

## Washington, D.C., makes space for the Portland Loo

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CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**D**irty. Creepy. Hard to find when you need them.

That's how Jennifer McLaughlin describes some of the public bathrooms she's used over the years. McLaughlin, a member of the People For Fairness Coalition (PFFC) in Washington, D.C., sits with a small band of advocates in a public cafeteria each week, discussing accomplishments and steps needed to see more clean, safe and available public toilets installed across the nation's capital. And their turning a keen eye toward Portland's achievements.

"I used to be on the street, and I had a son," she said. "It was hard to find places that would actually let me go and use the bathroom, or change him."

Many people experiencing homelessness must rely on the generosity of business operators for use of a toilet, or come up with the money to purchase something to justify use of facilities labeled "for customers only."

McLaughlin believes the homeless are not the only ones in need of public toilets. For example, she notices that many people get their lunch from food trucks, which don't offer restrooms.

PFFC adopted the public toilet cause after Gary Minter, a vendor for the Washington street paper Street Sense, brought the issue to the table at the group's routine "call for concerns."

"Mine is more a women's issue," Janet Sharp, another committee leader, explained. "Pregnant women, homeless women during their menstrual cycle, people further up in age, like me, when your bladder doesn't hold like it used to, tourists..."

Destination DC, a nonprofit marketing Washington, D.C., as a tourist destination, believes most tourists' needs are met during the day by the facilities in the museums and

around the monuments on the National Mall.

Media Relations Manager Kate Gibbs understands that some tourists may have special needs — such as families with young children. She said the group believes in "championing whatever infrastructure can help visitors find Washington and spend an enjoyable holiday here."

PFFC launched a feasibility study late last year to determine the project's practicality. That's when it discovered the Portland Loo, individual private toilets in public areas throughout downtown Portland.

The first Portland Loo was installed December 2008 after a three-year community campaign led by Public Hygiene Lets Us Stay Human, or PHLUSH.

When PHLUSH began shopping the idea around, an early design was to construct the unit from plastic material resembling playground equipment, for reasons of affordability. An architect recommended the design be upscaled for city streets. The resulting product, made entirely from stainless steel, sells for for \$90,000.

The city of Portland entered into a manufacturing agreement with Portland-based Madden Fabrication, with a plan to sell the copyrighted design directly. However, the Loo business didn't work well as a public entity, and Madden Fabrication ended up taking ownership mid-2014, maintaining a royalty agreement with city government.

There are seven Loo modules in Portland. The first to be installed out-of-state went to Victoria, B.C., in 2011. It was voted "Canada's best restroom," an annual contest sponsored by Cintas, the very next year. Installation has since been completed in California, Alaska and other parts of British Columbia. Seattle, Cambridge, Mass., Salt Lake City and Cincinnati have placed orders.

"I'd love to see it just become a standard. It really solves a lot of problems with cities not having bathrooms. It makes the city



A Portland Loo

more walkable," said Greg Madden, president of Madden Fabrication.

The stainless steel is hard to dent and the surface is treated with anti-graffiti coating. Each Loo has a locked interior cabinet containing a hose that maintenance workers use to spray down the facility as needed. The handwashing station is on the outside of the facility, allowing one person to use the toilet while another washes his or her hands or fills a water bottle.

The Portland Loo is designed to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines for accessibility. It is also large enough to accommodate a full-size bicycle. For nighttime use, the module is well-lit on the outside. The outer lights dim and inner lights engage when someone enters. These features can be powered by a solar panel,

AC power hookup to the city's grid or solar with AC backup.

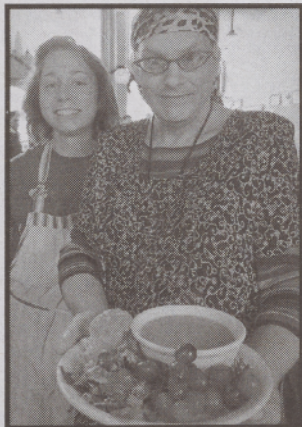
PFFC Director Robert Warren hopes to raise enough money to send a few members to see the Portland Loos firsthand.

"We want businesses to support us because business owners are going to close their business, and their restrooms, some time for the night," Warren said. "We'll have to look out, though, if we do get Portland Loos put in, and make sure businesses don't start to make their own restrooms less available."

Contributing research by Josue De Paz and Laetitia Vidor. [www.street-papers.org](http://www.street-papers.org). Street Sense, Washington, D.C.

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