

## 4. Plan for Operational and Financial Sustainability

For a toilet facility to be successful, management and maintenance over the long term should be part of the plan before a project begins. Most people are surprised at how high these costs can be, particularly for ongoing maintenance and for upgrades of older larger or historic structures. However difficult it is to estimate future expenses, advocates need to anticipate budgetary constraints and opportunities.

While a formal cost-benefit assessment may be impractical, you certainly can pair the costs of toilet construction and operations with the costs of not having them. This enables you to show the larger context and develop messages that resonate with individual elected and appointed officials and their constituents.

- What does it cost to keep a downtown clean? How much cleaning is required for human waste alone?
- If public urination is a criminal offense in your city, what is the cost of policing, prosecution and punishment? And what are the social costs to the offender and the ethical deficit to a jurisdiction that criminalizes an essential bodily function?
- What is the cost of obesity in children who don't play outside because there aren't any toilets?
- What is the impact on family life and on society of multi-generational families no longer visiting parks because oldsters and youngsters need toilets?
- What are the skills needed for daily or twice daily maintenance and emergency cleaning? Can people in workforce re-entry programs do the job?
- Can volunteer groups mitigate costs of planning and design? Can they estimate user numbers, preferences, ages and abilities? Conduct CPTED assessments with local law enforcement?

## Toward more 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. Therefore, try to foster partnerships among those with a stake in public restrooms from the private, public and nonprofit sectors: business associations, business and job creation specialists, social service agencies, civic clubs, and social entrepreneurs.

### Case Story:

#### "No money, no problem," says urban planner

Brant Birkeland, a planner with the City of Great Falls, Montana, says this about working with citizen groups: I didn't have a single dollar (other than staff time) budgeted for the development of this plan. We used city facilities for meetings, and if they weren't available we used other public spaces such as the library or schools. All communications and updates were handled through email, phone calls or the local media. Downtown restaurants donated food and coffee for the meetings. The key was to explain the financial situation to participants up front. Not only did they appreciate the honesty, it inspired them to contribute even more to the process.

Source: AARP & Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, From Inspiration to Action, 2012.

Look for practical synergies, even if short term. For example, construction sites are required under OSHA, the U.S. Labor Department's Occupational Health and Safety Administration, to provide sanitation facilities for their workers. As part of the contracting process, firms are also asked to mitigate the inconvenience that construction sites cause neighboring businesses and residents. Couldn't a construction firm keep their porta potties open for 24/7

use? Some cities have a 'percent for public art agreement' with new building developers. How about a percent for public restrooms?

Public restrooms are often needed in older neighborhoods, where urban renewal may be underway. Portland used tax-increment financing (TIF) to fund restrooms in a formerly blighted section of the city, which is now an extremely popular commercial, recreational and cultural gathering space. In developing the RiverPlace district, the Portland Development Commission covered capital costs of the restrooms and retail kiosks there. Today adjacent property owners share recurring maintenance and security costs.

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### Case Story: Oregon's tax-supported floating toilets

Publicly-funded floating restrooms serve boaters at fresh and saltwater locations throughout Oregon. Local communities apply for grants through the Oregon State Marine Board. Available funds include state fuel taxes paid by boaters and federal funds through the Clean Vessel Act. The toilets are pumped out using the same vacuum technology that boaters use to pipe the contents of their waste holding tanks into local sewer systems. By using these facilities Oregon boaters keep 750,000 gallons of sewage from entering Oregon's rivers, lakes, streams and coastal waterways.

[Source: Oregon State Marine Board](#)

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Clara Greed makes toilet design suggestions that could bring partner support. For example, she recommends co-locating public toilets with public buildings such as fire stations and police stations where personnel are on duty around the clock. Where direct access facilities

with private stalls are planned, she suggests equipping a single stall with a squatting toilet (also called a 'Turkish toilet') and a hose for personal washing.<sup>10</sup> Such a facility might win public advocacy support from cultural groups for whom washing after toilet use is the norm. Similarly, organizations such as the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation would benefit from places where their clients could wash in privacy following an accident. Advocates for people needing to change ostomy bags or women's or industry groups concerned with menstrual hygiene might also be inspired to lend political, financial or in-kind support.

Finding appropriate locations for public toilets requires carefully orchestrated collaboration among businesses, non-profit organizations and government groups. Use of a parking space can give around the clock toilet access to hundreds of pedestrians on the street, customers of businesses along it and users of adjacent parks. This is likely to be more practical and cost effective than acquiring land elsewhere. Calculating costs of using a parking space to site a toilet facility can be fairly straightforward. These costs are likely to rise as elected officials and urban planners agree that cities lose income by offering free or low-cost parking and wish to increase parking rates; the evidence has been well documented by researchers Donald Shoup and Todd Litman. When PHLUSH public toilet advocacy began, we proposed placing a non-sewered facility in a single space in a parking lot that also accommodated food carts. While this never happened, the City subsequently used on-street parking spaces to site the first Portland Loos. Curb extensions create sufficient space on the sidewalk to protect users from street traffic and allow placement of the water and sewer pipes.

### Sponsorship and advertising

Public toilets offer many unexplored possibilities for advertising within and without. Ads and public service announcements are increasingly

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<sup>10</sup>Clara Greed, "Creating a Nonsexist Restroom," in Moloch and Norén, Toilet, (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 332-333,336.

seen in restrooms in buildings. Health care corporations or public health agencies may be interested in sponsoring public toilet operations in return for advertising space. You will need to demonstrate the number of people reached both as toilet users and passersby. Compared with bus shelters or benches, street toilets have more usable outdoor space for printed posters or digital screens. Be aware, however, that many North American cities do not allow commercial advertising on public structures.

Automatic Public Toilets (APTs) are generally installed and operated by multinational advertising firms. Since their installation requires a market of several million people, they can be ruled out for any but the largest cities. Boston contracted with the US subsidiary of the German firm Wall AG, New York with the Spanish firm Cemusa, and San Francisco with the French multinational J.C.Decaux to install automatic toilets. New York's project has not been implemented, Boston's and San Francisco's APTs continue to face breakdowns and vandalism. However, the facilities can generate income. Between 1997 and 2014 San Francisco's



The City of Nanaimo, British Columbia posts its calendar of events on this washroom door.

APT project generated \$96.8 million in revenue for JCDecaux and \$5.8 million for the city in addition to the toilets themselves.<sup>11</sup>

In cities that don't allow advertising on street furniture, the exterior surfaces can be used to display sponsored artwork, historical information, maps for visitors, public service announcements and messages from health and social services non-profits. The City of Nanaimo, British Columbia posts seasonal calendars of events on the front door of its strategically located street toilet. The Portland Loo in the city's prestigious Diana Krall Plaza has approximately the same amount of display space as an automatic public toilet unit.

### Create a small business to operate facilities

Sanitation provides opportunities for small business development. Restroom cleaning and maintenance are increasingly outsourced to specialists. If your area lacks a small firm providing these services, explore feasibility with local business development experts. Full-time maintenance and cleaning jobs can provide individuals living wage employment with minimum barriers to entry. Workers develop employable skills while the costs of supervision are manageable. Restrooms need both periodic maintenance and emergency cleaning. Restaurants need to maintain bathrooms during peak hours. As for cleaning of tax-supported public restrooms, check to see how your city's contracting policies may favor women- and minority-owned small businesses, youth-oriented enterprises and programs to put offenders back to work.

### Consider engaging attendants

Most public toilets in large US cities had attendants until the mid-1900s. These men and women would greet visitors, see that premises remained tidy and by their simple presence deter inappropriate behavior. Until the summer of 2015, Paris used

<sup>11</sup> Matier, Philip and Andrew Ross. [City's latrine team tries to keep public toilets tolerable](#). San Francisco Chronicle. September 1, 2015.

attendants at various locations. Known as “dames pipi” the female attendants, many of whom were immigrants, became fixtures in key neighborhoods and took pride in their work as they collected tips in addition to modest salaries.

Now the City of Paris has joined other European cities and contracted with commercial firms such as 2theloo and Point WC to transform formerly free, tax-supported toilet facilities into fully attended high end conveniences. The facility at the Louvre in Paris was recently renovated by Sarvio. It costs about \$1.70 per use and features a gift shop selling colored toilet paper with pictures of the Eiffel tower.<sup>12</sup> Young, attractively-uniformed multi-lingual attendants trained in retail customer service greet users and ensure the cleanliness of stalls and sinks after each use.

According to the Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau, “PointWC are the first ‘luxury’ public toilets featuring a toiletries boutique and ‘well-being’ services. Disinfected by staff after every visit, they guarantee optimum cleanliness. Each cubicle is different: in ‘design’, ‘ethnic’ or ‘chic’ styles. Coffee /drinks/make-up available. Baby-changing facilities with a towel freely available for use, as well as an area for breastfeeding. Price €1.50.”<sup>13</sup>

Given the successful advocacy of CEPTIA to outlaw pay toilets in many US cities and states in the 1970s, it’s unlikely that there is sufficient demand for luxury commercial toilets apart from those already existing in high-end businesses. Employing attendants to perform a variety of duties, however, should be considered.

The City and County of San Francisco Public Works has piloted the Pit Stop program, “which provides clean and safe public toilets, sinks,

<sup>12</sup> Rubin, Alissa J. Paris Looks to Depose Keepers of a Different Throne. *New York Times*. September 28, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/29/world/europe/paris-looks-to-dispatch-keepers-of-a-different-throne.html>, accessed Sept 30, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau. “Toilets.” <http://en.parisinfo.com/paris-professional/74786/Point-WC>, Accessed September 28.

<sup>14</sup> San Francisco Public Works, Pit Stop Program. <http://sfdpw.org/index.aspx?page=1805>. Accessed October 4, 2010.

## Case Story: Warsaw leases public toilets to businesses

In Warsaw, Poland, more than half of public restrooms have been transformed into thriving businesses - luncheonettes, bars, Chinese restaurants, a veterinary clinic. The premises 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, a public toilet sign must remain above the door. Of 42 public bathrooms in Warsaw, 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. The challenge is making sure the public and visitors recognize the signage marking them as truly public restrooms.

Source: Peter Finn, “In Warsaw’s Public Restrooms, Capitalism Is the Bottom Line,” *The Washington Post*. Dec. 5, 1999.

used needle receptacles and dog waste stations in San Francisco's most impacted neighborhoods.”<sup>14</sup> In collaboration with the job training program of a local non-profit, attendants hired at \$16 an hour manage nine locations in key neighborhoods. Pit Stop workers monitor the area around the toilets and ensure the facilities remain available to legitimate users rather than occupied by those engaging in criminal activities. Some locations have portable sanitation units that are removed for cleaning every night while others have automatic self-cleaning kiosks. San Francisco hopes to cover the cost of the new monitors with the rebidding of the JCDecaux contract in 2016.

## Management by volunteers

World Toilet Organization Founder Jack Sim argues that the proper use of public toilets needs to be facilitated. If there's paper strewn about, provide a receptacle nearby. If there's water on the floor, make sure there are paper towels or hand dryers. "All this is facilitation," he says. "You have to understand all the dynamics, ergonomics, all the behavioral issues, and facilitate it. But if you don't want to do that and you blame people and then you walk away feeling very justified, it's very irresponsible."<sup>15</sup>

Advocates working to increase toilet availability need to observe bathroom behavior unobtrusively, put themselves in the shoes of users and agree on standards. When community members recognize that access to restrooms is a widely shared value, they may literally take "ownership" for a public restroom.

Volunteer monitoring and management of restrooms need to be explored and assessed, particularly in pilot projects. Following installation of a new facility, volunteers can monitor and clean, choose cleaning products and equipment, set cleaning protocols, develop signage, write position descriptions, raise funds to pay cleaners, and recruit and hire them.

Among the volunteer-managed facilities we have observed are the following:

- In operating hospitality centers with restrooms, the Portland non-profit Our Peaceful Place found clients who felt that the need for a public toilet was so important that they offered to serve as volunteer hosts and cleaners.
- In a Salinas, California, a homeless encampment operated its own porta potty and made it available to people outside their community.

- In Singapore, volunteer members of the non-profit Singapore Restroom Association conduct toilet audits for a variety of advocacy and outreach tasks.
- Businesses such as Natural Event in Australia and the UK and Toilettes du Monde in France, which deploy composting toilets at large festivals and events, have engaged volunteers to maintain toilets. These firms are helping meet the increasing demand for waterless toilets by offering training courses.
- The all-volunteer Point Holmes Recreation Association in British Columbia manages a commercial porta potty housed within a handsome wooden structure.



As volunteer stewards of their local beach, these residents of Comox, British Columbia designed and built this attractive structure that encloses a commercial porta potty.

<sup>15</sup> Bharati Jagdish, "Toilet Man Jack Sim's push for the Flush Revolution," Channel News Asia, September 25, 2015, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/toilet-man-jack-sim-s/2150196.html>, accessed September 27, 2015.

## Rental of publicly-owned comfort stations to retail businesses that maintain public toilets

Many cities in Europe and North America have large comfort stations and toilet complexes that are no longer used except for storage. The larger structures are likely to have once held public baths as well as toilets. Some buildings have historic designations which make renovation especially costly.

Older comfort stations can be reconfigured to create rental space for small businesses that agree to manage the toilets. This is a win-win situation. In addition to increased toilet availability, this activation of unused space enhances safety and livability, creates jobs, and generates tax revenues for the first time.

## Government subsidies to local businesses that open restrooms to the public

Local governments can pay businesses to provide restroom facilities to the public including non customers. The challenge is to ensure that restrooms are clearly designated as public and that people know about them. Clear, consistent signage is necessary to designate a business restroom as a public toilet. Locations and hours should be listed on city websites, visitor maps and in toilet apps for use on mobile devices.

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### Case Story:

#### City pays retailers to open toilets to public use

Geneva, Illinois Mayor Kevin Burns knew he had to do something. On Saturdays when he was catching up on work in his office, residents would knock at the door of City Hall asking to use the restroom. Understanding the city's lack nearby public facilities, the Mayor let these taxpayers and voters in. The decades-old issue was finally addressed when the city paid businesses to label their private restrooms public and made sure the public knew about it. The city covers the cost of supplies and maintenance in exchange for the public designation. Businesses that accepted the offer saw an immediate boost in business. "It's the quintessential partnership," Burns said.

Source: Sciarra, Rhonda. "At last, downtown residents will have a place to go." *Daily Herald*, Aug. 7, 2003.

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