

Downtown Ann Arbor Public Restroom Pilot
Frequently Asked Questions
October 2023

Why do we need more public restrooms downtown?

- Public restroom access is a basic human need. For all people to enjoy spending time downtown, from a parent with their toddler to a visitor in a wheelchair, this basic need must be met.
- At the peak of the pandemic, limitations on indoor operations called attention to the lack of stand-alone public restrooms for those working, visiting, and living unhoused downtown.
- The City Administrator hosted Downtown Listening Sessions in the summer of 2022; the top issue was the lack of public restrooms in the downtown area.

Why a pilot?

A pilot allows data to inform next steps. Prior to implementation of a Bikeway loop downtown, concerns regarding safety, level of use, and business health were shared. Data collection and public engagement during the pilot made the project better. Today, the Bikeway is [improving safety](#) for all users and well used, with nearly 40,000 bikes counted in September 2023.

What is the desired outcome/goals?

The overarching goal is to provide a safe & dignified public restroom option for all people regardless of ability, gender, race, housing status, culture, and age. Pilot success will be measured in the following areas:

- A public restroom that is welcoming and easily accessible to all people
- A public restroom that is a well-used amenity that adds to the downtown experience and overall vibrancy
- A public restroom that is inclusive and responsibly managed
- A clean and reliable public restroom that people would be happy to use more than once

The desired outcome for the pilot period is to help us determine where and how we install public restrooms downtown to meet these goals, including the needed infrastructure and service. The final recommended option could include the Throne to provide both infrastructure and service or a different combination of model and service option.

What public restroom model has been selected for the pilot and why?

Following downtown stakeholder sessions in summer 2022, the City Administrators Office convened an internal team to address the desire for more public restrooms downtown. Through this work, the [Throne](#) was selected as the pilot restroom option ([watch a short video about the unit here](#)).

Features: The Throne provides a gender neutral, ADA accessible model with baby changing stations in each unit. In addition, we have asked the Throne to provide signage in braille, a sharps container, and menstrual products in compliance with the [Sanitation Supplies in Public Restrooms Ordinance](#).

To implement public restrooms in the short term, a turnkey option is needed. Without an existing service model, it is important to pilot an option that includes service. The Throne was the only option that provided high-quality public restroom infrastructure and corresponding service. Details about service and maintenance provided by Throne are outlined below.

Infrastructure work for the pilot is minimal compared to other options as Throne restrooms do not require water or sewer connection. This flexibility allows us to pilot a high-quality restroom in different locations without investing in significant infrastructure.

How many Throne units will be piloted downtown?

There will be two Throne units piloted in three different downtown areas.

How long is the pilot?

The goal is to begin piloting the Throne in summer 2024. The pilot will be a temporary installation for approximately one year so that we can test a stand-alone public restroom option through all seasons and a range of downtown activities. Some locations may be tested for shorter periods of time.

How much does the Throne cost?

The Throne charges a base fee of \$24,000 per unit + \$1,000 - \$5,000 per month to service the unit. The monthly service fee depends on how often the Throne is used in that month. Overall, the Throne Pilot cost will range from \$36,000 - \$84,000 per unit. We do not anticipate installing more than two units downtown during the pilot period.

How do you access a Throne public restroom?

There are three ways individuals can access a Throne (watch [30 second demo video here](#)). The most common method is text-to-enter. Users scan a QR code that pre-populates a text that is sent to open the door. If an individual does not have a smartphone, they can text "Throne" to the phone number on the unit. Frequent users can download the app that helps users find nearby Thrones and provides real time cleanliness ratings from other users. Lastly, for those without reliable access to a phone, Throne works with local service providers to distribute tap cards that maintain accountability without requiring a phone. The Throne's unique access mechanisms help ensure responsible restroom usage. If the Throne's data sensors, staff, or customer reports indicate that a restroom has been mistreated, the associated user may have their access revoked. Access can be restored through an appeals process.

What level of service/maintenance does the Throne provide?

Throne provides a turnkey solution for the City. This includes:

- On-going monitoring and as-needed service. Throne reports that Data sensors and user feedback ensure conditions remain satisfactory and any issues are quickly addressed.
- Cleaning approx. 30-50 uses or as needed
- Pumping approx. 220 uses or as needed
- Field tech support
- All paper goods & soap
- Throne repair and replacement

What other cities have used the Throne?

Throne has worked with multiple cities in the Washington, DC area including Fairfax (VA), Hyattsville (MD), Mount Rainier (MD) as well as business improvement districts, private businesses and schools in the District of Columbia and Arlington (VA).

How will you select a pilot(s) location?

The DDA formed a Downtown Public Restroom Work Group to recommend the public restroom goals and the pilot placement analysis and evaluation criteria.

The Work Group is made up of:

- Ann Arbor District Library Director
- City of Ann Arbor Commission on Disability Issues representatives (2)
- City of Ann Arbor Director of Organizational Equity
- City of Ann Arbor DDA Executive Director
- City of Ann Arbor Public Services Area Administrator and Chief of Staff
- Downtown Business District Association Directors
 - Main Street
 - State Street
- Shelter Association of Washtenaw County Executive Director

The Work Group helped inform:

Pilot placement analysis: Before the pilot can be installed, we need to determine where the Throne can physically fit, major destinations, and areas of need. The Work Group helped set the criteria that our consultant used to find feasible pilot locations.

Evaluation criteria: The Work Group also helped set program goals and metrics to measure the pilot against.

The Ann Arbor Police Department was also consulted.

Who will approve the pilot cost and implementation?

Any purchase over \$75,000 requires approval by the DDA Board or City Council, depending upon the funding source. As part of this approval step, DDA and City staff will include the Work Group recommendations for goals and evaluation criteria.

How can I provide input into the pilot?

Once the pilot is installed, quantitative and qualitative data will be collected to understand how well the pilot is meeting stated goals. This will include an opportunity for broader public feedback.

Additional Information

<https://www.thronelabs.co/>

<https://ggwash.org/view/75209/yes-we-need-more-public-restrooms-in-dc-but-how-do-we-make-them-usuable-for-everyone>

<https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2016/7/1/public-bathrooms>

https://www.recpro.org/assets/Conference_Proceedings/2019/Presentations/2019%20NORC%20A%20Cholo.pdf

<https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/get-involved/be-an-advocate/restroom-access>