

Department Source: Parks and Recreation

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: January 20, 2026

Re: Report – Downtown Public Restroom

Impacted Ward: Ward 1

Executive Summary

At the direction of City Council and in response to ongoing discussions regarding downtown restroom access, Parks and Recreation staff have evaluated the potential installation of a permanent restroom facility in the downtown area of the city. This report outlines potential site considerations, known or anticipated utility availability, estimated capital costs, and projected annual utility and maintenance expenses. Staff based the information provided in this report on the installation of a prefabricated, single-occupancy restroom designed for durability, safety, and ease of maintenance.

Discussion

At the February 17, 2025 City Council meeting, staff was asked to put together a detailed report about the potential installation of a permanent public restroom in the downtown area of the city. Parks and Recreation staff put together the following information based on previous experience with the installation and maintenance of permanent outdoor restroom facilities in the park and trail system and information gathered while researching the feasibility of a restroom in the downtown area for this report.

Public Restroom Facility:

Staff had multiple communications with a sales representative with Madden Fabrication to discuss the Portland Loo restroom facility. The Portland Loo is a prefabricated, stainless-steel public restroom designed for high-use urban environments. The Portland Loo restroom facility has been installed in over 250 locations in the United States. The key features of this type of restroom facility include:

- Single-occupancy, gender-neutral design that meets ADA accessibility requirements.
- Heavy-duty materials resistant to vandalism including anti-graffiti coating.
- Angled louvers on exterior walls allow for necessary privacy while deterring improper use of the facility.
- Minimal interior fixtures and durable finishes to reduce maintenance.

The unit is designed to connect to standard water, sewer, and electrical utilities and is typically installed on a concrete pad. The restroom also has solar power installation capabilities to reduce the need for electric installation at a site. Additional information about the Portland Loo can be found at <https://portlandloo.com/>.

Park staff also researched comparable outdoor public restrooms designed for urban environments from different manufacturers but had concerns with other similar facilities based on security, costs associated with automated systems and long-term maintenance.

Downtown Location Analysis

The Portland Loo restroom is small enough to fit within the footprint of one standard parking space and could be located in multiple locations throughout downtown Columbia. The restroom facility is approximately 6' wide and 10.5' deep. The primary considerations for placement of the restroom would be site availability, adjacent available utilities and access for maintenance. Depending on utilities availability, this style of restroom could be placed in a plethora of locations due to the size of the facility.

As part of the report, park staff analyzed two park locations as potential locations to provide additional information to the City Council.

Flat Branch Park

Flat Branch Park, located at 101 S. 4th Street, is a high-visibility downtown park with significant daily pedestrian traffic and frequent programmed events. The park's location and proximity to downtown businesses make it a viable candidate for a permanent public restroom. The park is currently served by a portable toilet located in a parking space on 4th Street.

Site Considerations:

- High level of expected public use based on adjacent businesses and organizations, daily use of park amenities, MKT Trailhead designation and special events organized by community organizations at the park.
- Visibility supports safety and appropriate use.
- Placement of the restroom would be adjacent to accessible parking, downtown streets and two key park and trail destinations.
- Potential aesthetic considerations due to park setting including surrounding landscaping.
- Placement of a restroom at this location would not serve the highest level of downtown pedestrian traffic as it is situated on the west edge of downtown.

Utility Considerations:

- Water and sanitary sewer infrastructure are present within or adjacent to the park.
- Electrical service is available nearby for lighting and security features.
- Final utility connection locations would require confirmation through engineering review and utility locates.

North Village Park

North Village Park, located at 210 Orr Street, is currently under construction and will serve as an open greenspace focused on music and public art. Staff anticipates future use to include community events, outdoor performances, food truck events and daily park patron use. The park will include a playground, outdoor seating, green space and multiple public art displays.

Site Considerations:

- Planned outdoor performance area and event programming will create periodic demand for on-site restroom facilities while daily patrons would need a restroom facility intermittently. This would be a primary need for playground users.
- The park location is considered to be removed from the core downtown pedestrian activity areas and would not serve all downtown patrons.
- Demand may be more intermittent compared to Flat Branch Park until infrastructure is completed and future development of the Colt Trail and connecting walkways are completed.

Utility Considerations:

- Available utilities have been identified at the site during the engineering and design process for North Village Park.
- Water, sanitary sewer, and electrical service would be available within the project area or adjacent right-of-way.
- Final utility locations and connection distances would be confirmed through engineering design and utility locates.

Capital Cost:

Based on information from the manufacturer and comparable municipal location installations, the cost for the purchase of a Portland Loo restroom facility is estimated at \$180,000 to \$200,000, depending on the specific features purchased.

Staff estimates that the site preparation, concrete pad, utility connections, and installation of the facility would be \$100,000 to \$125,000. The total estimated cost for the installation of a Portland Loo restroom facility would be \$341,250. This estimated cost includes a 5% cost contingency.

This cost does not include solar panel installation. This was not included with the initial cost as it cannot be considered until a site is identified that would allow for the necessary amount of daily sunlight.

Annual Maintenance and Utility Expenses:

The estimated annual utility expenses include water, sewer, and electricity. Staff estimates that the annual expenses for these utilities will range from \$3,000 to \$5,000. The utility expenses are estimated as facility use will fluctuate depending on time of year and activities.

Annual maintenance would include cleaning the facility five to seven days per week when the facility is in use. The cost of maintenance also includes necessary supplies, restocking of supplies and minor repairs. Staff estimates the annual maintenance cost for one restroom at \$5,000 to \$7,000 per year. The maintenance costs associated with the restroom facility will fluctuate depending on usage, care of the facility and length of operation.

Staff would propose to operate this facility on a similar schedule to other seasonal park restrooms. If placed in one of the proposed parks, staff would open the restroom in April and close it each year by the end of October. This represents the months of highest use and avoids any issues with extremely low temperatures. Staff would place a portable toilet in place of the Portland Loo restroom during the closed season. This is the same schedule and process utilized for the majority of the park and trail restrooms currently in use.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: The estimated total cost to purchase and install a Portland Loo restroom facility is \$341,250.

Long-Term Impact: The estimated total cost to maintain and service a Portland Loo restroom is \$8,000 to \$12,000 per year.

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Reliable and Sustainable Infrastructure, Secondary Impact: Safe Community, Tertiary Impact: Inclusive and Equitable Community

Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Infrastructure, Secondary Impact: Not applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Legislative History

N/A

Suggested Council Action

This report is informational only. No action required at this time unless directed by City Council.