

**Madison's Central Business Improvement District Board**  
**Report on [Leg ID 33930 - Downtown Public Restroom Staff Report](#)**

June 5, 2014

**SUMMARY**

Madison's Central Business Improvement District (BID) includes the greater State Street and Capitol Square area, and approximately 220 properties and 350 street-level retail, restaurant, hospitality and service businesses. Among other programs, BID Ambassadors serve more than 45,000 downtown users per year, and provide staffing that allows for daily access to public restrooms (see below).

Downtown business, customer and visitor feedback confirms the need for more public restrooms in the central downtown area to serve all downtown users.

Key issues will be:

- Location
- Safety and durability
- Annual operating funding for maintenance, staffing (varies by type of facility selected).

The BID Board concurs with one of the recommendations (p. 91) in the [2006 City of Portland report](#) "Strategies for Meeting Public Restroom Need in Portland's Central City."

*The City should engage in discussion with the business community . . . Business interests should be valued and given high priority. Addressing the concerns of businesses will help guarantee public restroom success.*

The BID Board is glad to see the stakeholder representation on the Ad Hoc Public Restroom Committee, and the Committee charge to coordinate with BID and other relevant business and stakeholder groups.

The City and Committee would benefit from collecting and review public restroom reports and strategies from other cities (e.g., Portland, Seattle), and to follow up in Seattle and Portland and see what was implemented and lessons learned. (There is more to Portland's strategy and recommendations than the Portland Loo. For example, their report also recommended including restrooms in upcoming public works projects.) Also, the city of Austin is slated to present a [downtown restroom proposal](#) in July of this year.

[City of Portland report](#) (2006)

[Seattle Report on Automated Public Toilets \(2008\)](#)

**SPECIFIC INPUT**

RE: Peace Park-Possible Pilot Project (pp. 12-13)

Some relevant information was not included in this section. Through public/private partnership, Madison's Central Business Improvement District (BID) funds and provides the "supervision" mentioned in the staff report, i.e., staffing for the city Parks Visitor Center, which currently allows access to the public bathrooms. Currently, Madison Central BID provides 2,086 privately-funded staff hours per year (avg. 34 hrs/wk) for visitor services and public bathroom access. The 2014 BID-provided staffing level is a 20% increase in hours since fall 2010 when the Visitor Center opened and BID staffing began.

Through a mutually-approved use agreement with City Parks, it is stipulated that Visitor Center bathrooms will be open to the public only when the Visitor Center is staffed by either BID or other City-designated staff. The proposed unstaffed pilot is counter to the existing use agreement and to this staffing requirement, which was developed with input of Parks staff and Central District MPD to ensure the safety of users and to protect the facility from damage.

RE: Automated toilets (pp. 7-8)

As part of the Visitor Center planning process, automated public toilets were explored. Findings: The toilets are extremely expensive to install and maintain; still require daily cleaning and maintenance by a human crew which negates potential cost savings on labor; self-locking design enables inappropriate uses; high water usage equals negative environmental impact

- Seattle spent \$5 million on installation and maintenance of five automated public toilets installed in 2004, including \$37,000 on special repair costs. The city removed them in 2008 due to problems with cleanliness, safety, and the need for constant repairs. Trash left in the toilets required that the automated scrubbers be disabled, and the self-locking toilets became sites for criminal activity and negative behaviors. Seattle has now moved to contracts with private sector for public use of toilets, cleaning and maintenance.

Seattle to Remove Automated Toilets (July 2008)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/17/us/17toilets.html>

The Seattle problem seems to have led to the Portland Loo, and Seattle bought one (for \$90,000). <http://www.geekwire.com/2013/public-poops-seattle-public-toilet/>

- “You need a dedicated crew taking care of them every day,” J. Francois Nion, Executive VP of JCDecaux North America, manufacturer of automated public toilets.
- Automated toilets use between 8-11 gallons of water per use (flush + cleaning cycle), compared to typical 1.7 gallons per use in public restrooms with manual flush toilets.
- San Francisco – problems with misuse (people sleeping inside by jamming door shut); specific toilets locked at night. “The 25 automated toilets in San Francisco require constant fiddling.”
- Portland – Advisory report recommends less expensive alternatives that would be cleaned by human attendants.
- American Restroom Association (<http://www.americanrestroom.org/>) recommends against locks on outside door to full restroom (e.g., self-locking toilet compartments), which impact availability of facility and safety. “The worst situation is an external restroom door with internal slide locks.” To improve security, ARA also recommends that entrances to toilet facilities should be located along major person traffic corridors.