

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



## Portland, Oregon's Public Restroom Advocates



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## What's happened to America's public restrooms?

*In the early twentieth century, progressive cities in the United States built public facilities that were clean, comfortable, and conveniently located. As late as the 1950s most cities still boasted public restrooms staffed by attendants. By the end of the 20th century, however, tax-supported toilets became very hard to find. Rather than upgrade them and make them accessible to all, city officials often simply closed them and urban planners seemed to forget about them altogether.*

*Today we are making new commitments to sustainability, urban living, childhood fitness, active aging, and vibrant public spaces. Rest rooms are as central to this 21st century vision as sidewalks and street lights.*



## Benefits of Public Toilets

### Revitalized downtown neighborhoods.

If people know they can find a clean, safe toilet, they feel comfortable walking, shopping and enjoying themselves in downtown areas. Restrooms are as basic to the needs of pedestrians as sidewalks and street lamps. In a business, the restroom is often the place where first and lasting impressions are made; the same is true for a city.

### Fewer cars in the city.

Many people hesitate to use public transportation if they're unsure they can find a toilet along their route. Restroom availability is a part of travel and commuting. Without facilities that serve public transit systems, people will drive.

### Healthier, happier people.

Public restrooms further human dignity and social equity. Everyone should be able to enjoy beautiful public parks and open spaces with their family and friends; yet some people are denied the opportunity if there is no toilet. Involuntary urinary retention not only compromises bladder health but inflicts psychological stress. And no human being should have to face the criminalization of a natural function.

### Better overall public health.

Adequate, available restrooms address issues of concern to US public health officials. First, people can protect themselves and others from contagious diseases if handwashing facilities are nearby. Second, there are growing concerns about obesity, heart health, and fitness. Have researchers asked how many people are unable to walk or play in the park because restroom availability is not dependable?

### Safer, more comfortable public spaces.

Well-designed, conveniently located restrooms activate public space and contribute to natural surveillance that helps everyone feel safe. When restrooms have a steady flow of users, they become more comfortable and secure.

### Social inclusion of "restroom challenged" citizens.

"Restroom challenged" people include those who have to go frequently – every hour or so – and those whose need to go comes suddenly and urgently. They may have a variety of medical conditions, many of which are invisible, or normal conditions such as pregnancy, young age, and old age. We're all restroom challenged at some point in our lives.

# PHLUSH Public Restroom Design Principles

## Cost Effectiveness

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

## Maximum Function in Minimum Space

- Save space with single door direct entry stalls.
- Increase capacity and solve gender parity issues by making stalls unisex.
- Think public comfort station i.e. a place the public feels comfortable making shortstops rather than an interior room for rest.

## Safety

- Site restrooms to benefit from natural surveillance by the community.
- Apply the principles of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) in location, layout, lighting, surface, materials, fixtures and hardware.
- Protect users, especially children, from inappropriate contact with strangers in a multi-user space by providing individual direct entry stalls.



Located between a coffee shop and a residential building with a parking pay station in front, Portland's RiverPlace comfort station benefits from excellent natural surveillance by neighbors and passers by.

- 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 an emergency.
- Activate surrounding area with retail, information kiosks, food carts, street performers, bus stops, or parking pay stations.

## Accessibility

- Adhere to standards of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Choose unisex stalls to accommodate families and opposite sex caregivers.

## Availability

- Place sinks outside of stalls so users do not tie up toilets while handwashing.
- Make the flow of users more efficient by using unisex stalls.
- Plan for restrooms that can function year round and 24/7.
- Use directional signage to restrooms and signs on facility listing hours, number to call for maintenance.
- Complement signage with print and web-based information.



For a restroom to be available, people need to know where it is. In Portland, most have blue bicycle racks as well as wall signs.

*Our goal is cost-effective public restrooms that provide maximum function in minimum space and are safe, accessible, available, attractive and easy to keep clean.*

## Attractiveness

- Focus on restrooms as positive attractors, incorporating historical artifacts, artwork and text in design.
- Involve users in restroom design and aesthetics as well as function.
- Give the community opportunity to take pride in and responsibility for restrooms.



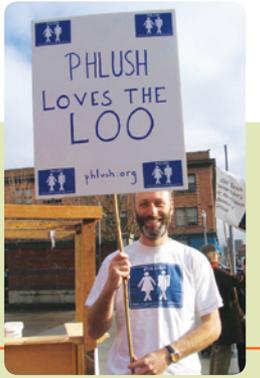
Placing the washbasins in public areas increases restroom efficiency and the likelihood that users will wash their hands.

## Ease of Maintenance

- Use unisex stalls so individual toilets can be cleaned or repaired without closing facility.
- Choose vandal-resistant hardware and make surfaces graffiti resistant.
- Lower risk of vandalism by putting sink and trash bin outside in the open.
- Install tap for power washing and utility cupboard for supplies.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation plan for maintenance.



The Portland Loo illustrates most design principles. Angled louvers at the bottom make it possible to see if the toilet user has fallen to the ground.



Charles Madean / www.spiritimagecatcherart.com

## Take Action!

### Start the conversation.

Toilet use is a basic need and a basic right. The provision of public facilities is a civic issue.

### Organize and advocate.

PHLUSH and partner organizations offer a wealth of online tips and tools for advocates. Without the strong support of tax-payers, local government officials may be reluctant to allocate resources for toilets. Find people who share these concerns and start working together.

### Check out these resources.

Online you'll find tools and links for use in your community.

**PHLUSH (Public Hygiene Lets Us Stay Human)** has information on taking action and on facility design for sustainability and social impact. [www.phlush.org](http://www.phlush.org)

**The American Restroom Association** provides information on design, code change, and need for federal regulations. [www.americanrestroom.org](http://www.americanrestroom.org)

**The World Toilet Organization** enables sanitation organizations and citizen advocates to learn from one another and leverage global support to bring toilets to the 2.6 million people without them. [www.worldtoilet.org](http://www.worldtoilet.org)

**Sit or Squat** lets you find or add detailed information on public toilets near you. [www.sitorsquat.com](http://www.sitorsquat.com)

**PHLUSH (Public Hygiene Lets Us Stay Human) believes that toilet availability is a basic human right and fundamental to urban livability.**

Based on our shared values of human dignity, we address the practical need of all people to have access to toilets when they're in public places. We work to increase public restroom availability in Portland, Oregon through well-focused citizen advocacy, sharing of best practices and collaboration with local officials, planners, architects, non-profit leaders, and business owners.