



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Robert Spillar, P.E., Director, Austin Transportation Department
Richard Mendoza, P.E., Director, Public Works Department

CC: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Assistant City Managers
Department Directors

DATE: July 26, 2018

SUBJECT: **Downtown Public Restroom Pilot Program – Permanent Location Recommendations**

This memo provides an update on the recently completed downtown public restroom pilot program, including a summary of findings, potential locations for permanent restroom facilities, and recommended next steps.

Background

In 2016, following direction from Council, a pilot program involving several City departments, was initiated to inform recommendations for the purchase and installation of permanent public restrooms in the downtown area. The Public Works Department (PWD) led the pilot program, Austin Transportation Department (ATD) funded the pilot using parking revenues, and the pilot was coordinated with Austin Public Health (APH) and the Economic Development Department (EDD) through a partnership with the Downtown Austin Alliance (DAA).

During the pilot, a temporary restroom facility was moved between five downtown locations for set periods of time. (See Figure 1 below). These locations were selected through a community input process conducted by APH. The temporary unit provided flushable, wheelchair accessible facilities with a hand sanitizer station. Because of its temporary nature, the unit was not plumbed directly with city services but rather included a water reservoir and waste tank, necessitating daily draining and filling by staff.



Figure 1. Left – Temporary Restroom Unit; Right – Public Restroom Pilot Program Locations (green) and Recommended Public Restroom Permanent Proposed Locations (red)

The temporary restroom facility was made available 24 hours a day for approximately five weeks at each location, with the exception of Location 4 (removed after 2 days due to complaints). As a result of the limited time at Location 4, Location 1 was repeated and also identified as Location 6.

Use Data and Pilot Results

Between 6 a.m. and 12 a.m., DAA Ambassadors were contracted to serve as restroom attendants, providing information to users, cleaning, restocking, notifying city staff of needed repairs, notifying emergency personnel as needed, and collecting data on use (e.g., daily restroom entries, misuse, number of cleanings required).

Observations on the surrounding streets of public urination and defecation (not including alleys and green spaces) were also tracked in the vicinity of the temporary unit locations before, during, and after each placement. With the exception of Location 5, observations of public waste generally decreased during and after deployment of the temporary restroom unit. Key use data is summarized by location in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Key Data Collected During Pilot Program

Location	Dates (2017 – 2018)	Average Daily				Downtime
		Daytime Entries	Estimated Night Use	Cleanings	Misuse	
1 - I-35 Feeder Road and 6th St.	9/28 - 11/6	85.7	24.4	14.9	0.3	0.4%
2 - 500 Block of Brazos	11/6 - 12/12	95.8	34.1	11.2	0.4	0.7%
3 - Red River and 6th St.	12/12 – 1/30	94.6	35.6	14.3	0.6	7.8%
4 - Colorado and 4th St.	1/31 - 2/1	24.5	0.5	3.5	0	N/A
5 - Colorado and Cesar Chavez	2/2 - 3/6	37.5	16.9	3.4	0.2	1.6%
1/6 - I-35 Feeder Road and 6th St.	3/7 - 3/30	128.2	32.8	12.5	0.4	3.3%

- **Locations 4 and 5** received the least amount of average daily use (locations 4 and 5 averaged less than 40 visits per day as compared to the other locations averaging 100 or more visits per day).
- **Locations 1, 2, and 3** each demonstrated approximately 100 uses per day. Nighttime use (12 AM to 6 AM) was estimated based on the amount of water used; average hourly use remained consistent with daytime (6 AM to 12 AM) usage.
- **Location 1** (identified as Location 6 for the second placement) was used again at the end of the pilot (and during SXSW film and music festival). Usage during the festival increased to approximately 200 uses per day.
- **Locations 1, 2, 5 and 6** had similar data for emergency calls;
- **Location 3** demonstrated the highest average misuse. At this location, PWD responded to multiple fires within the bathroom unit, increasing the down time of the unit.
- The amount of cleanings required was generally proportional to the amount of uses at each location.

Recommendations on Location of Permanent Public Restroom Facilities

As demonstrated by the higher use of the temporary restroom unit when placed east of Congress Avenue, permanent public restroom locations are recommended to be prioritized for locations that would serve this higher demonstrated demand. Locations in the vicinity of the temporary **locations 1 and 2** are recommended for permanent facilities:

- A- Location 1**, located on TxDOT Right of Way and adjacent to I-35 is the closest location to downtown public services for persons experiencing homelessness, and to 6th Street. However, with the pending reconstruction of I-35, a permanent facility should be located off of TxDOT Right of Way so that it remains accessible when I-35 is under construction. Near the temporary location evaluated by staff is a small parking lot adjacent to the Austin Municipal Court building at the corner of East 7th Street and the Southbound I-35 Frontage Road. This location is close enough to location No. 1/6 to likely generate the same use profile as did the test location. This recommended alternate location is also closer to potential city utilities such as electrical, water, and wastewater that will be needed for the permanent facility. A multi-stall unit is recommended for consideration at this location and will be explored further during preliminary design.
- B- Location 2**, 500 block of Brazos, is recommended as a location for a second unit, pending available funding. Placement of this unit will require the removal of at least one parking space to make ready for installation.
- C-** In addition to the two permanent locations recommended above, a location on Trinity Street near Brush Square Park is being considered. The unit at this location would be a joint effort between ATD, the Parks and Recreation Department (PARC), Austin Convention Center, and Capital Metro and will be proposed to be included as part of the purchasing agreement for the other two permanent bathroom facilities. This third location will primarily serve patrons of the new Capital Metro downtown station and the park but will be available to the general public. An interlocal agreement will be brought to Council outlining a partnership between the City, using Great Streets and other parking funds, and Capital Metro, using funds from the station construction program.

Next Steps

Following completion of the pilot study the Austin Transportation Department (ATD) has been assigned ownership of providing the recommended permanent restroom facilities. ATD will be responsible for funding the construction of these facilities and for negotiating a long-term maintenance agreement for their upkeep, likely with the Downtown Austin Alliance DAA. With regard to funding and maintaining these facilities, we offer the following recommendations:

- 1) Staff will work with the Municipal Court and the Community Court to secure use of the recommended parking lot at East 7th and the Southbound I-35 Frontage Road. Alternative parking locations can be provided by ATD for use by Community Court. At this site, we will explore the ability to provide sufficient utility capacity to offer a multi-stall unit. Funding for this facility will be provided using parking revenues. We are in negotiations to use funds generated from the parking lots operated by the City on TxDOT right-of-way and may also recommend using funds from on-street parking meters should there be a shortfall from funds generated by the parking lots. Use of parking revenues is consistent with providing a safe and conducive pedestrian network in the central business district to access parking opportunities

on-street (e.g., if the sidewalks are not clean and inviting, patrons will tend not to park on-street, thus affecting overall parking revenues).

- 2) For the location proposed near Brush Square, we are proposing use of Great Street funds to assist in the construction of an interim semi-permanent facility in cooperation with Capital Metro station construction. The Great Streets program is funded by a transfer of revenue from the downtown on-street parking system and is used to partner with downtown developments to provide pedestrian amenities. At this time, a cost estimate does not exist for the construction of the interim facility; as we move forward we will continue to insure that this is an appropriate and feasible use of the Great Streets funds. PARD will work to incorporate a permanent restroom facility as part of the Brush Square Master Planning process.

A prefabricated facility, similar to a Portland Loo (<http://theloo.biz/>) is proposed and would be plumbed with water and wastewater. The Parks Department is currently working on a new comprehensive plan for Brush Square and will incorporate a permanent public restroom facility as part of that design process, allowing the prefabricated facility to be relocated within downtown or incorporated as part of the park redesign. The interim facility is anticipated to be delivered in time for opening of the new downtown rail station in 2019/2020.

- 3) Construction of additional public restrooms, beyond those recommended at East 7th/I-35 and at Brush Square is dependent on available funding.
- 4) In the coming FY 2019 funding proposal, we will recommend parking revenue be used for the permanent restroom construction and maintenance, and that downtown sidewalks be maintained using roadway maintenance funding (Transportation User Fee/"TUF"). City Code 14-10-6 – TRANSPORTATION FUND requires that the transportation fee shall be used only for the transportation system, which includes accessory pedestrian facilities such as sidewalks. We will seek a maintenance contract with the Downtown Austin Alliance or similar organization for on-going cleaning and maintenance responsibilities.
- 5) We will move expeditiously to achieve Council's vision of a safe and clean pedestrian environment in the downtown core. Council should expect several requests for action as we move forward with implementation.

Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Director Robert Spillar at ATD.

Cc: Joe Pantalion, Interim Assistant City Manager
Greg Guernsey, Planning and Zoning Director