

Why NYC's \$185k smart Portland Loos ended up costing \$1 million each and still saved millions

New York City has introduced a new wave of sleek, prefabricated public restrooms across its five boroughs, part of Mayor Eric Adams' ambitious "Ur In Luck" initiative to improve park bathroom access. While the new "Portland Loos" cost just \$185,000 per unit to manufacture, the total installation price came to nearly \$1 million each.

The extra \$815,000 is due to extensive infrastructure upgrades, including water and electrical line extensions, foundation work, and landscaping.

The new restrooms have been placed at Irving Square Park in Brooklyn, Joyce Kilmer Park in the Bronx, Thomas Jefferson Park in Manhattan, Hoyt Playground in Queens, and Father Macris Park in Staten Island.

These are part of a broader plan to build 46 new public restrooms and renovate 36 existing ones over the next five years.

Although the \$1 million cost per restroom may raise eyebrows, it's still far cheaper than the traditional restrooms typically built in NYC parks, which can run between \$3.5 and \$5 million.

This cost saving comes largely from the decision to use the Portland Loo, a prefabricated stainless-steel unit designed for durability, safety, and easy maintenance.

The Looses are manufactured by Madden Fabrication in Portland, Oregon, and arrive at the site nearly complete, reducing the on-site construction time and cost.

The Portland Loo design includes safety features such as grating at the top and bottom for visibility and ventilation, graffiti-resistant walls, exterior hand-washing stations, and solar panel compatibility.

They're ADA-accessible, family-friendly, and designed to operate in all seasons with full utility hookups. Despite their smart design, the Loos are intentionally low-tech inside to discourage misuse and reduce the likelihood of maintenance issues.

Evan Madden, CEO of Madden Fabrication, told amNY that working with New York City posed unique challenges due to complex regulations and review processes, including requiring a Department of Buildings-approved fabricator. Overcoming these bureaucratic hurdles contributed to the project's final cost.

Mayor Adams said the importance of the project in making the city's public spaces more accessible and enjoyable. "Let's be honest, when nature calls, New Yorkers shouldn't have to cut their fun short," he said in the press brief.

"These new, sleek bathrooms will ensure New Yorkers can spend more time in parks without worrying about where to go when they have to go."

The city has also added a new layer to Google Maps to help residents locate public restrooms more easily.

This initiative comes in response to the city's long-standing bathroom shortage, currently offering only one public restroom for every 7,800 residents. The goal is to increase that number to one for every 2,000 residents within the next decade.