

## Petition to provide public restrooms in Downtown Chapel Hill

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Submitted by BuildUp, CEF, NEXT, & IFC

Downtown Chapel Hill is a public restroom desert. There are very few 24/7, centrally located, well-maintained/well-lit restrooms that do not require someone to make a purchase to use it (the best practice description of a public rest room amenity) in downtown Chapel Hill [See Swayne et al., 2023) to discuss tools for holistic picture of public restroom access].

The lack of access to public restrooms impacts all people, with particular concern for groups such as people experiencing homelessness (Hochbaum, 2020; Maroko et al., 2021), people with periods (Maroko et al., 2021; Hartigan et al., 2020), and transit operators (Sarles & Gillespie, 2020). Public restrooms help to prevent spread of disease, including hepatitis A, shigellosis, and influenza. (Amato et al., 2022; Greed., 2006; Swayne et al., 2023), through access to handwashing (Burton et al., 2011) and toilet paper (Hughes, 1988), and promote well-being (Sclar et al, 2018.; Human Rights Watch, 2017). Availability of accessible public restrooms reduces outdoor defecation, minimizing the potential spread of disease (Amato et al., 2022). Consequences of “holding it” include urinary tract infections, incontinence, kidney stones; and humiliation (Hartigan et al., 2020). Public toilets also encourage tourism by allowing people to visit public places for longer (Webber, 2018).



Figure 1 Public Restroom in Bar Harbor, Maine

When assessing public restroom access, Swayne and colleagues (2023) utilize three tools to investigate sanitation justice through the development of a database of locations of public bathrooms, assessment of the quality of the restroom, and perception of the restrooms by public users. Corradi and colleagues (2020) also suggest a scale of privacy, ease of use, and cleanliness in accessing existing public restrooms.

Right now in Chapel Hill, aside from the poorly maintained and situated Wallace Deck facility, people waiting for the bus, people shopping, people walking through town, people visiting for sports and other UNC events have no place to use a restroom that is free, well-maintained, easy to locate,

and available 24/7. Public restrooms are public amenities. Many towns proudly provide these amenities to their residents and visitors.

We commend town staff for their creation of a public restroom report (Town of Chapel Hill, 2019). In 2019, the Town of Chapel Hill brought together representatives from key local organizations (ex. Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness, The Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership, the Chamber of Commerce, Chapel Hill Police Department) to study and make recommendations on how to move forward to create accessible restroom facilities for our community. A 150-page report was created with considerations that included location, affordability, accessibility, hygiene products, maintenance, and information about community services. You can [view the report here](#).



Figure 2 Public Restroom Signage in Bar Harbor, Maine



We request that the Town Council act on that report. We request that the town move forward with a plan to provide at least four public restrooms in downtown Chapel Hill. We request that these public amenities adhere to best practices including being in well-traveled areas, centrally located, well-maintained, well-supplied with hygiene products to support public health, and well-lit.

We request that, in the interim, a plan be implemented to compensate local businesses in the downtown corridor to provide their restrooms free of charge as public amenities.

Figure 3 Public Restroom in Bryant Park, NYC, with Signage to Other Facilities

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