

## **Public restroom downtown, specifically Portland Loos, discussed by councilors**

By Terri Harber Roswell Daily Record Apr 9, 2024

During last week's special meeting of the Roswell City Council, before councilors chose a site for the new skate park, there was a presentation and discussion about Portland Loos, outdoor restrooms designed for use in parks and other high-traffic public areas.

While some councilors weren't on board with the idea, mostly because of budget constraints, it was noted by Councilor Cristina Arnold that the presentation was simply for education and not something that required a council decision then and there.

Arnold suggested that the idea be the topic of a council workshop after discussion about it during the February meeting of the Infrastructure Committee. It was added to the special meeting agenda for information only.

Problems arose about 20 years ago after the city of Seattle's purchase of high-tech toilets purported to be self-cleaning. They became magnets for drug use and prostitution. The cost for those restrooms averaged about \$1 million each and they had to be removed within about a year.

The city of Portland, Oregon wanted to avoid similar troubles so they developed their own type of toilet facility, Madden said: "Focus is on the person who has to clean and supervise it."

And for the person who needs to use the restroom, it's not supposed to be comfortable but is simply meant to serve its specific purpose as a restroom.

The top and bottom of the structure are louvered so there's much less privacy than allowed inside a building a conventional structure or even from behind the tall polyurethane plastic door of a portable restroom. It's easy to clean and has coated, rounded wall panels that are difficult to vandalize.

And steel makes these loos "strong and durable." Madden said.

"They are very solid," Arnold said after last week's discussion among the city's elected officials about the steel loos. She was able to locate one in Albuquerque.

"We have a lot more important things to focus on," said Councilor Will Cavin. "Firefighters, police officers ... The backbone of our city."

The ongoing cost to keep it available needs to be made clear, Cavin also said.

Councilor Darrell Johnson said he also has issues with the potential cost and stressed that the loo would need significant maintenance.

The company states on its website that the Portland Loos actually in Portland are cleaned between two and five times daily.

Arnold said the restroom — which would likely cost more than \$200,000 to purchase and install — should be paid for with Lodgers Tax.

“I’m up in the air about this,” said Councilor Juan Oropesa.

Oropesa said he wondered how much use the restroom would receive at 2 a.m.

Downtown business owners are asking for things "that bring people in and create revenue," Arnold told opponents.

Adding a public restroom — or restrooms — downtown has been an idea swirling around for some time. Councilor Juliana Halvorson has been interested in addressing the problem as well. She chairs the city’s Public Safety Committee.

Both Arnold and Halvorson have stated that the lack of restrooms downtown continues to be a major concern for businesses there. The topic came up once again during the public forum about local homelessness that Halvorson hosted this past October.

Much time was spent with people expressing their frustrations, including business owners. That conversation during the forum resulted in a local company offering two portable restrooms. One was placed on each side of North Main Street between Third and Fourth streets: One behind Reischman Park and the other in the back of Stellar Coffee. One ended up being set on fire within several days of being set up, however. A councilor retold the story during the meeting last week.

Arnold said the site being considered for the restroom is at Reischman Park, accessible from North Main Street, between West Third and Fourth streets, and where one of the portable toilets had been placed.

Those opposed or undecided about the city constructing a Portland Loo or some other type of public restroom downtown pointed to the plan for a restroom to be part of the Roswell Cultural Plaza. The outdoor event and entertainment venue will be two blocks east of the Chaves County Courthouse. But those facilities will be within the plaza, behind a locked fence, and available only when the site is being used. So those restrooms won’t be accessible at other times, according to Chaves County and MainStreet Roswell, the major partners involved with the project. The city opted out of its role as the financial agent last year but is still involved with the process.

Portland Loo’s website lists some specific groups who would use its product among the general population: Not only homeless people but tourists, visitors, and those exercising outdoors, such as runners and cyclists. Seniors can require public restrooms, especially if they deal with medical issues that affect their body functions.