

## Asheville's new public bathroom is open for business

By Laura Hackett

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A handful of Asheville leaders and community members celebrated a shiny new piece of city infrastructure: a state-of-the-art \$400,000 toilet.

Instead of a ribbon cutting, community leaders cut a roll of bright pink toilet paper on Thursday to ceremoniously open Asheville's new 24-hour public bathroom at the corner of Rankin Avenue and College Street.

The downtown toilet project has been in the works for years and was originally set to open this summer. Hurricane Helene further delayed the bathroom's installation. Asheville City Council voted to purchase the public bathroom earlier this year with American Rescue Plan Act funds as a solution for downtown's dearth of 24/7 bathroom options.

The new loo, which is ADA-compliant, is spacious and made of big, graffiti-proof steel walls. It includes one toilet, a baby changing station, and a syringe disposal unit. It even has a name: The Portland Loo. The name comes from the Oregon city where government employees first designed it.

At the grand opening, city employee Jade Dundas said the toilet – unlike other public restrooms downtown – is built to withstand almost anything, requires less costly maintenance, and won't be out of order due to frozen pipes.

"We chose this type of toilet because of its ability to withstand use," he said. Unlike most public bathrooms in the city, the loo has a heated pipe system that allows it to have running water year-round.

Councilmember Sage Turner also attended the toilet paper cutting. She supported the project in February and said she was pleased with the results.

"It's a 24/7 bathroom bringing dignity to downtown, cleaner sidewalks and hand washing 24/7. I love it," she said.

Prior to its installation, Turner said some people were using the bathroom on the streets, which led to public health issues.

"At the time we were hearing from lots of downtown businesses about what's called biohazard in the area," she said. "So this [project] was to both support the businesses growth, our infrastructure, and just offer a safe place for washing hands, things like sharps disposal and just the dignity of a private functioning bathroom."