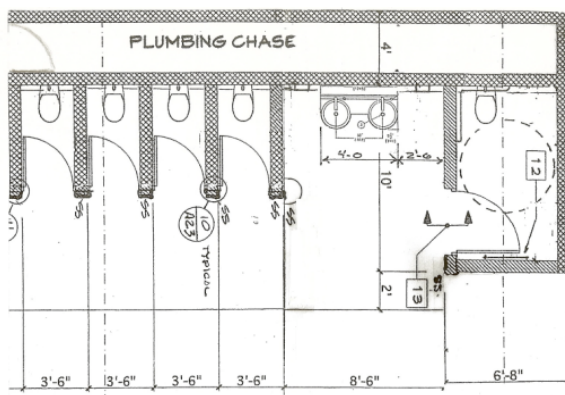
- Place sinks outside of stalls so users do not tie up toilets while handwashing. <sup>OTCT24,LJS10</sup>
- Make the flow of users more efficient by using unisex stalls. <sup>OTCT24,RDS8,LJS</sup>
- Plan for restrooms that can function year round and 24/7. <sup>GP-A27</sup>
- Use directional signage to restrooms, signs on facility listing hours, number to call for maintenance, etc. and print and web-based information to complement signs. <sup>GP91, OTCT8,OTCT28,RDC17,CG37</sup>

## Attractiveness <sup>LJS5,7</sup>

- Focus on restrooms as positive attractors, incorporating historical artifacts, artwork, and text in design. <sup>OTCT34,LD3</sup>
- Involve users in restroom design and aesthetics as well as function. <sup>OTCT34,GP90-91,LJS2</sup>
- Give the community opportunity to take pride in and responsibility for restrooms. <sup>OTCT34,GP90,GP84</sup>

## Ease of Maintenance <sup>GP95,GP73</sup>

- Use unisex stalls so individual toilets can be cleaned or repaired without closing facility. <sup>OTCT24,LJS</sup>
- Choose vandal-resistant hardware and make surfaces graffiti resistant. <sup>GP31,LJS5,6,11,RDC15,16,CG</sup>
- Lower risk of in-install vandalism by putting sink and trash bin outside in the open. <sup>LJS5</sup>
- Install tap for power washing and utility cupboard for supplies.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation plan for maintenance. (Amended 6/3/08)



Drawings by restroom design consultant Mary Coakley for PHLUSH. Note roofless open plans, direct access stalls & external wash basins.

## Key Local Documents and Related Design Resources

<sup>GP</sup> **Going Public: Strategies for Meeting Public Restroom Need in Portland's Central City.** Prepared for the Office of Mayor Tom Potter, Relief Works/PSU, June, 2006. 40pp. Download at [http://www.americanrestroom.org/us/portland/psu\\_gopubliccvr3.pdf](http://www.americanrestroom.org/us/portland/psu_gopubliccvr3.pdf)

<sup>OTCT</sup> **Public Toilets for Old Town Chinatown: A Report to the Community by PHLUSH,** February 7, 2006, 34pp. Download at <http://www.americanrestroom.org/phlush/phlushpp.pdf>

<sup>RDC</sup> **"Restroom Design Checklist"** PHLUSH, September 2007, Download at <http://otcneighborhoodassociation.nexo.com/phlush>

<sup>LJS</sup> **"La Jolla Shores Public Comfort Station"** – Nomination document for APWA award winning restroom by designer Mary Coakley, 2006 <http://www.americanrestroom.org/us/lajolla/index.htm>

<sup>CG</sup> **Inclusive Urban Design: Public Toilets** by Clara Greed, Architectural Press, 2003.

<sup>CLG</sup> **Improving Public Access to Better Quality Toilets: A Strategic Guide.** Communities and Local Government (UK), March 2008. Download free at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/publicaccesstoilets>

## Status of PHLUSH Design Principles for Public Restrooms:

Approved by the Old Town Chinatown Visions Committee, May 14,2008

Approved with amendment by the Old Town Chinatown Neighborhood Association, June 3, 2008