

Urine, excrement are on our streets — so why not add a public toilet to Cesar Chavez Park? | The Sacramento Bee

EDITORIALS

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BY THE SACRAMENTO BEE EDITORIAL BOARD

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Great news for people sick of navigating fetid minefields of human urine and excrement on downtown Sacramento streets: The Sacramento City Council is poised to approve a new restroom facility in Cesar Chavez Park.

Homeless advocates have argued in favor of a public restroom for years. The park had one until 2015. Now, Chavez Park — “one of the oldest park spaces in the state, established by John Sutter in 1849” — is [poised to get its own](#) state-of-the-art “Portland Loo” style restroom, according to The Bee’s Theresa Clift.

Public restrooms don’t get much better than the “Portland Loo.” Billing itself as “designed for the city, by the city,” the ultra-sleek and modern toilet has received rave reviews around the nation. According to the manufacturer’s website, the toilet is designed to resist vandalism, crime and deterioration. The toilets have even become tourist attractions in Portland, where cameos on the IFC show “Portlandia” boosted their [iconic status](#).

They can be configured to run on solar power. Their unique steel-slat design ensures privacy while enabling police to detect how many people are inside. They can even be outfitted with blue lighting that allegedly makes it hard for heroin addicts to locate veins.

When it comes to addressing city life's grittiest problems, it would seem the potty makers of Portland have thought of everything. The City Council is expected to approve purchase of the freestanding toilet, or one of its competitors, tonight.

Not everyone is a fan. The Downtown Sacramento Partnership thinks a new public restroom is unnecessary and will only attract more crime and problems. The organization won't support the new toilet unless it's staffed by a full-time attendant – which would drive the price even higher than the hefty \$360,000 needed to buy, install and run one.

Others, like Sacramento Public Library Director Rivkah Sass, support the new toilet.

“If we're going to be a full-service city, we have to offer places for people to go,” said Sass. “Public restrooms are really a civic responsibility.”

She's right. Access to toilets is a basic necessity of both human dignity and public health. When you've gotta go, you've gotta go. It's not only homeless people who use public doorways, stairwells, sidewalks and alleys as toilets when nature calls and there's no toilet in sight. Public toilets serve everyone. And while there's always a chance that a new toilet could attract more crime and nuisance, a city without toilets is crappy.

Last year, a city report revealed that Sacramento has a startling lack of access to public toilets in the central city, especially after-hours. As we wrote at the time: “The public policy response should be obvious: Open more restrooms that are available all day, every day — and do it immediately.”

The residents and workers of downtown deserve better than excrement stains on the sidewalk and a situation so unsanitary it puts them at risk of contracting Hepatitis A. It's time to try something new. Public restrooms have worked elsewhere. Why not here?

We understand that some people in our city wish to make downtown Sacramento as unfriendly as possible to homeless people in the hopes that they'll go elsewhere. They want downtown to be home of the Kings, not home of the homeless.

But let's reflect on the words of Cesar Chavez, for whom the park is named: "We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community ... Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own."