



TO: Robert W. Healy, City Manager
FROM: Karen Hacker, Interim Chief Public Health Officer
DATE: October 23, 2006
SUBJECT: Response to Policy Order #24, dated 9/11/06

Text of Order: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to revisit the issue of public restrooms in Central Square; and be it further that the City Manager be and hereby is requested to report back to the Central Square Business Association and the City Council on this matter.

The City of Cambridge recognizes the need for safe public restrooms in business districts with high pedestrian traffic, such as Central Square and Harvard Square. At the same time, the City recognizes there are considerable maintenance and upkeep costs associated with the provision of safe and clean public restrooms.

Between 2001 and 2003, the Cambridge Public Health Department (on behalf of the City Manager and City Council), explored a number of options for expanding access to public restrooms in Cambridge. These options included:

- Installing automatic public toilets in several well-trafficked locations through an agreement with an outdoor advertising company.
- Prominently advertising locations of public restrooms in city buildings.
- Developing agreements to post signage and expand restroom hours of existing bathroom facilities in malls and arcades.
- Brokering a public/private sponsorship agreement to install and maintain permanent public restroom facilities in Cambridge.

Each of these options has its benefits and drawbacks. *For a short summary of each option, see Appendix A.*

Recommendation for Central Square

With regard to Central Square, the City recognizes the need for a public restroom that could be open 24 hours, given the district's heavy pedestrian traffic, vibrant nightlife, and homeless population. The restroom would also have to withstand potential vandalism and misuse. Based on these needs, the public health department is recommending that the City Council consider the installation of an automatic public toilet in Central Square. *(For more information about automatic public toilets, see Appendix B.)*

Benefits of an APT:

- Self-cleaning
- Could operate 24 hours
- Heated in winter
- Vandalism and graffiti-resistant
- Internal alarm systems
- Accessible to the disabled community
- Free access to the homeless community

- No cost to the city (under the advertising model)*
- Maintenance and upkeep provided by outdoor advertising company

Drawbacks of an APT (advertising model)

- Standard contract length with an outdoor advertising firm is 20 years.
- Additional outdoor advertising in the city
- Siting issues**

***Advertising requirements**

Martin McDonough, president of Wall USA, (which owns and operates Boston's coordinated street furniture program, including APTs) estimated that based on the formula used in Boston, a single automatic public toilet in Cambridge could be supported by:

- *25 city information panels*
Panel dimensions: 4 ft. x 6 ft.
Total height (including pedestal): approx. 8 ft.
OR
- *10 city light boards*
Panel dimensions: 8 ft. x 11 ft.
Total height (including pedestal): approx. 16 ft.
OR
- *5 traditional billboards*
Panel dimensions: 24 ft. x 48 ft.
OR
- *Some combination thereof*

Note: These are rough estimates. Actual advertising requirements would be determined through a formal proposal process.

****Siting**

In October 2002, staff from the Community Development Department and Cambridge Public Health Department identified potential sites for Automatic Public Toilets in Central Square and Harvard Square. Criteria for siting included:

- Ability to support the size (8' x 10') and weight (2+ tons) of an APT.
- Ease of access from the Squares
- Level of pedestrian traffic near the proposed site
- Potential impact on abutting business

The team recommended two sites in Central Square:

1. Western Ave at Mass Ave in front of 26 Central Square
2. Lafayette Park

Note: These choices were based on physically visible factors. Further investigation of the proposed sites would need to be conducted to assess utility and structural issues.

Public Toilet Reports, 2001–2003

On behalf of the City Manager and City Council, the Cambridge Public Health Department produced a comprehensive report in 2001 on the cost, feasibility, safety, and maintenance issues surrounding the installation of public toilets in the city. In subsequent reports and policy memos written between 2001 and 2003, the public health department explored the adequacy of existing public restrooms in Cambridge, the possibility of expanding access to these facilities, and ways that other communities have addressed this issue.

Key options investigated between 2001 and 2003 were:

1. **Installing automatic public toilets in several well-trafficked locations through an agreement with an outdoor advertising company.** An automatic public toilet (APT) is a coin-operated, free-standing public toilet that automatically flushes and self cleans. The APT structure is designed to be functional, safe, and resistant to vandalism and graffiti. APTs are typically owned, operated, and maintained by outdoor advertising companies, which provide this service at no cost to municipalities in return for the right to display advertising on a set number of free-standing structures (e.g., sidewalk-level information panels, mini-billboards, and traditional billboards). Municipalities can also buy or lease APTs. *(See Appendix B for more information).*
2. **Advertising locations of public restrooms in city buildings.** Public agencies in approximately 26 locations across Cambridge have public restrooms. However, a number of city agencies expressed concern in 2001 about allowing the city to advertise their restrooms as “public” because they believed (a) they lacked the capacity to handle additional bathroom traffic and/or (b) bathroom users could pose a safety risk to their clientele and staff.
3. **Developing agreements to post signage and expand restroom hours of existing bathroom facilities in malls and arcades.** In this scenario, the City of Cambridge would negotiate individual agreements with local malls, arcades, and other businesses that have the capacity to handle a large influx of bathroom users. The terms of the agreement, as put forth by former city councilor Kathy Born in May 2001, would be that malls and other entities that already offer public access toilets would expand their restroom hours and post signage advertising their facilities in return for compensation from the city or in-kind support (i.e., police presence). In addition, the city would pay for the signage. At present, only a handful of Cambridge businesses allow the public unrestricted access to their restroom facilities. Restaurants, malls, and other places of assembly do not have a legal obligation to provide restroom facilities to non-customers.
4. **Brokering a public/private sponsorship agreement to install and maintain permanent public restroom facilities in Cambridge.** This type of partnership would involve an agreement between the city and private entities to jointly fund the purchase, installation, and maintenance of a public restroom facility or facilities. The private entities might include the membership of Cambridge business associations; Harvard University and MIT; and possibly non-profit organizations. The facility could either be a traditional, freestanding public restroom or an automatic public toilet that would be owned by the city and its partners.

AN OVERVIEW OF AUTOMATIC PUBLIC TOILETS

Summary of Report

Design, maintenance, accessibility, safety, and cost were among the key issues addressed in the Report on Automatic Public Toilets (APTs) released to the Cambridge City Council in 2001.

Design & Maintenance

- The exterior dimensions (a.k.a. footprint) of most APTs are between 70 sq. ft. and 96 sq. ft.
- Most APTs weigh between 2 tons and 8 tons.
- Most APTs are heated in winter, but not air conditioned in summer.
- The toilets self-clean after each use. The process that takes about 55 seconds.
- APTs are hooked into sewer and water mains, and telephone and electric lines.
- Under a leasing or advertising agreement, the street furniture companies would be responsible for restocking supplies, additional clean-up, and repairs.
- Maintenance emergency — Street furniture companies, under a leasing or advertising agreement, would remotely monitor a toilet's functioning status so that technicians could respond immediately to a maintenance emergency.

Accessibility

- ***Disabled community***—Most APT manufacturers believe their toilets are “fully compliant” with the American with Disabilities Act. However, most of them have never put their products to the test in the United States. (Note: The design of automatic public toilets in Boston, manufactured by Wall USA, was approved by the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board in February 2001, and is ADA-compliant).
- ***Homeless community***—Most street furniture companies have systems for allowing free access to the toilets for homeless individuals and other designated populations. Systems range from free or reusable tokens to non-transferable “Smart Cards.” Municipalities set policy on this issue.

Safety

- APTs can be equipped with an interior emergency button(s). When pushed, these buttons may sound an alarm, open the doors of the APT, and/or notify either the street furniture's call center or 911 (or other emergency responders). Municipalities set policy on this issue.
- ***Emergency access***—Police, EMTs, and fire fighters could access a locked toilet. Some companies said they could issue a special key to emergency responders that would deactivate the power and open the main door. Others said it would be possible to open the doors remotely. Some APTs have both front *and* rear access.
- ***Nuisance behaviors***—Lewd and illicit behaviors (e.g., prostitution, drugs) could be diminished by siting the APTs in well lit, highly trafficked locations and restricting hours of operation.
- Most cities choose to restrict individual visits to the APTs to 10 to 20 minutes. After the elapsed time, the main door automatically opens. *FYI:* Customers can exit the facility at any time. Average use: < 3 minutes.
- ***Vandalism***—Most APTs are graffiti resistant; they are also difficult (if not impossible) to knock over given that they weight 2+ tons and have 3-foot deep cement foundations.

Cost

- ***Purchasing an APT***— In 2001, the public health department identified a well regarded, New Zealand-based APT manufacturer that would sell its product directly to the City of Cambridge. Approx. cost: US \$90,000 (based on a 2001 estimate). The company guarantees parts and equipment for 12 months. Service and maintenance is not included. A U.S. distributorship is located in Smyrna, Georgia.
- ***Leasing an APT***—A street furniture companies may be willing to lease their toilets to the city for \$50,000 to \$65,000 a year (based on a 2001 estimate). This fee includes full maintenance and service.
- ***Advertising agreement***—A street furniture company would install and maintain APTs in Cambridge at no cost to the city in return for the exclusive right to display advertising on the toilets and other street furniture. Some cities have also negotiated fixed annual fees and percentages of annual advertising revenues. Standard length of contract: 20 years.