

The Portland Tribune

Portland Loos Making a Splash Beyond City

By Jim Redden

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City-patented, locally produced public toilets are solving vexing problem around the world.

The TV show "Portlandia" may be ending this season, but another iconic symbol of the city's weirdness continues to spread around the world — the Portland Loo, a locally designed and constructed commode.

It is revolutionizing the way cities solve one the oldest problems in the world, the lack of safe and easy-to-maintain public toilets.

Since the first Loo was installed in Old Town/Chinatown in 2008, another 54 have been purchased, most by 20 other cities.

Portland hosts 15 of the Loos, while Victoria, British Columbia, and Galveston, Texas, have five each. The farthest one is located along Baldwin Street, the steepest street in the world and a popular tourist attraction in the city of Dunedin, New Zealand.

Portland Loos are the only public toilets with their own social media accounts.

And a Portland Loo in Vancouver, B.C. was voted the best public toilet in Canada in 2012.

Lawsuit dominated Loo news

Most Portlanders are probably unaware of the Loos' growing popularity. That's because most of the publicity about them in recent years was related to their role in a long-running utility ratepayer lawsuit against the city. Filed in Multnomah County Circuit Court, the lawsuit charged the City Council with misspending water and sewer funds on programs and projects not authorized by the City Charter.

Last June, Judge Stephen Bushong ruled that approximately 90 percent of the challenged spending was legal. However, he ordered the City Council to repay the Portland Water Bureau and Bureau of Environmental Services more than \$17 million for spending that was not "reasonably related" to their missions. Of that amount, nearly \$1.3 million was for water bureau funds spent to develop and build the first Loos. The council settled the case last December for \$10 million, without admitting any wrongdoing.

The water bureau stopped paying for the Loos well before Bushong's final ruling. The most recent local additions have been funded by Portland Parks & Recreation and installed in renovated city parks. There has been no controversy over their funding.

One person who has followed the history of the Loos closely is Greg Madden. His company, Madden Fabrication, makes and sells them out of a converted warehouse in the Guilds Lake industrial sanctuary area in Northwest Portland.

"We get a lot of positive feedback about Portland. Everyone wants to replicate our success with the Loos," Madden says.

Loo business booming

On a sunny but chilly late January morning, the growing popularity of the Portland Loo was apparent at Madden's shop. A completed Loo sat on a pallet in the parking lot, ready to be

shipped to Miami. Three workers were assembling another one in a corner of the building. It will be installed in Spring Garden Park in Southwest Portland. Prefabricated parts for future ones were stacked on large shelves outside.

"Business is increasing all the time," says Evan Madden, the company's sales manager and Greg's nephew. Loos represent one-third of the company's business, and are increasing by 30 percent a year, he says. His marketing brochure features a pop-up Loo and the slogan, "A unique solution for a universal problem."

Most public restrooms are conventional, freestanding buildings with doors that open into fairly large restrooms that include toilets and sinks. But over the past few decades, the behavior of those who use public restrooms has changed dramatically. The restrooms frequently are taken over by drug users, the homeless and the mentally ill, creating safety and maintenance problems for the governments that own them. In many cases, public restrooms were closed down, including in Portland, especially downtown.

Early failed attempts to respond are legendary within the public toilet industry. Seattle reportedly spent \$5 million on five self-cleaning facilities that suffered numerous mechanical breakdowns and were quickly shuttered. No one seemed to know what to do.

"Most of the time, toilets were stuck off in out-of-the-way corners in public space, like no one wanted to talk about them. Of course there were problems," Greg Madden says.

PHLUSH aids good design

After growing complaints about the lack of public toilets for visitors and the homeless in Portland, activists began a campaign for an affordable, durable and safe design that could be easily installed throughout the city. Former City Commissioner Randy Leonard, who was in charge of the Portland Water Bureau, embraced the idea and appointed a group in 2006 to work out the challenges, including coming up with a design that would be hard to damage, easy to maintain and reduce crime.

Their solution was a single-stall toilet with almost no creature comforts that used the well-recognized concept of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. Most of the structure is made of stainless steel with a graffiti-proof coating. There are narrow gaps at the top and bottom so police and others can see if it is occupied without violating the privacy of the users. There is no mirror, because those get broken. There is no indoor sink, because the homeless frequently wash their clothes in them. Instead, there is only a spigot on the outside for cleaning up.

At night, an exterior light shines outside until someone enters. When that light goes off, the internal light turns on, so everyone knows it is occupied. The internal light is blue, which makes it hard for drug users to find a vein to shoot up.

"The idea was to make it uncomfortable for anyone to stay in there long. There's only one or two things you can do in it, and then it's time to leave," Greg Madden says.

Madden Fabrication won the contract to build the prototype, which was installed in late 2008 near the Greyhound Bus Station on Northwest Glisan Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues. It cost around \$140,000. The base price has since gone down to about \$90,000, with options — including a heating system for just the toilet — that can push the price to about \$110,000.

"We way overbuilt the first one. We had some half-inch stainless steel left over from a previous project and used that. It must weigh about 7,500 pounds. But it still looks pretty good after all these years," says Greg Madden. All the other Loos are made primarily out of quarter-inch stainless steel and weigh about 6,000 pounds.

When the city approved the next three Loos, Madden's company won the contract for them, too. It eventually struck a deal with Portland to build all of them, and pay an 8 percent commission for any sold outside of town.

"Portland has made over \$300,000 in commissions so far, which is more than the city paid for the initial design," Evan Madden says.

City-owned design

Portland patented the Loo in the summer of 2010. U.S. Patent No. D622,408 S is the first patent the city ever received.

Governments buying the Loos are responsible for their installation and maintenance. The restrooms are designed to be placed onto a concrete base with existing water, sewer and electrical connections. Leo Gonzalez, the company's project manager, travels to every installation to make sure everything goes right.

"There are been no problems, so far. The quickest one was installed in just two hours," says Gonzalez, one of several employees hired exclusively to refine and build the Loos.

Madden Fabrications is a family-owned business. It is a subsidiary of Madden Industrial Craftsmen Inc., which was started over 25 years ago by local entrepreneur Ron Madden, his wife Isabel, and their sons, Greg, Ken and Paul. They built up the business with the assistance of the Portland Development Commission, now known as Prosper Portland. A PDC representative told them the city was looking for a contractor for the prototype Loo in early 2008.

The rest is public toilet history.

"Portland Loos have helped us grow, and we're doing everything we can to keep improving them and telling Portland's story," Greg Madden says.

That includes opening and maintaining a Facebook page, blog and Twitter account for the Loos. They include links to each of the Loos' locations.

The Portland Loo even has its own Wikipedia page.

Find out more

- Facebook: www.facebook.com/portlandloo
- Blog: portlandlooblog - theloo.biz
- Twitter: twitter.com/portlandloo
- Wikipedia: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portland_Loo

All Portland Loos:

- Are manufactured and factory-assembled by Madden Fabrication in Northwest Portland
- Are made primarily of stainless steel
- Weigh approximately 3 tons
- Fit in an average parking space
- Use 1.28 gallons of water per flush

- Come standard with a 24-volt DC solar-power system
- Can withstand 140 mile-per-hour wind gusts for up to three seconds
- Meet ADA standards

Notable locations:

- Pixar Animation Studios, Emeryville, Calif.
- Bastion Square, Victoria, British Columbia
- Tongass National Forest, Ketchikan, Alaska
- Harvard/Cambridge Common Park, Cambridge, Mass.
- Great American Ball Park, Cincinnati, Ohio
- Missoula Art Museum, Missoula, Mont.

Homeless Campers Plan to Resist City Eviction

*By Pamplin Media Group and KOIN 6 News
January 31, 2018*

UPDATE: New group camping on city-owned property near Northeast Airport Way disrupted the Jan. 31 City Council meeting, demanding that the city not force campers to leave.

Leaders of the new Village of Hope homeless camp near Northeast Airport Way and Mason Street say they will resist attempts to evict campers, which could begin Thursday morning, Feb. 1.

Camp organizers were served Tuesday, Jan. 30, with city notices requiring them to remove their belongings by Thursday morning. By Wednesday afternoon, Jan. 31, the group sent emails saying members would risk arrest to resist the evictions.

Members and supporters of the group disrupted the Jan. 31 City Council meeting in a protest against the evictions and continued sweeps of homeless camps. The protesters were angry that Mayor Ted Wheeler opposes the new homeless camp set up during the weekend in a city-owned natural area by the Columbia River Slough.

The council chambers protests began after a number of inner-eastside business owners told council about problems they were having with homeless people. Wheeler began explaining the city's approach to the issue and protesters repeatedly interrupted him. "If you know and have declared that you're in a housing emergency, a housing crisis, you do not sweep homeless encampments," one yelled.

After several disruptions, Wheeler invoked rules established last year that allows him to remove people who disrupt meetings. The council took a brief recess while one person was removed and others walked out, saying they were heading back to the camp.

Pleas for support

Although the city says the camp must go, the people living in the Village of Hope say it is a chance to build a life, explaining that they are tired of being chased from everywhere they camp. "All we're asking is a place to be where we can get from where we are to where we want to be," said one camper known as "Thumper." "Like off the streets. (You) can't set up (an) appointment

for social security then are forced to move so you are moving and (you) forget about appointments and have to start all over again."

During a Monday, Jan. 29, press conference, Pastor Steve Kimes of the Anawim Christian Community, told reporters that the camp was self-governed and volunteers were dedicated to helping campers receive services they need. Ibrahim Mubarak of Right 2 Survive, one of the camp organizers, said the group hoped to stay in one place long enough to focus on re-entering mainstream society. "If the neighborhood association and business alliance don't want us in their area, they need to come out here and support us away from their neighborhood and away from their businesses and see what we're doing," Mubarak said.

In a written statement Monday, Wheeler says that rigid structures should not be constructed on public environmentally sensitive lands. But camp supporter Elspeth Tanguay-Koo notes the property is actually zoned industrial. "The location of the Village is not within an 'environmentally sensitive' public lands property," Tanguay-Koo said in a Tuesday email.

Tanguay-Koo also charged that the city had not maintained the property, claiming that campers collected 20 garbage bags of litter and refuse while moving in on Sunday. But city documents say the property was purchased for environmental reasons. It is intended as a buffer between the slough and industrial businesses in the area near Portland International Airport.

Portland is not alone

The camp is in a 165-acre parcel known as Big Four Corners. Some of the final 115 acres were purchased by the Bureau of Environmental Services from Catellus/ProLogis, a distribution company, in the fall of 2005 for \$200,000. The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board granted BES \$150,000 for to restore wetland functions, add streamside vegetation, and improve water quality in the Columbia Slough. The parks bureau, which agreed to own and operate the site as a natural area, contributed another \$40,000. Catellus/ProLogis donated the remaining parcel, valued at over \$208,000.

"Big Four Corners is one of Portland's core habitat areas. It provides important habitat for deer, coyotes, river otter, and a variety of birds and amphibians. More than 175 species of birds use the Columbia Slough Watershed. Water quality benefits include protecting cold water sources to the Slough and providing the opportunity for restoration work to shade the Slough," according to a city publication (www.portlandoregon.gov/bes/index.cfm?&a=129798).

Before the protesters interrupted him, Wheeler said that while the homeless situation in Portland is "dire," it is not unusual. He said that while recently attending the U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting in Washington, D.C., he met with other West Coast mayors to discuss the issue. In some cities, Wheeler said, there is even more of a crisis.

Wheeler blamed much of the homeless problem in Portland on housing costs that are increasing faster than incomes, forcing low-income renters out of their homes and preventing some newcomer from finding a place to live. He started to explain how the city was responding with a mix of affordable housing, emergency shelter and livability initiatives before recessing the meeting.

KOIN News 6 is a Portland Tribune news partner. Reporter Jim Redden contributed to this story.

The Portland Mercury

Portland's Bet on Forcing Developers to Build Affordable Housing Is Getting Lackluster Results

By Dirk Vanderhart
January 31, 2018

Now, Mayor Ted Wheeler Wants to Offer a Sweeter Deal

DENNIS SACKHOFF doesn't build a parking lot if he can help it. So, last year, the Beaverton-based developer jumped at the chance to scratch an expensive underground parking garage from an apartment building he plans to build in the Kerns neighborhood.

In July, city records show Sackhoff's Urban Development Group scrapped plans to build a four-story, 74-unit building with a 26-stall parking garage at Northeast Everett and 28th. Instead, the company now plans to build a 119-unit building at the site—with no parking spaces.

It's the type of project that has made Sackhoff despised in some Portland neighborhoods, but city officials wish more developers would follow his lead. That's because in exchange for a break on building parking stalls, Sackhoff will make 18 of the building's 119 units "affordable."

A year ago, Portland City Council enacted "Inclusionary Housing" (IH), a new policy requiring any apartment building of 20 units or more to rent a portion of them below market rates—from 30 to 80 percent of the city's median family income, depending on the option a developer selects.

When the city implemented the policy, detractors warned the new rules would simply ensure developers stopped building here. City officials argued IH would force the private market to create much-needed affordable units in Portland's building boom.

A year into the policy, the detractors seem to be winning. Apartment construction in Portland has fallen off a cliff, though there's still ambiguity as to whether IH or other market forces are the key reason. Meanwhile, Mayor Ted Wheeler is planning to sweeten the deals that the city offers developers to convince them to build.

"We think we can do better," Wheeler told the Mercury this week. "In March, I will be bringing an ordinance to the [city] council that will give the housing bureau authority to add some incentives."

20-Plus Unit Multi-Family Projects Planned Since February 1, 2017

Key: Address / Total Units / Affordable units

A 6263 N Cecelia / 21 / Number of affordable units currently unclear

B 1515 NE 28th / 53 / 8

C 2821 NE Everett / 119 / 18

D 14775 NE Couch / 30 / 5

E 123 SE 13th / 87 / 13

F 2580 SE Ankeny / 96 / 15

G 5770 E Burnside / 48 / 7

H 6012 SE Yamhill / 76 / 11

I 5955 SE Milwaukie / 54 / 11

J 5434 SE Milwaukie / 28 / Number of affordable units currently unclear

K 2508 SE 32nd / 32 / Number of affordable units currently unclear

L 5401 SE Woodstock / 38 / 3

So far, IH's results are underwhelming. According to the city's Bureau of Development Services, 12 qualifying buildings with a total of 682 units have applied for permits since the IH policy went into effect on February 1, 2017. Under IH, those projects could bring in anywhere from 55 to 170 below-market units, depending on the options their owners select (not all developers have decided, so an actual number of affordable units isn't clear).

Whatever the case, 682 is a huge drop off for a housing market that from 2013 to 2017 typically built between 3,000 and 6,000 new units per year. And the number doesn't give the complete picture.

Sackhoff, for instance, could have elected to avoid the IH rules altogether in the Kerns project, since it was underway before IH kicked in. Observers say his Urban Development Group made a calculated decision to build affordable units in exchange for a reprieve on building a hugely expensive parking garage—and not just in one building. All told, Urban Development Group's projects account for more than 300 of the total units currently planned under IH (and more than 50 affordable units), but it's not clear whether the company will keep it up, or that other builders are as eager to avoid building parking facilities.

“The question is in all of this: Are we meeting our goals in terms of adding affordable housing annually to the marketplace?” says City Commissioner Nick Fish, who thinks it's too soon to say IH hasn't worked. “What we do know is we aren't getting the job done.”

The slowdown in apartment development can be explained by a number of factors. In the run-up to IH going into effect, developers rushed applications to build thousands of units in order to avoid the new requirements—nearly four years' worth of development was filed in short order. Fish and others believe IH can't be truly evaluated until those projects are built (or canceled, as many undoubtedly will be). Thanks to record demand in recent years, construction in Portland is also extremely expensive right now, and rents have softened, making projects less feasible, developers say.

But most people think it's more than that.

“We've seen the spigot turned off so completely, so fast,” says Kurt Schultz, a principal at SERA Architects, who notes that his clients who've worked with similar policies in other cities often blanch when told of Portland's strict IH rules. “I've never seen it turned off so fast before, and I've been doing this for 30 years.”

The projects submitted under IH are striking not just for their scarcity, but for where they're located. Under the policy, developers are given more incentives to build in the central city, where tax breaks are bigger and the city offers steep bonuses that let developers construct larger buildings. But not a single building that's applied for permits under IH sits in the central city. None are west of the river.

“It's working well in the neighborhoods outside the central city,” argues Kyle Chisek, director of bureau engagement in the mayor's office. “It's not working as well in the central city.”

To try to curb the trend, Wheeler will offer new incentives to developers. In a recent City Council session, the mayor suggested he would seek to jump-start IH by allowing larger buildings in central Portland.

“Our biggest plays are around height and density,” Wheeler’s office tweeted as the mayor made a statement at the council hearing. “That way we can pick off hundreds at a time and with [Inclusionary Housing] we’re ensuring #affordability.”

That’s only true if builders bite. To whet their appetites, Wheeler’s mulling a range of incentives for developers who already have “vested” projects that don’t need to follow IH rules. Tax breaks will be on the table in March, officials say, though details are still scant. The mayor’s office will also consider future tweaks to the IH program to allow more density.

One big fish that the city’s been trying to angle: the Zidell family, whose large-scale Zidell Yards development is slated to bring thousands of residential units to the South Waterfront in coming years. Representatives of the family’s ZRZ Realty Inc, declined to comment on their ongoing negotiations with city officials.

Plenty of other developers are in the city’s sights, too. Wheeler’s office says to expect more clarity on what it will offer those companies in February, even as the mayor looks to tweak the IH program in the near future.

“By the time you come to a definitive conclusion” about whether IH is failing or not, notes Wheeler spokesperson Michael Cox, “it might be too late to adjust the program.”