

# *Can't Hold It?* *Urine Luck!* Midtown Public Bathroom Access



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Manhattan Community Board 5



# Issue Significance

## Homelessness

As of June 2023, over 100,000 New Yorkers were staying in shelters, with thousands more living unsheltered on the streets — including nearly 19,000 families with children. This marks NYC's **highest level of homelessness since the Great Depression**. CB5 has the greatest number population of homeless individuals in Manhattan.

"Homeless people experience urinary tract issues and related health problems at a rate **300% higher** than the general population, and many suffer from extreme dehydration because they never drink water to minimize trips to the bathroom"

*Picture the Homeless 2018*



# Issue Significance

## Migrants

"Over 130,600 migrants have arrived in New York City since 2022 and the City is using a landmarked former hotel within CB5 as its primary migrant intake center" as well as several other Midtown hotels." Failure to properly house and accommodate migrants/refugees is exacerbating issue of homelessness.

## Quality of Life / Public Health

From its statement of needs CB5 wishes "to see improvements in cleanliness through effective waste management and sanitation services to create a more pleasant environment throughout the District."





## Problem Statement

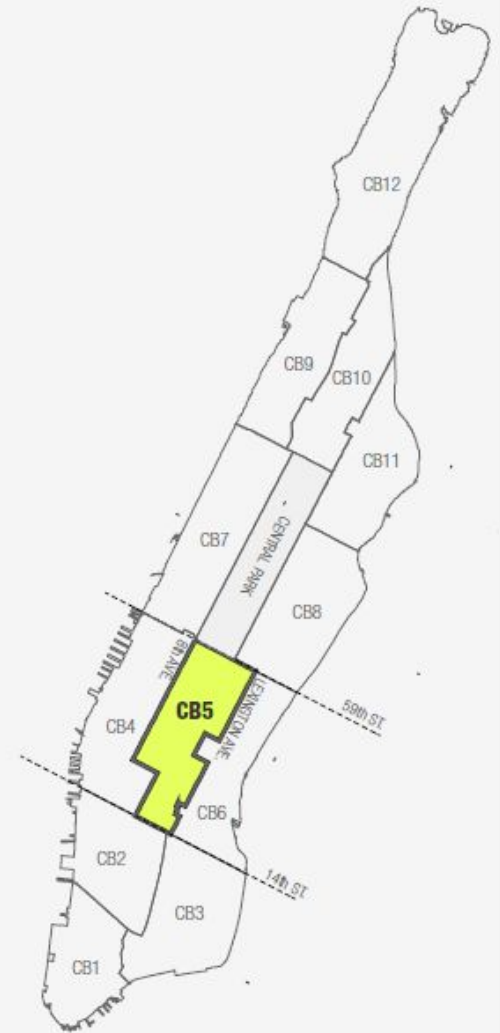
There are not enough clean and regularly and clearly usable bathrooms in Manhattan Community District 5, an area with very heavy foot traffic, not only of residents but also tourists. Homeless New Yorkers suffer the most under this lack.

## Research Questions

Where are the restrooms available to the public in Manhattan Community District 5?

What conditions are these restrooms in and what standards do they meet or fail to meet? Who owns and maintains them?

Where should new restrooms be proposed to fill the gaps in access and what amenities are important for some or each to include?



# Scope of Work

Compile a list of documented publicly available bathrooms

Conduct an the ground survey to assess these restrooms

Propose improvements for ADA accessibility and amenities that can serve wider needs

Create comprehensive map of CB5's restrooms that is easy to update in the future

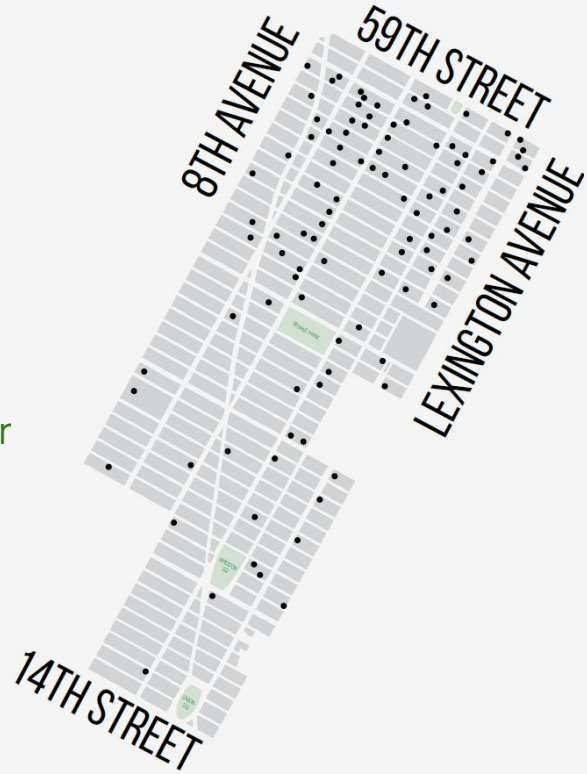
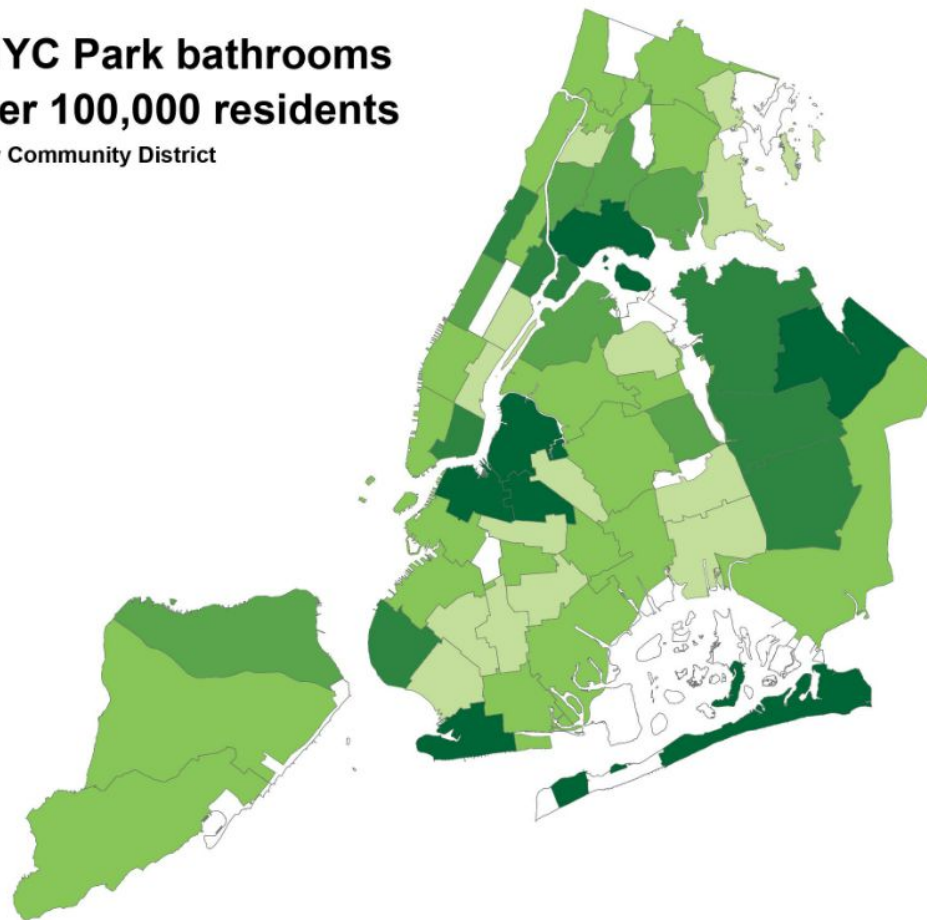


Chart 6: NYC Parks bathrooms per 100,000 residents, by Community District



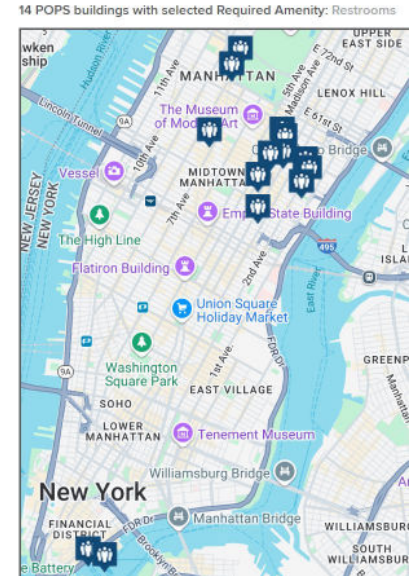
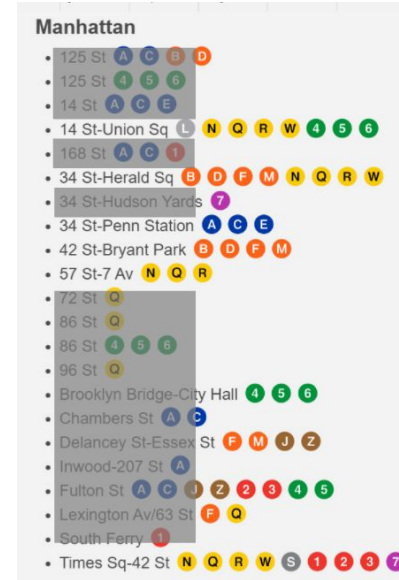
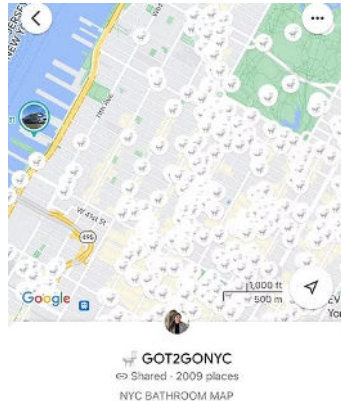
## NYC Park bathrooms per 100,000 residents

By Community District



# Methodology: Identifying Public Restrooms

- CB5'S Website and personal GMaps Layer
- Mayor's Office "Ur In Luck" 2024 GMaps layer
- MTA's list of stations with bathrooms
- Park's list of facilities with bathrooms
- Libraries within district
- Map of POPS with bathrooms
- GOT2GO GMaps layer



# Methodology: Info to Glean through Foot Surveys

## Features

- Handle rail to stand up
- Hanging hooks
- Trashcan
- Menstrual product disposal
- Changing table
- Soap
- Paper towels or dryers
- Number of stalls/ accessible stalls





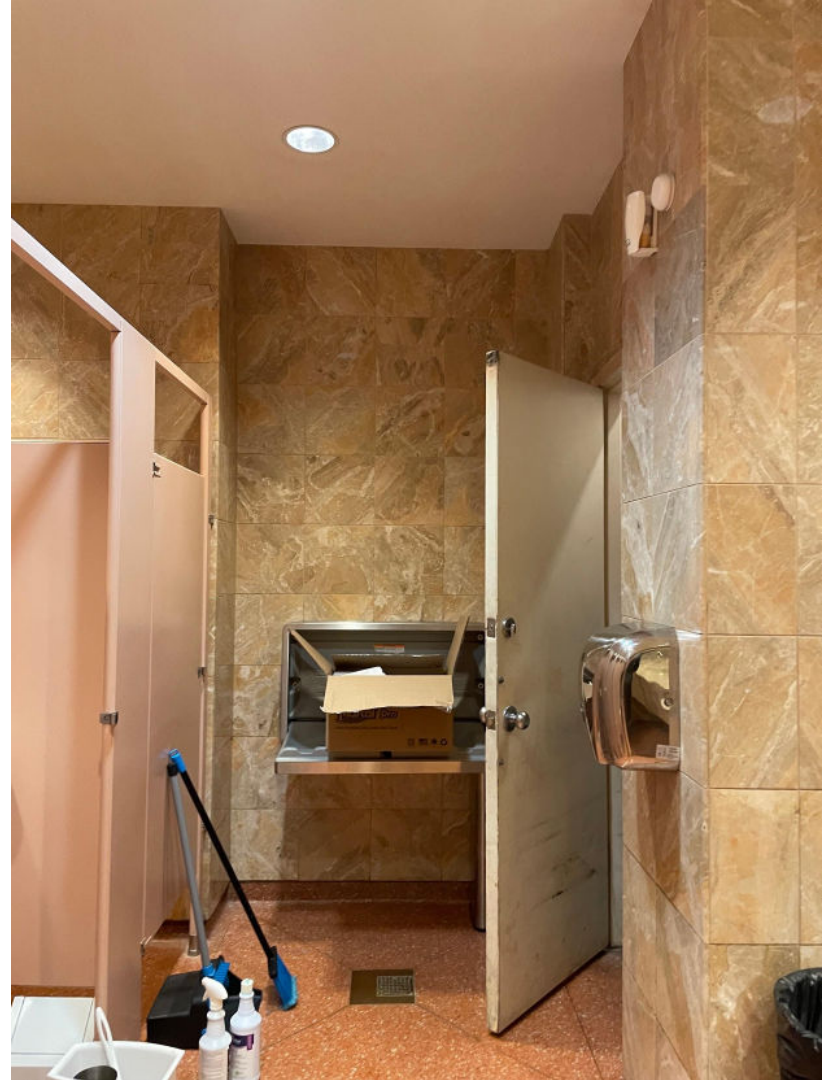
# Info to Glean through Foot Surveys

## Labor

- Frequency of maintenance
- Shift duration
- Do you get breaks/ how long
- Sitting allowed?

## Permissible Use

- Sink use types
- Gender segregation and enforcement
- Specific instructions from management on who isn't welcome here?



# Running Location List

## Parks

- Union Sq Park
- Evelyn's Playground
- Bryant Park
- Herald Square Park
- Greeley Square Park
- Madison Square Park APT  
(Operated by DOT)



## POPS (Privately Owned Public Space)

- 645 Fifth Avenue
- 575 Fifth Avenue
- 55 East 52nd Street
- 550 Madison Avenue
- 725 Fifth Avenue
- 120 Park Avenue



## Subways

- Penn Station LIRR
- Penn Station MTA
- 14th St Union Sq
- 42nd Bryant Park
- 42nd St Times Sq
- Grand Central (Metro North)  
LIRR Restroom
- Grand Central MTA
- 57th St-7av NQR
- 34th St Herald Sq



## Drop in Centers

- Antonio Olivieri Center
- Mainchance Drop-In Center



## Libraries

- Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library
- Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library
- Stephen A. Schwarzman Building
- 53rd Street Library
- 58th Street Library

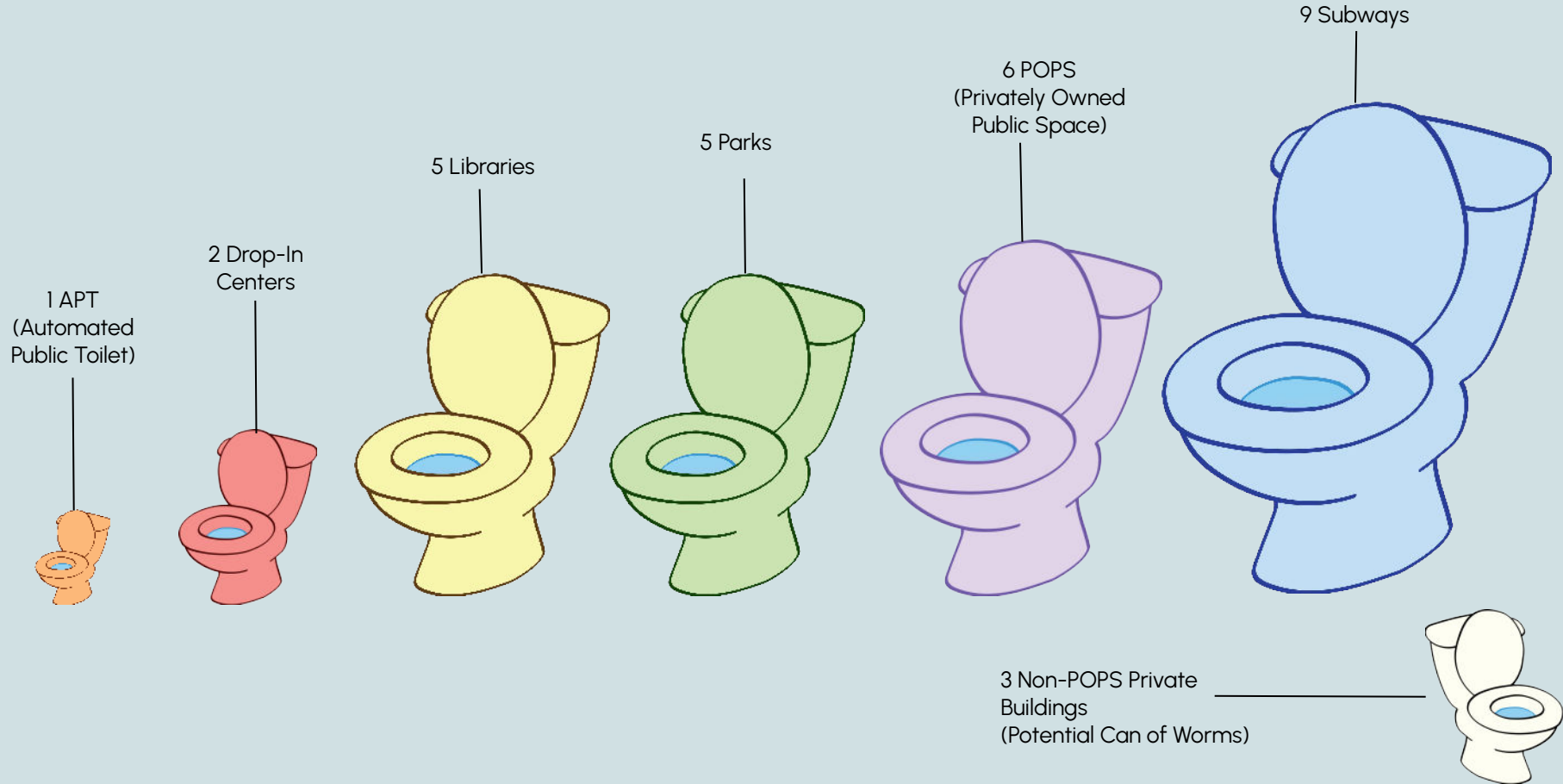


## Other Private (Non POPS)

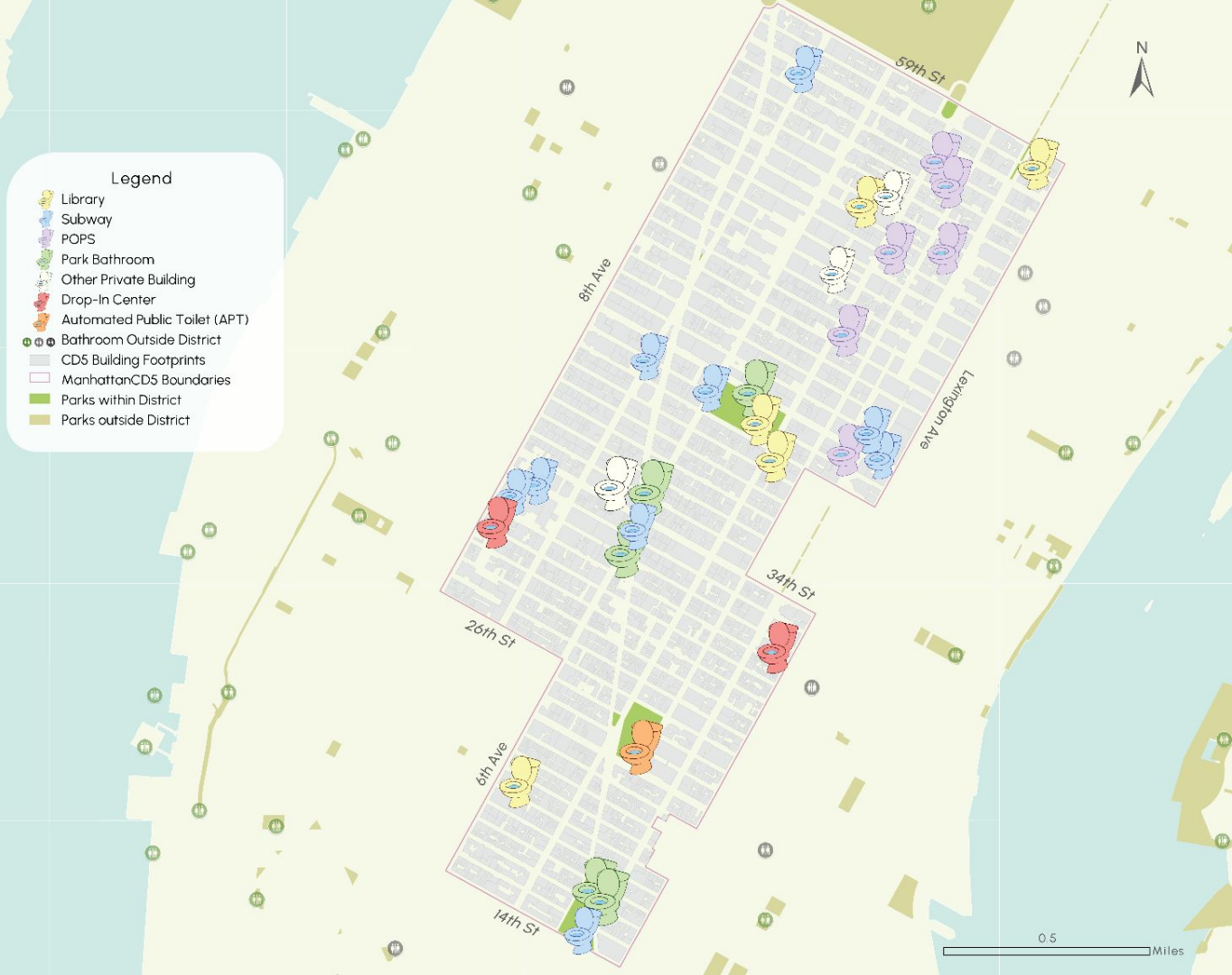
- St Thomas Church 53rd St
- Macy's 34th St
- Rockefeller Center



# Restroom Numbers



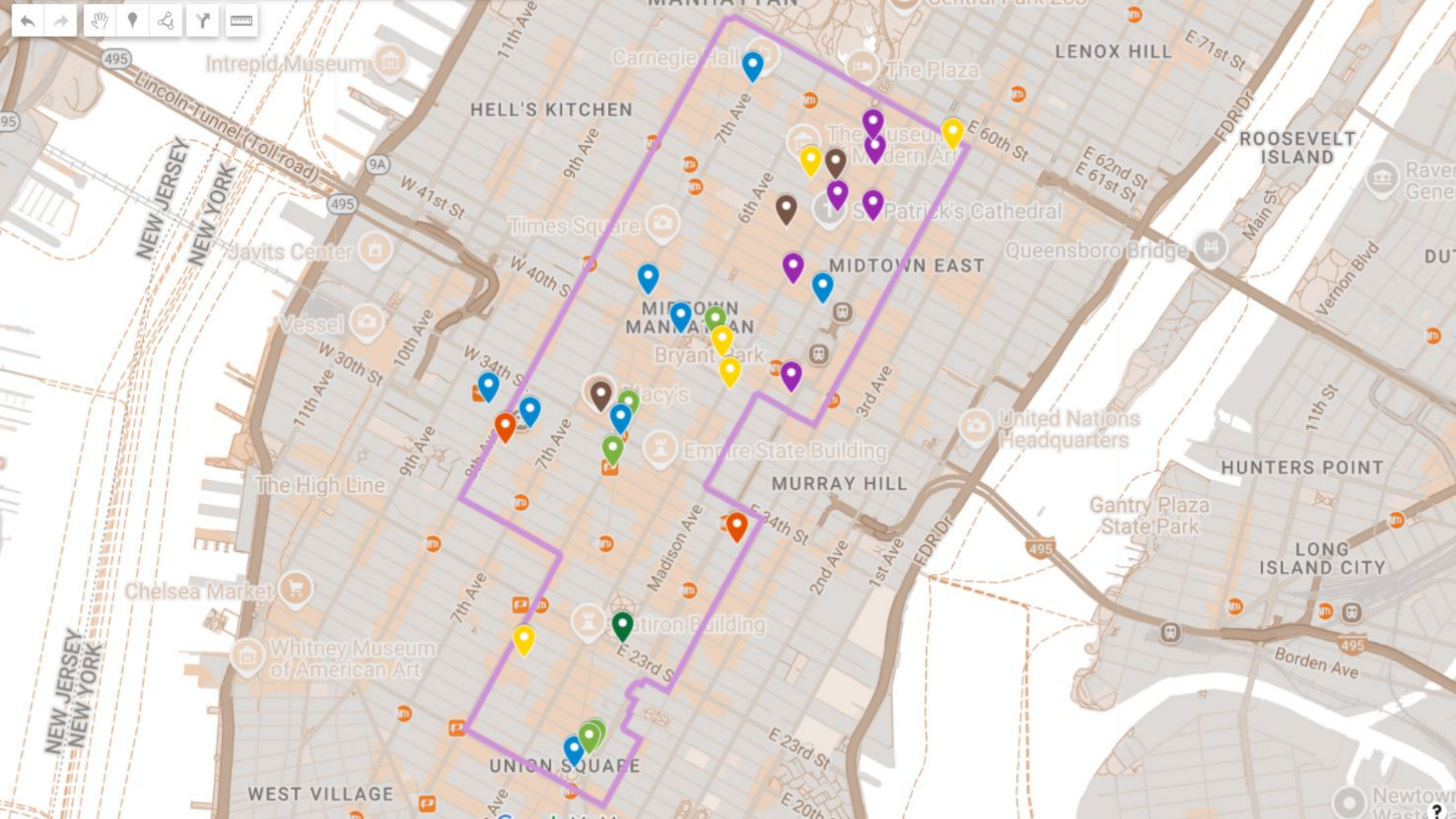
# Public Restroom Locations and Types



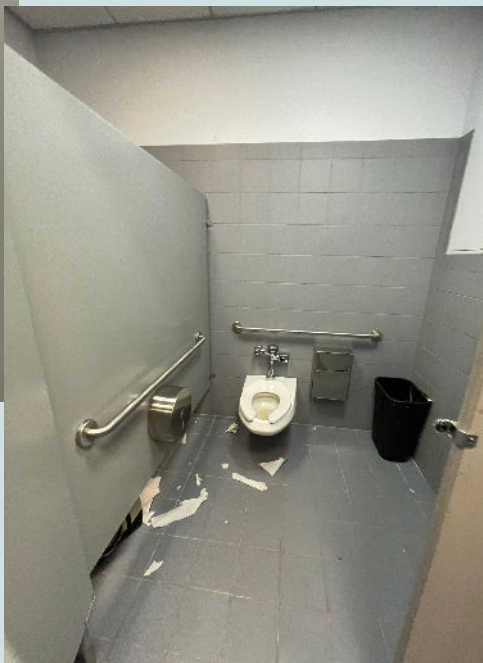
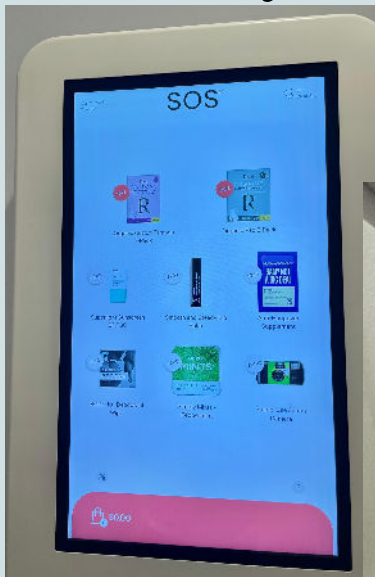


# Public Restroom Locations and Types









# Madison Square APT

- 23rd and Madison outside the park
- Operated by DOT
- Technically 24/7
- 15 minute limit
- One stall
- Red light indicating occupied on for who knows how long
- Quarter exclusive access
- Urine smell downwind





# Evelyn's Playground



Tru

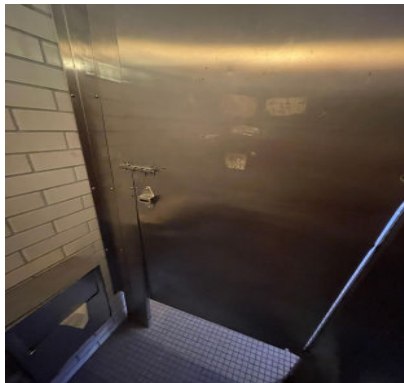








# Union Sq Park





# Bryant Park- BID managed



## RESTROOM RULES



You are welcome to...

- use this facility at any hour the park is open
- follow instructions from security officers and staff members
- enjoy the restrooms free of charge; tips are not accepted
- request complimentary feminine products from staff
- make use of the baby changing station
- respect staff and fellow patrons in our shared space

Park guidelines prohibit...

- smoking and spitting
- bathing, shaving, and tooth brushing
- loitering
- laundering of personal belongings
- standing on sinks or toilets
- changing clothes
- obstructing entrances and breaking the queue
- shopping carts, bicycles, or large bags/luggage

# Times Square Station





# Times Square Station



# Antonio Olivieri Drop In Center

Drop in resource and shelter for  
homeless individuals to take a shower,  
use bathroom, or spend the night

Not open to housed folks to use the  
bathroom

Almost always full

They tell others to use Penn Station  
restrooms

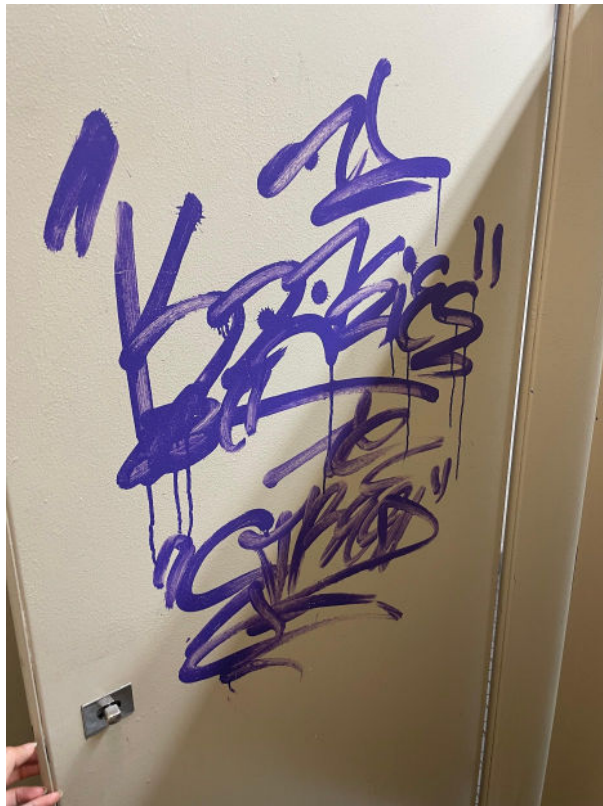




# 14th St Union Sq Station



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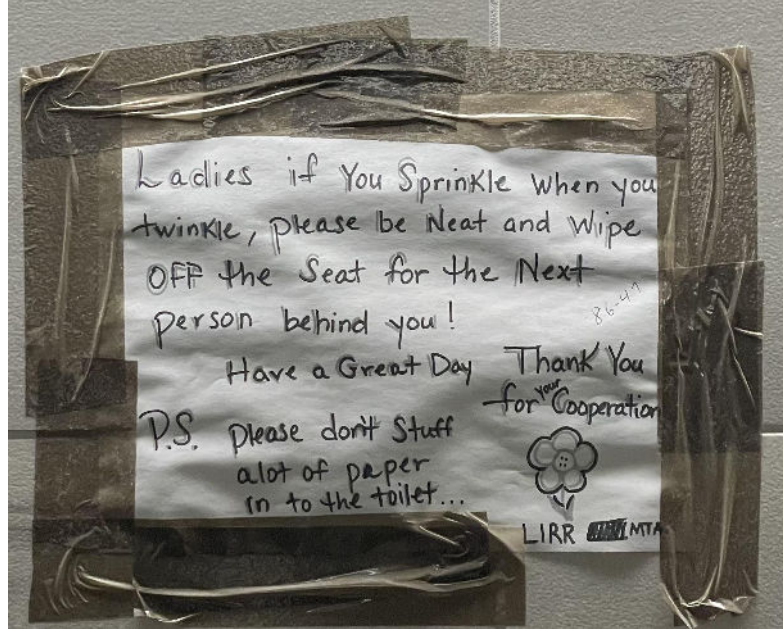




# Penn Station



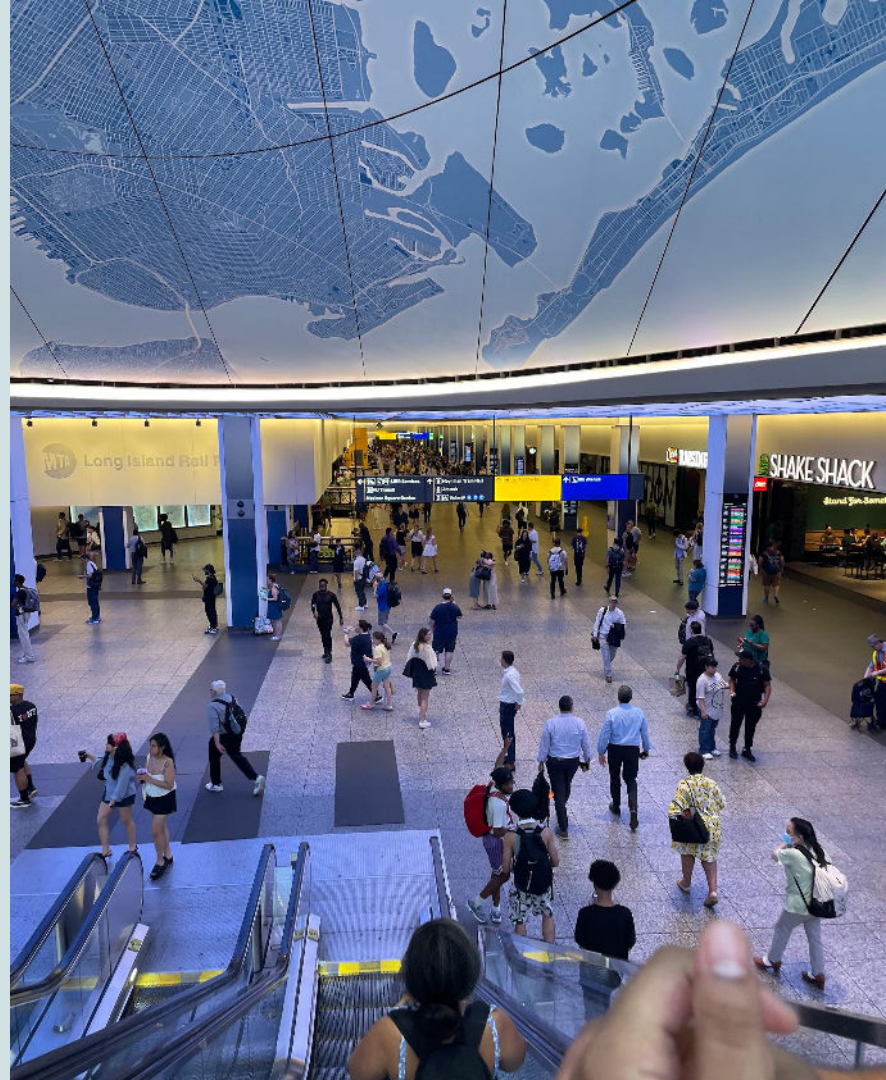
# Penn Station





# Survey Limitations

- Not permitted to visit "Men's" restrooms
- Likely inconsistent treatment
- Seasonal variation in restroom availability
- Service workers not always present or willing to speak



# Survey Takeaways

- BID managed restrooms are clearly the cleanest park facilities
- Balance between cleanliness and worker conditions
  - Long shifts, very short breaks, sitting restricted
  - Questions about wages
- Homeless inclusion varies by management and worker ideology





# Survey Takeaways

- No true 24/7 restrooms
- Wayfinding often difficult
- No free menstrual products thus far
- Gaps from gender segregation
- Many POPS with restroom capacity

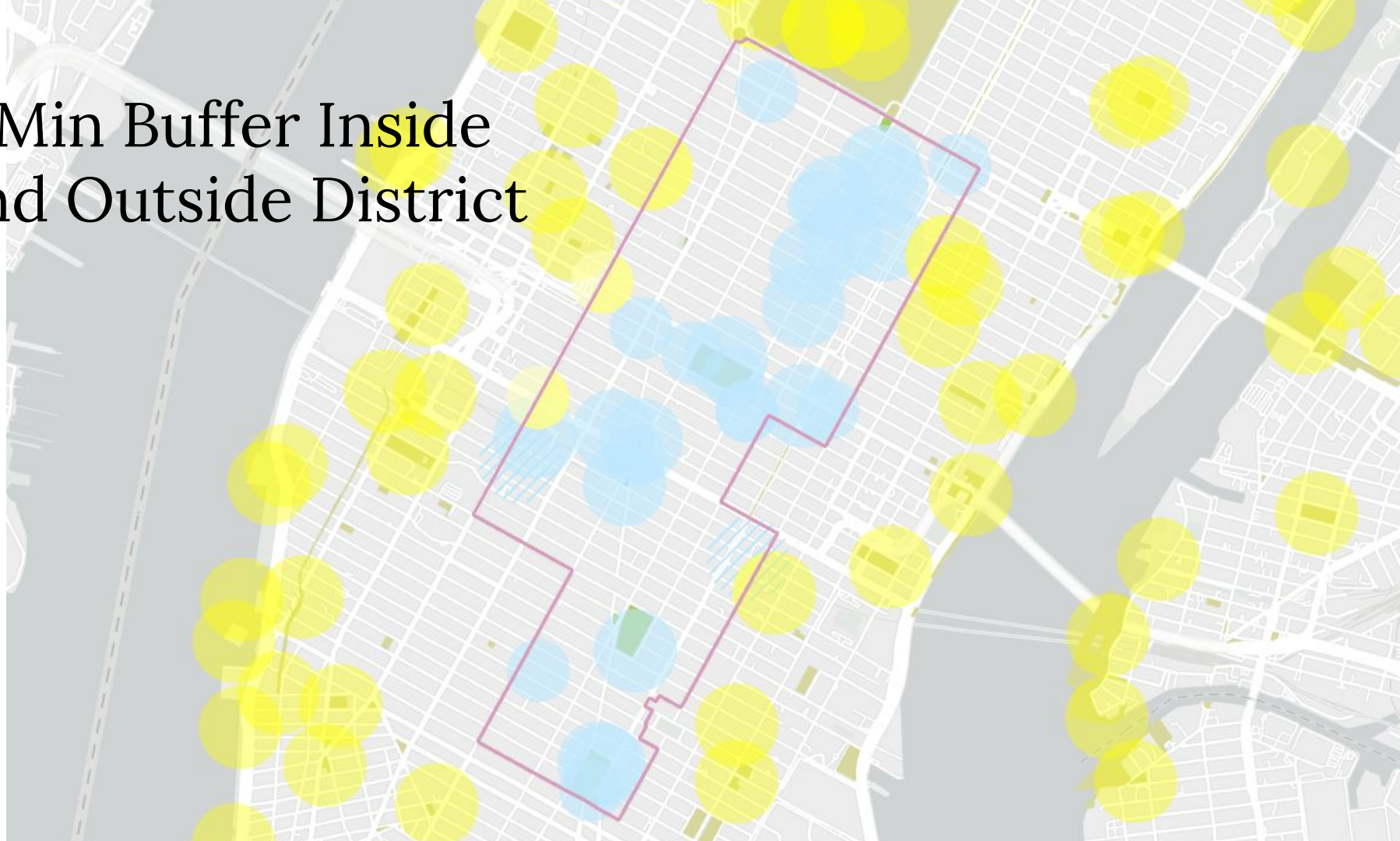




# Finding Access Gaps with a 3 Minute Walk Buffer



3 Min Buffer Inside  
and Outside District







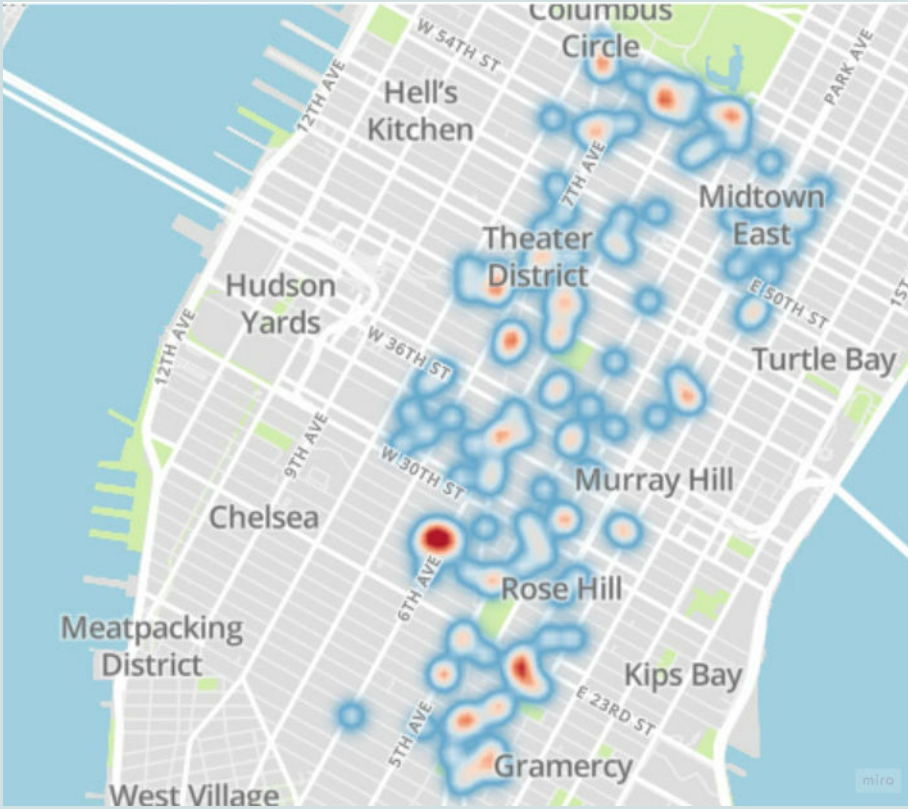


Midtown  
South

Murray Hill

Madison  
Square Park

# CD5 311 Complaints Mapped

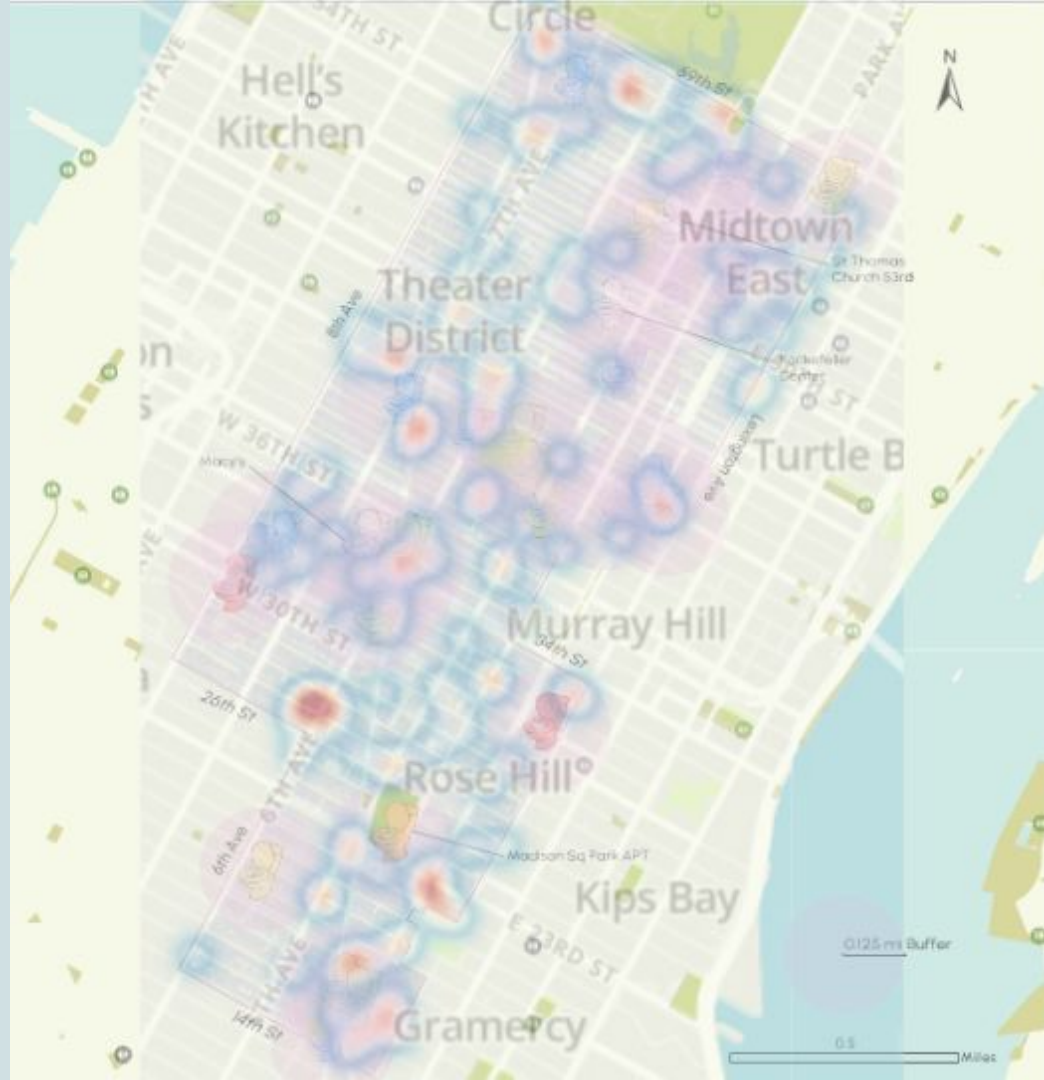


Public Urination Complaints  
January 2020 to April 2025



'Homeless Street Condition' Complaints  
January 2020 to April 2025

# Potential Opportunities For New Restrooms





# Legislation

*Food service establishments with 20+ seats opened after 1977 must provide a toilet for its customers.*

*Ur In Luck Mayor's Office 2024: 82 New and Refurbished Restrooms Will Come Online Citywide in Next Five Years, City Will Site 14 Additional Automatic Public Toilets in Next Two Years*

VICTORY!! If Adams approves..  
"The 1:2,000 ratio would make New York City a global leader in public bathrooms. (It is currently ranked 93rd among the 100 largest cities in the United States"

## Recent and Pending Public Bathroom Legislation in New York City

Bill	Sponsor	Date	Summary
<b>Local Law 117 of 2021</b>	Councilmember Carlina Rivera	Enacted 10/24/21	This bill would require that food delivery applications include a provision in contracts with restaurants requiring them to make their toilet facilities available for delivery workers' use, as long as the delivery worker seeks to access the facilities while picking up a food or beverage order for delivery.
<b>Local Law 114 of 2022</b>	Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine, Councilmember Rita Joseph	Enacted 11/27/22	This law requires the City to find at least one feasible location for a new bathroom in every ZIP code. The law also requires the City to work with Community Boards and the public about new bathroom locations and submit their report to the Mayor and Speaker of the City Council no later than December 31, 2023 with the identified location in each ZIP code.
<b>Local Law 144 of 2023</b>	MBP Mark Levine, CM Rita Joseph	Enacted 11/05/23	This bill would require the City to inspect and issue a report on the conditions, features and current status of existing public bathrooms, and to make this information readily available on the open data portal and a website run by the City.
<b>Intro 1076</b>	MBP Mark Levine, CM Rita Joseph	Proposed 06/08/23	This bill would require the City to open ADA accessible bathrooms in publicly owned buildings across the City. Bathrooms that are on public property and paid for by taxpayers should be open to the public.
<b>Intro 1077</b>	MBP Mark Levine, CM Rita Joseph	Proposed 06/08/23	This bill would require the City to develop a capital funding plan for the bathrooms that were identified in each zip code.
<b>Intro 1154</b>	Councilmember Sandy Nurse	Proposed 08/03/23	This bill would create a permanent, long-term strategic planning process for the establishment and maintenance of a citywide public bathroom network with the goal of providing 1 toilet per 2000 residents by 2035 and thereafter.

# Recommendations

- Commitment to pressure any future POPS applications to include bathrooms
- Incentives for commercial businesses to provide the public restroom access and include signage on their storefronts
- Design competitions to reduce to current staggering cost of restroom construction
- Interim bathroom trailers in public plazas before construction
- Divert funding to provide living wages to bathroom attendants with adequate breaks and opportunities to sit
- Expand hourly availability of restrooms



# To-Do

- Continue on the ground inspection
- Assess municipal buildings
- Change the script for future surveys / interviews
  - Assume less intimidating role
  - Include gender enforcement
  - Standardize questions
- Google sheets





# Conclusion

"The history of public restrooms parallels fights for social justice, from racially segregated bathrooms in the Jim-Crow era US South to the ongoing debate over transgender access to toilets today." -*Selina Xu Bloomberg 2022*

# Sources to ref

<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/discomfort-stations-the-conditions-and-availability-of-nyc-parks-bathrooms/> New York ranks 93 out of 100 large cities in the US for number of PARKs bathrooms per capita

Ur In Luck," Adams said the Parks Department will build 46 new public restrooms and renovate another 36 over the next five years.

The new restrooms will be added across each of the five boroughs, with 10 in the Bronx, 23 in Brooklyn, 28 in Manhattan, 14 in Queens and seven on Staten Island, Mayor Adams said.

Parks Department Commissioner Sue Donoghue said the city will be able to install the new restrooms faster and with less difficulty than in the past. That's due to a new "streamlined design," which she said makes the facilities easy and less expensive to install.

Additionally, Donoghue said, the restrooms will have a smaller building footprint; be built with simplified materials; and powered by electric heat instead of gas. The modular structures are built offsite, she said, which allows for installation with minimal disruptions to the surrounding communities.

# NYC POPS BATHROOMS, RATED



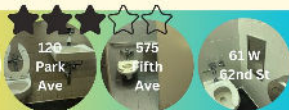
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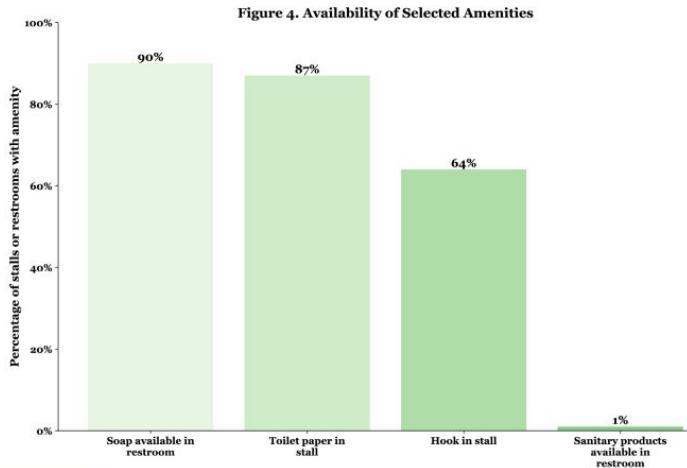
# Nature's call inspection of 51 restrooms

Did not survey midtown

Provide example of methodology

Assessment criteria: Status and Closures: Identification of restrooms that were Availability and functionality of baby changing stations, toilet paper, hand dryer, trash, and a cleanliness rating. Accessibility: Availability of accessible sign of hazards such as sharp objects, mold, poor lighting, tripping hazards, or pest

5 See Appendix B, Photos 3 and 4 for examples of differing restroom cleanliness ratings.



5 See Appendix B, Photos 3 and 4 for examples of differing restroom cleanliness ratings.

6 See Appendix B, Photo 5.

## NATURE'S CALL: AN ASSESSMENT OF NYC PARK RESTROOMS

### ACCESSIBILITY

#### 22. Is the bathroom accessible?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

#### 23. Select which, if any, are present:

- ☐ Signage indicating that the bathroom is accessible
- ☐ Grab bars
- ☐ Wheelchair accessible stall(s)
- ☐ Lowered amenities (sinks, soap dispensers, paper towel dispensers, etc.)

### SAFETY

#### 24. Select the hazards that are present, if any:

- ☐ Sharp objects (glass, syringes, etc.)
- ☐ Slipping or tripping hazards (slippery floors, obstructions, etc.)
- ☐ Structural problems (exposed wires, damaged ceiling, uneven floor, etc.)
- ☐ Pests (bugs, rodents, etc.)
- ☐ Insufficient lighting
- ☐ Mold
- ☐ Peeling paint
- ☐ Other

Functionality and Amenities:  
iness: Presence of graffiti or  
amenities. Safety: Identification

The opportunity to go to the bathroom in the city became more scarce in 2022 after the Adams administration decided a change to building code meant restaurants no longer had to allow the public to use their bathrooms, according to a report from Crains.

Ten other “automatic” public sidewalk toilets are supposed to be installed and maintained by JCDeceaux, a company that sells outdoor advertising space, according to DOT.

Those toilets are still going through the “stakeholder approval process,” Forgione testified Thursday.

The new bill would also require agencies to consider population data and social and equity indicators to determine “foreseeable challenges” to constructing and installing the new facilities.