Pissing in Public:
The Role of Public Washrooms within the Context of a Neoliberal City

By Emily Scoular
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The Role of Public Washrooms within the Context of a Neoliberal City

by

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Abstract

The role of public washrooms is excluded from civil discourse on public amenity provision within the City of Vancouver. The public washroom if ever included in a design, is considered an afterthought and its implementation are symptomatic of attitudes towards commercialisation of the city, consumer-as-citizen equivalence, and privatised-public space. This research highlights historical and contemporary conditions and neoliberal tools utilised by the City to establish a clear understanding of how space is created, maintained and how value emerges.

The historic Comfort Stations' current role, within the socially and economically diverse neighbourhood of the Downtown Eastside, is symptomatic of macro ideologies on the public washroom. Neoliberalism and its political rhetoric shape these ideologies to create a consumer-dependent right of access to basic public necessities. The definition of neoliberalism highlights dependence on rhetoric, laws and policies to changing the urban landscape, while critics suggest an active social-democratic process better reflects the right to the city. Local instances of neoliberalism emerge that stifle democratic and capitalist city building. These such instances include Business Improvement Associations, Community Amenity Contributions, Development Contribution Levies, Privately Owned Private Spaces, and Public-Private Partnerships. Contemporary precedents of public washrooms around the city express the shape that neoliberal autonomy of form and practices as detrimental to the public.

As the future of public washrooms is contingent on renewal of long-term contracting with a private corporation this Graduate Project proposes that by examining neoliberal policies in the City of Vancouver, designers, developers, and the public can make informed decisions about need-based amenities such as washroom implementations. This proposal will be expressed as a set of guidelines for alley developments in conjunction with the Community Amenity Contribution, and subsequent design responses. By creating a transparent and straightforward guideline for public amenity production in alley spaces a more democratic process will be created that allow various user groups, designers, developers and planners to make economic, policy, and public decisions.
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Part I: Publicness and the Washroom

Architectural Significance

The public washroom is a humble, but fundamental aspect of everyday, contemporary life. In order to better understand its architectural significance, especially within the city, it is necessary to expand upon its two elements; publicness, and the washroom. This section provides a foundational, and reductive, understanding of these two elements. With these foundations in place, the remainder of this paper will focus on the specifics of each, and each together. Famous architectural quotes, roman capitalisation, or a Venice Biennale do not define the architectural significance of the washroom; instead, it is defined by its banality. The matters of everyday users and its place within the urban context define its architecture.

Clara Greed, the most notable authority on the public washroom in urban planning and design, establishes a hierarchy of scale to consider when examining and designing a public washroom. At the macro scale, cultural and political beliefs should be considered. This is a matter of framing the perspective of the broader ideologies within society. The mesoscale can be considered the regional and local ideologies that are reflected through bylaws, codes, and policies. These are the collective, formal agreements that distill the ideologies presented at the macro scale. The microscale is a localised, specified example of the two proceeding scales, that is manifested in the design. Greed goes on to define the themes that contribute to contextualise of the washroom. It is within this context that this thesis will consider. Specifically, this paper will focus on the architectural, cultural, and economic aspects that contribute to the public washroom.

Publicness

“There is no seat like my seat”

It is first essential to clarify that this paper is discussing the public washroom, rather than the broader non-residential washrooms. Many consider a non-residential washroom as the toilet facility provided by commercial space, such as restaurants, hotels, institutions, and places of employment. Each of these non-residential washroom types is, to a certain degree, chosen by the user, and aligns with their values as an individual. This process of selection provides an added sense of privacy and comfort within the space. There are pre-established knowns and relationships within each non-residential washroom that reassures the user.

Conversely, the public washroom distinguishes itself from the non-residential washroom through its publicness. In this case, the lack of reassurance that the space is exclusive to those that are within the same resolution as the users define the publicness. In Alexander Kira’s The Bathroom, publicness is defined by this “strangeness” to its user. Kira expresses this strangeness as how it is mediated by privacy. Kira presents two notions of privacy: privacy–from and privacy–for. In the context of the washroom privacy–
from can be thought of as the segregation of sexes for example, whereas privacy-for is defined as the discretion of public washrooms. Both forms of privacy imply the idea that users should ignore each other to better use the facility. Publicness in the washroom can then be thought of as the sharing of space that none of us wants to share.\(^5\)

The Inclusive Washroom

“access to toilets is a prerequisite for full public participation and citizenship.”\(^6\)

There is no need to define what is a washroom as it is a familiar feature within daily life. However, it is essential to establish the significance of accessibility and gender for the public washroom. By defining the washroom concerning both accessibility and gender, one can better create an understanding of their cultural and social importance. The washroom has different implications for many despite elimination being of a relatively similar nature. A trip to the washroom for any able-body man is vastly different from those with mobility limitations and physiological complications, and from those who are non-cisgender, and cisgender women.

For much of the last seven decades, washroom legislation has changed rapidly in North America to become more inclusive for varied groups of the public. This is predominately expressed in user design legislation such as the ANSI (American National Standards Institution), and American Disability Acts. Within Canada building bylaws and codes for accessible spaces exist at regional and provincial levels, but a federal act is not expected for another six years.\(^7\) Even Kira’s The Bathroom was published just two years after the Civil Rights Act overruled Jim Crow Laws, that promoted racial segregation and were still in effect throughout many Southern United States. Today, exclusionary measures still exist within the washroom. These are both material and psychological.

[Diagram: Scales of washroom factors. Source: Clara Greed, Emily Scoular]

[Diagram: Range of Public Toilets Users. Source: Clara Greed, Emily Scoular]
Material exclusion exists in the disparaging lack of physical fixtures for women relative to men, lack of retrofitting to accommodating increased female and non-binary users of a building, and locations that are removed from central spaces within spaces of assembly. Material limitations should also be extended to include the lack of public toilets within urban settings, and the lack of critical sanitary fixtures such as showers, private sinks, sanitary counter space and access to power outlets. Psychologically exclusion exists as many communities around North American express anxieties over sharing facilities with transgender persons. This form of exclusion is harmful to the mental health of a person who is denied a necessity, as toilet discrimination is humiliating and ultimately degrades human life. This mode of exclusion is especially toxic as gender-identity is less binary as most washroom facilities suggest. However, the inclusive washroom extends beyond gender segregation. Barbara Penner’s Bathroom defines an inclusive washroom as “a space that does not exclude particular user groups either by design or by law... [it] is a necessary component of a socially just society.”

This socially just society should be concerned with the matter of what it means to be included in public. The public, the washroom, and the city are all elements that address contemporary life. The essential question is what is the relevance of architecture in contemporary life, and as designers of the just society within contemporary life how do we work within history, policy, and contemporary constraints to better support a material reality that is inclusive and supportive to live. As Kira would suggest, the washroom can support the body. Penner suggests the washroom can reflect the history and ideology of place and society. As Greed suggest, the washroom can support the city as a means of infrastructure to support all that the city contains. This formative understanding of the washroom allows a sensible foray into the topic of the public washroom within the neoliberal city.

NOTES
1 Many Modern architects, Adolf Loos (The Plumber), Le Corbusier (Manuel de l’habitation), Frank Lloyd Wright and more, dedicated much thought to the washroom’s role in architecture.
2 Liz Tracey, “The Rise and Fall of Pay Toilets,” JSTOR Daily, December 8, 2016, https://daily.jstor.org/the-rise-and-fall-of-pay-toilets/. Note: Vespasian was the first to monetize the washroom by producing public toilets for a charge, and then sold the waste as fertilizer and ammonia.
3 Rem Koolhaas, Rem Koolhaas: Elements of Architecture (Koln: Taschen, 2018). Note: In Rem Koolhaas’s award-winning exhibition at the 2014 Venice Biennale, 15 architectural elements were analytically displayed for their cultural and architectural importance. The toilet is the eleventh.
6 Kira, The Bathroom, 203-206. Note: “the mutual agreement to ignore on another and our activities.”
9 Plaskow, the Role of Toilets, 53-54.
Part II: Potty Trained

A very brief history of Vancouver.

Vancouver is and has always been a real-estate city. Since the Canadian Pacific Railway finalised plans for the terminus Waterfront station and the land-parcel settlement that sealed the deal, the city’s population rapidly grew to make it one of the hottest real estate markets in the latter part of the 1890s. The population nearly tripled in the first twenty years, while real estate agents and developers dominated the professional business of Vancouver. Since these early beginnings, Vancouver’s growth has been instigated by private development and the demand for civic growth. From the West End and Shaughnessy to the British Properties, Vancouver’s early developments and master plans were driven by corporate capital, such as Canadian Pacific Railway and the Guinness Family respectively. By the 1960s and 1970s, Vancouver reached a period of municipal experimentation in line with Canada's liberalist hey-day. This experimentation was a reversal of the previous conservative-backed, pro-development local and provincial governments. Projects such as Project 200 (freeway extension) and Maclean Park (mass social-housing) died, while new public projects such as Granville Island, South False Creek, and Robson Square were completed. These mass projects increased local and provincial confidence in the city and by Expo '86, civic and government pride and spending soared. In the post-Expo Vancouver, however, this experimentation seems to have "degraded into a kind of leveraged buyout, negotiated at the nexus of trans-nationalising real-estate imperatives and the distinctive rhythms of the country’s federal and provincial neoliberalisation."
A Very Brief Beginning of the Public Washroom in Vancouver

Though Vancouver’s long reputation as being a place for investment and opportunity, there has been many publicly-funded and locally supported developments. What initially started as a response to taming the frontier-township in anticipation of a booming metropolis quickly slows by wartime and further by postwar-suburban shifts. It is not until recent decades that the public washroom reemerges with equivalent relevancy, especially as the downtown population continues to grow, and inequality with it. To better understand the situation at present one must look to the past.

After the founding of the City of Vancouver, in 1886, Vancouver was no longer a frontier town. The budding metropolis began to staple of city government through the design of public-works and government facilities standard to any North American. As Margaret Andrews details in her article *Sanitary Conveniences and the Retreat of the Frontier: Vancouver 1886–1926*, the behaviour of a natural-resource township would no longer be tolerated. This meant dealing with plumbing and sewage infrastructure, as well as providing public facilities for the predominately male population. This was a slow process but one that is of broad interest as historical precedent to the contemporary dilemma of the public toilet.

Vancouver’s early sanitary convenience growth was contemporaneous to other North American cities. At the turn of the century, Toronto, and Chicago experience similar demands for public facilities as Vancouver. A year after the founding of the City of Vancouver, and its first elected City Council, the council released a by-law stating “Every dwelling-house, hotel, saloon, boarding house, store,
1886 - City Council Formed

1887 - Public Health Law
“every dwelling-house, hotel, saloon, boarding house, store, shop, foundry, factory, or manufactory...have connected there within a privy or privies,” this was later repealed by property-owners and business-owners. It was until a decade later that Aldermen, received complaints of fowl toilet behaviour, and the city took action. Since there was such strong opposition to private-ownership providing facilities, the City installed public urinals in the back allies of public buildings, such as the Post Office and City Hall. Though the maintenance of these urinals was notably bad, there was little pressure from users to alter the design.

By 1912, women had gained the right to vote, and participate in land-ownership independent from men, allowing them to enter the public-realm fully. It was at this point that female suffrage groups focused their attention on their role within city development. In Chicago, where the Woman’s City Club was especially organised, the public toilet fell under their domain as a fight for domesticating the city, but ultimately fighting to allow women, the working-class and children the right to the city. In Vancouver, the Women’s New Era League, along with local business-owners, asked City Council to allocate funds to erect new sanitary conveniences for both genders. In 1922 the Victory Square Sanitary Convenience opened. Today, the Victory Square Park Comfort Station and the Hasting and Main Comfort Station are the only two remaining from the 1922 washroom expansion. Both are still operational and heavily depended upon for the Downtown Eastside’s washroom supply.

### Comfort Station Victory Square Park

This public station has served the public for nearly a century, though over the last three decades its users have gradually decreased, and its facility is in a state of disrepair. It consists of two separate entrances for male and female, two attendants for both sexes who share a party wall, with a window between the two rooms. Each side has four stalls, and the men’s side has a few urinals. Access to the washroom is located on the northwest corner of the park and is only accessible via stairs as the washroom is completely undergrounds.

Though this site might be of a cultural significance, its design and location have contributed to its fall in practical use-value. The concerns of this comfort station are as follows: safety, cleanliness, and accessibility. These concerns are predominately due to the nature of the comfort station as it is full subterranean as well as its siting. Many external factors have shaped the neighbourhood of Victory Square, and the washroom is not immune to the changes and challenges that have faced this area. By understanding the neighbourhood, this section will establish a critique of the public washroom’s current role in the city.

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Figure 7 - Timeline of Early Public Washrooms in Vancouver. Source: Emily Scoular

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>City Council Formed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Public Health Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>“filthy” frontier city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>Public Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Public Urinals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Sanitary Bylaws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Public Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Public Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Funds allocated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Gendered washrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Victory Square Park</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Eastside’s washroom supply.
When initially constructed in 1922, the sanitary convenience was serving clientele from Vancouver’s central shopping district of West Hastings and Gastown, and those that frequented the numerous public buildings adjacent the park. This was a consumer-oriented and heavily trafficked area, of what was considered to be of great importance. By the 1970s, with the construction of Pacific Centre and Bentall Centre, businesses had moved towards the Burrard–Georgia axis, and the commercial success of the East Hastings and Victory Square neighbourhoods began to decline. It was not until the 1990s, when the Woodward’s Department store closed, that the neighbourhood hit its lowest point with increasing numbers of homeless coming to the area.

Figure 8 – Site Map of Victory Square Park. Source: Emily Scoular.

Figure 9a – Axonometric of Victory Square Park showing underground comfort station. Source: Emily Scoular.
At this time, a class of creative professionals began to enter the neighbourhood. Directly across from the Victory Square Park, the AIBC moved into its location at Cambie Street, and the Vancouver Film School moved into its West Hastings Street location. Despite the new creative industries’ initial moves into the neighbourhood, the value of the area was negatively affected by the gradual increase of the homeless population. This gradual increase continued even as the Woodward’s site was redeveloped into a mixed-use development, and creative industry continued to redevelop the historic buildings surrounding the park by post-Olympics.

Despite this fluctuation in the area’s demographics, these washrooms exemplify the current social divide of the neighbourhood and the disconnect between access and provisions of public space in Vancouver at large. This disconnect exists from the architectural significance to the larger area. The sanitary convenience is heritage. Its rights to heritage designation extend farther than any historical facade in the neighbourhood as it hits four out of the five themes for heritage designation. It is a cultural artifact, a rare architectural and public infrastructure typology, and extends into numerous sub-themes of city governance, community building. That said many local bloggers draw comparisons to ruins, due to its lack of funding for architectural and cosmetic upgrades. This is especially ironic in a neighbourhood which values the heritage aesthetics and gritty public life.

The use-value of the washroom is vastly different between those who live in this neighbourhood and those that patronise and work in the neighbourhood. For the latter, the trip to this facility is ghastly and avoided at all cost. This is in part due to the facilities as being unnerving, due to their dark location and association with the unusual quality of dankness, as well as for the notion of disgust with the unknown and dissimilarities between user-groups. Judith Plaskow identifies this disgust as symptomatic of social hierarchies and the subconscious association with the “socially inferior” as a form of contaminate to the space,
themselves and those around them. While the those who live in this neighbourhood, especially women of the Downtown Eastside, it is a rare sanctuary. Marginalised women in this area can find refuge and access without discrimination. This necessity and right to the city, found within the comfort station, represent the fundamental values that the women of Vancouver had in mind a century ago.

NOTES

1 Noted to the author by Andy Yan.


7 In the city archives there are only textual accounts of these public urinals, and a catalogue of urinal models.

8 Harland Bartholomew, The Major Street Plan and Civic Centre. (Vancouver, B.C.: City of Vancouver, 1947). Note: Hastings and Granville street are considered the two most frequented streets in the city. They are both considered a civic focal point at the time, it was recommended that the entirety of the downtown business district be designed to maintain the order and importance of those two streets.


10 It is often noted in City Council Meetings and third party reports that the cost of attendants and maintenance to the space are expensive.


Note: “The general, moneyed citizenry does not notice this dearth of toilets, because our notion of private and public space has become so muddled that we consider a Starbucks to be the same thing as a public loo. My mother, for one, arranges her downtown shopping itinerary so she only ever uses the facilities at Holt Renfrew, thereby avoiding sticky floors, unflattering lighting, and whatever germs are carried by people who shop at Winners. But those atrocities are nothing compared with the reality of the nearby underground toilets at Victory Square. Open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., they reportedly cost $100,000 each year, and still manage to feel like an ancient burial chamber—the type of place people dares each other to walk into.”


Part III: A neoliberal City

As the previous chapter laid out, the small-scale public space of the comfort station reflects the direct needs and concerns of the public working class. The comfort stations were a result of direct financing by the City. Today, financing models are more nuanced, based on several formalised models of financing that capitalises on a third party; one that is inclusive in that it shares the costs by both public and private sources. This vital mode of production gives precedence to the last 30 years of development within Vancouver, where a formalised strategic policy has dominated.

To further understand the contemporary City, it is critical to understand the market consequences further. The current state of Vancouver’s civic building strategies consists of policies that generate vast amounts of funds for public use through negotiations with private and public developments. This mode of spatial production is characteristic of neoliberal governance. The following chapter will outline the definition of neoliberalism, its strategies and implementation, and how these strategies and rhetorical implementations manifest within the built environment of Vancouver. It is worth distinguishing that this paper is concerned with neoliberalism as an institutional and local scale, rather than the broader global terminology, especially, as this paper is focused on the spatial manifestations.

For many neoliberalism functions as a catch-all phrase to discuss capitalism, neo-capitalism, post-capitalism, post-industrial economies, globalism, corporate domination, managerial practices and bureaucratic governance. Due to the phrase's widened definition many attributes of contemporary anxiety to it. Its ambiguity shapes critical discourse on topics of wealth inequality and affordability, private-public partnerships (P3), de-investment of public services by governments, deregulation of corporate entities, and the vast global economy. This overflowing term is one that defines the political discourse of the twentieth and twenty-first century.

It is generally understood that the rise of neoliberalism began in the late seventies as Ronald Reagan, Margret Thatcher, and Den Xiaoping introduced new economic policies to stimulate growth and to establish a broader idea of the global free market. Though this is the popularised beginning, its emergence in political theory dates back to the post-World War II era of nineteen-thirties to fifties with the deployment of Keynesian. During this post-war era political theorists, notably the Mount Pelerin Society, aligned themselves to the eighteenth-century Liberal thought of personal freedom and the aim to protect the “position of the individual and the voluntary groups progressively undermined by extensions of arbitrary power.”

Contemporary neoliberalism has moved away from the aspirational idea of protection for the private individual as the definition of a private individual has evolved to include private entities of unprecedented scales. David Harvey characterises contemporary neoliberal as a set of two fundamental strategies. The first strategy is as a theory of political, economic practices that proposed that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The second strategy is by the state to limit interventions in the market, guarantee the success of the market (even if aided), and provide structures (such as legal and military) to secure private property rights.

Language as a Neoliberal Tool

These strategies can be found in the way in which institutions (be they public or private), utilise a universal language. Much of what makes something neoliberal is found in its use of law, policy and societal discourse. The rhetoric of neoliberalism is one of simplicity and non-specification that penetrates all manner of discourse. In Neoliberalism: The...
Key Concepts, Matthew Eagleton-Pierce argues that by understanding keywords and concepts that are frequently used in policy and government, since the nineteen-eighties, we can begin to understand how neoliberalism is not only a political theory but a broader cultural language. Through analysing language, Eagleton-Pierce illustrates “how neoliberal practice will always be hybridised creations and how, paradoxically despite failures, doubts and cynicism, the vocabulary often refreshes itself or, at the very least, becomes so normalised that users struggle to imagine what an alternative discourse could look like.” The pervasive quality of neoliberalism rhetoric presented by Eagleton-Pierce echo Harvey’s critique as a “conceptual apparatus [that] becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question.”

The keyword concepts presented by Eagleton-Pierce include common phrases such as challenge, community, growth, responsibility, and vision. Each one of the forty-four concepts presents an alternative meaning to the historical or conventional use of the word. An example of this is a challenge, which is present in nearly all formal rhetoric. From Obama’s speeches to press releases from Coca-Cola, a challenge is always ready to be defined. Its appeal is that it is vague enough for optimistic commitment and the aspiration that we all might “contribute to dealing with the problem and find rewards.” By using language as common as this, neoliberalism has penetrated Western thought. Its message is that there is no alternative to the status quo.

Though this seems digressive, the importance of how policy and language are structured broadens understanding of how these ideas structure the built environment. The written documents, policy, guidelines, and in the City of Vancouver’s Financing Growth, two of Eagleton-Pierce’s identified terms of neoliberalism, the document outlines how the City expects to manage densification by development, and an influx of population. The purpose of the document is to express, through policy, the need for mediation between new development, residents and property tax generated by the private-landholding population. The issues laid out are inherently urban, architectural, and publicly oriented, but the initial impression of the document is vague as to the meaning of growth; specifically, whether it refers to the population growth or economic growth. What matters is the distinction as to which growth the City sets out to serve. Population growth would inherently imply mandates that support and foster the current population while demanding additions to the public realm that support the population in anticipation of growth. Economic growth conversely implies that the City would seek to maximise the land for not the support of a growing population but for the private interests and profits those that own land, and for the city itself.

Growth has been a continuous, global issue as the cost of living has increased, and wages have stagnated. The document lays out strategies in which the City is prepared to create partnerships or accept contributions from the private realm. Vancouver’s urban development is contingent on this constant growth in real estate supply. Regulatory mandate stipulates contributions be made by private development in anticipation of growth to a neighbourhood. The result is a supply of public facilities amended to new construction. The conclusion to this mode of production within the City is one that prizes significant developments capable of affording regulatory fees that supply the City with new public amenity through continuous production while prioritising redevelopment that is instigated by the private realm.

The ambiguity of the language of these documents, which are intended to stipulate the future production of the City, aids the private realm through the flexibility of its understanding and goals. Without a clear plan for how we finance the City, and why we finance it in this manner the policies in place are a form of obscurity to all manners of residents to the City. Through this obscurity, a disjunction is created between the privately held production of the City and public production of the City.
NOTES

1 Raewyn Connell, "Understanding Neoliberalism" Neoliberalism and Everyday Life. (Montreal: MQUP, 2014), 22

2 Note: See Financing Growth, 2004 City of Vancouver. As well as numerous redevelopment applications where Community Amenity Contributions, Public Art Contributions, and Public Space Contributions are negotiated.

3 David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (Brantford, Ontario: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2014), 1-10.


5 Harvey, Brief History, 2.

6 Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, Neoliberalism: The Key Concepts (Routledge, 2016), xviii

7 Harvey, Brief History, 5

8 "But even as the recession fluctuates, neoliberalism remains the common sense of our era. The debate is about how to get the market working better, not about what should replace the market. Neoliberalism is now the ground from which labour parties, conservative parties, and liberal parties all proceed.” "Understanding Neoliberalism." Neoliberalism and Everydaylife. Raewyn Connell. Page 22

9 Eagleton-Pierce, Key Concepts, 17

Part IV: Local Instances of Neoliberalism

It is also crucial to the vitality of public life in the urban-built environment to understand the immaterial structure of the city. The right of the city, defined as not only access to property but the right to affect change is obscured by opaque neoliberal policies and partnerships that shape our city. The right to active democratic practices within a city, as designers and citizens, are contingent on educating ourselves on the mechanism that exists within local and provincial governments. The following sections are the major Neoliberal structures that exist within the City of Vancouver. These structures are either created to forge a relationship between the public realm and the private realm or establish a relationship that did not formally exist before their establishment.

Business Improvement Areas and Associations.

Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) are established areas that collect a specific property tax within a business district. The funds collected through this tax are then managed by a not-for-profit group, Business Improvement Association, which represents the property owners and business tenants of the area. The primary goals of such groups are to promote business, tourism, safety and street beautification. In Interboro’s *The Arsenal of Exclusion & Inclusion*, the BIA (Business Improvement District in the book), is considered a policy response to post-industrialisation of the city. It is exclusionary in that the changes made in the interest of the BIA is privatised and specialised to means of consumption rather than a citizen-based experience of the city. The BIAs favour economic growth of commercial corridors over aspects of public life. The privileging of economic growth creates an equation of citizen as consumer. This equivalent is important as urban place-making under BIAs is an expression of private

Figure 14 - Macro Expenses of DVBIA. Source: City of Vancouver, Emily Scoular.

Figure 15 - Micro Expenses of DVBIA. Source: City of Vancouver, Emily Scoular.
property and business owners in the public realm, rather than residents of an area.

The mechanism used by the BIA focuses on improving the safety and order of the urban realm while blurring the line between the utility and function of space and the right to the city by all citizens, not just those who are consumers in the area. For example, the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association (DVBIA) collects three-million annually on a 1.25% tax from the Downtown Area’s businesses. This is redistributed throughout a large area of the business district and civic center of Vancouver. The most recent public-making project is the alley rehabilitation, designed by HCMA. By painting the alley with fun colours, and the addition of light installations, the focus is on appropriating the alley as a pedestrian thoroughfare and an Instagram-ready space, while actively prescribing new users to what was a “crime risk”.

Figure 17 and 18 show the expenditure breakdown for the DVBIA for the 2017-2018 fiscal year. Figure 17 is the thematic cost breakdown, while Figure 18 is the specific break down. Between these two figures, the focus is not on the improvement of the physical interface between the public realm and the private businesses but rather on the promotion and governance of the not-for-profit body.

**Public-Private Partnerships**

Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) is a neoliberal mechanism that offers a mutually beneficial exchange of goods, services and profits between public and private entities. These partnerships exist as fixed, long-term agreements between the City and a private corporation. In many cases, the goods and services provided include new buildings and infrastructure, and management of sites. This form of agreement eliminates risk for the City of Vancouver while supporting innovation and private competition. In some cases, the City’s benefit is guaranteed annual revenues, such as the case of the Parking Corporation of
Vancouver, otherwise known as EasyPark. EasyPark offers private management and operation services to the City of Vancouver and other third-party parking facilities in exchange for a council budget. In other cases, the revenue generated goes to the private entity in exchange for their services. For example, CBS Deaux, the French urban furniture company, offers furniture and urban equipment for free in exchange for the ad revenue collected. Another form of Public-Private Partnership is the Community Amenity Contribution.

**Community Amenity Contributions.**

Community Amenity Contributions is an incentive program for that exchanges increased Floor Space Ratio (FSR) for community amenities or cash-in-lieu. This is only applicable for projects that are asking the city to sell density or developments require rezoning of the whole land parcel, or a portion. Unlike the mandatory development cost levies (DCLs), which provides improvements to infrastructure such as sewage, electrical, and roads for each new development and adjacent work upgrades, the CAC is not protected under law as it asks for non-necessities to support urban growth and thus can be a negotiated agreement between the developer and the city. The agreement that is settled can become problematic as preference can be given to those developers that can offer more capital for amenities in exchange for density.

Since the 1990s much of our public realm is created through Community Amenity Contributions. Notable early examples include Concord Pacific’s Downtown South development and Marathon Reality’s Coal Harbour development. Each contributed community centers, seawall expansions, and park spaces in exchange for FSR and rezoning. Many of the spaces contribute to a network of public infrastructure that is celebrated, such as the seawall. Despite the early success the architectural significance of this tool is problematic. The public spaces are both a product of capital growth and a product of the developer rather than...
elected governance for the public. The maintenance and ownership of CAC remain open. In some cases, the CAC is gifted back to the City of Vancouver or the Parks Board, and in other cases, operation and ownership are retained by the private entity.

**Privately Owned Public Space.**

Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS), can be defined as public space required by the local government that remains owned and operated by the land owned. In most Vancouver cases, POPS are a byproduct of Community Amenity Contributions. POPS fulfill CAC public space requirements while still allowing the land-owner control over their assets. This can become problematic as the regulation and maintenance of real public access to the Public Space fall short. The erosion of public access exists in small forms, such as security guards, decreased hours, and leasing of plaza space to private leaseholders. An example of a Privately-Owned Public Space is TELUS Garden, owned by Westbank. The TELUS Garden project benefited from CACs and in exchange for extra density and site rezoning, Westbank contributed public art, space, and alleyway remediation to the project. Figure 19 illustrates the privately-own-public space and how these spaces are controlled, ultimately reducing the public aspects of the spaces initially required by the City.

Each of these structures is tools used by the City to create new additions to the public realm. Though noble their efforts may be, they create opportunities for success in the private realm over the specific and considered needs of the City they are meant to serve.
NOTES


Note: "CACs are negotiated contributions from developers who recognize that when a property is rezoned to a higher density, the increased population can create the need for more community amenities and services. By sharing the benefits made possible by increased development rights and land value, property developers, through CACs, can help make sure that Vancouver remains a great place to live."

Figure 20 – Photo Collage of Automated Public Toilet Vancouver. Source: Emily Scoular.
Part V: Development Down the Drain

In the previous chapter, the various definitions illustrate the way in which neoliberal policy affects the material production of the city. In this chapter, the Downtown Peninsula of Vancouver will be examined in three specific ways. First, the city will be examined through the inventory of existing publicly owned washrooms, second, will be through unsanctioned private-public-partnerships of private washrooms, and the third will be through the sanctioned public-private-partnership of public washrooms. Throughout this section, the local issues and responses will be highlighted and critiqued. This thesis is concerned with the public washroom as it is defined by the rights of access to the entirety of the public. For that reason, the inventory of public washrooms omits malls, cafes, and other privately-owned public space. Many of these spaces negatively affect marginalised persons as they deny access through bylaws and private security as they privilege consumers over citizens.

Public Washroom Inventory throughout the City

The number of public washrooms in downtown Vancouver is relatively low for the density of the surrounding population. This can be seen in the seat to butt ratio diagram, the City of Vancouver is relatively high compared to cities globally. Zürich and Portland being the two most similar regarding population and city area have a much lower seat-to-butt-ratio (public toilet per capita), while the Downtown Business Improvement Area has an outrageously high ratio relative to both local and global standards. Of the public washrooms on the downtown peninsula, the ownership and availability define the spaces and their functionality within their surrounding neighbourhoods.

Above: Figure 21 - Butt to Seat Ratio. Source Emily Scoular.
Following Page: Figure 22 - Public and Private Washroom Inventory. Source Emily Scoular.
Ownership

The ownership of the purely public washrooms in the city is divided between the Parks Board and the City of Vancouver. The Parks Board holds the majority of public washrooms, and their inventory consists of Heritage buildings, community centres, and field houses. These buildings are architecturally unique and vary in their design, completion date and initial funding. Their common feature is that few are mono-programmatic, meaning each facility is shared within a broader structure. Even the Harbour Green Park and English Bay Bathhouse buildings, though they provide separated toilet entrances, are shared with a privately-owned restaurant.

The public washrooms provided by the City of Vancouver differ in that they are purpose-built, uniform and mono-programmatic. Two City of Vancouver facilities are the previously mentioned underground comfort stations. The majority are JC Decaux Automated Public Toilets (APTs) and are the product of a Public-Private Partnership between the city and CBS Decaux. This agreement stipulates that Vancouver will receive seventeen APTs by the end of 2023 in exchange for ad revenue. This commitment is problematic as it guarantees a monopoly stock for nearly two decades, whether or not the APTs are appropriate for the City of Vancouver’s growing toilet troubles. As was the case in Seattle, APTs are notorious for their unpleasant odour and uncleanliness despite them being self-cleaning and are subject to misuse as places of crime and drug use.

Availability

The availability of public washrooms concerns two matters; the hours of operation and the accessibility. The Park Board’s public washrooms are limited to hours of operation of that which share the facilities, whether it is a specific building’s operational hours or that of the park it is located. The APTs, on the other hand, operate 24 hours a day. The Thornton Park APT is the expectation, as its operational hours are between 8 am and 3 pm. To limit misuse on site, the APTs are in high-traffic areas to increase “eyes on the street,” and include a maximum 12 minutes limit before the doors automatically open. In recent months, the APTs have been retrofitted to play classical music overnight and into the early morning.

The Starbucks Effect

Within the City of Vancouver, there are limited public toilets— that much is clear. However, many in the public do not see the issue of public washroom needs, as privately operated toilets service the majority of the public. This majority often take these spaces for granted. The current trend for many citizens is to equate themselves with consumers. By the right of selection and purchase, they can access a private realm of washrooms. This public delusion became volatile as the same narrative...
occurred twice in North America in the same month: The Tim Hortons Pooper, and the racially motivated arrests of two men in a Philadelphia Starbucks. In both instances, the denial of the washroom is a catalyst for unjustifiable reactions. In the Tim Hortons case, the woman, who was denied the washroom, reacted by defecating and throwing her excrement at the cashier. At Starbucks, the two men were waiting for their business associate and asked to use the washroom while they waited after being denied and their instance on not vacating the premise, the cashier called the police. The latter reaction is within Starbuck’s legal right as a private business.

Ultimately, the reality of privately-owned businesses and their right to deny facilities to non-customers eliminates this washroom typology as a reliable alternative to the publicly-owned washroom.

JC Decaux – radically different micro, socio-climates with autonomous facilities.

The JC Decaux APTs are fascinating in that they are widely used in cities across the Pacific coast (San Francisco, previously Seattle) and throughout Canada (Toronto and Montreal) despite being far from successful. The use a vast amount of water for every use, warranted or not, require maintenance, provide no toilet paper, and lack natural ventilation. The City of Vancouver’s provision of Automated Public Toilets is contractually exclusive to CBS Decaux. As they are contractually obligated to use the APT supply exclusively, it is worth examining their effectiveness within the communities in the downtown of Vancouver. This section will look at the effects of the APT on two specific sites, and their use.

North Plaza at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Historically the North Plaza at the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG), is a gathering spot for protest and celebration. It is, in a city that focuses the edge condition, the closet
Vancouver has a civic centre. In 2017, HAPA Collective, and Matthew Soules completed the long-awaited redevelopment of the site. Its main feature is the removal of the divisive spatial fountain. The new design allows for sanctioned groups to gather uninhibited. That is with the exception of washroom facilities. On the site, that has the capacity for 1500 people; there is a single-user APT. The single-user APT can at maximum service four people an hour with 12-minute-occupation–2-minute–cleaning cycle. A health and hydrated person should be urinating once every hour, minimum.

When it comes to the right to the city and the right for the public to gather and protest, one has to question the effectiveness of a single toilet. This is especially suspect as the City of Vancouver even states the inadequacy of placing an APT at busy SkyTrain stations (Broadway–Commercial) as it would have little effect on the need generated by the accumulation of pedestrians. This gesture indicates two possibilities: either the City of Vancouver needed to roll a new APT in schedule with their contract to CBS Decaux, or the APT is not for public gatherings but rather everyday life. The latter would indicate the City’s emphasis on “sanctioned” gatherings as those that can avoid the lawful lease of the plaza, and the rental of portable-toilets to facility their guests. This diminishes the impact of the North Plaza as a genuinely public gathering point for the public at large, not just those groups and organisation that can afford the cost and time of the permitting and organising process in the city.

As for the detailed implementation and provisional standards of the actual APTs, the performance of the interior space is substandard. The APT as the North Plaza is the largest JC Decaux model, which achieves British Columbia’s accessibility code requirements, making it technically wheelchair accessible. However, the time limitation alienates many wheelchair users who are prescribed bowel management programs, which can take anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour, the blind who would not be able to see signage while the pre-recorded audio instructions...
are obscured by classical music and those with Irritable Bowel Disease and Crohn’s, who may suffer flare-ups of unknown lengths. In addition to alienating user-groups, APTs provide poor conditions for changing a baby’s diaper or one’s colostomy bag which requires a hot water supply, surface space and proper lighting.

**Pigeon Park**

Pigeon Park is one of two parks in the Downtown Eastside, and despite it being owned and operated by the Parks Board, the City of Vancouver has installed an APT on the site. This site is diverse as it is a local gathering spot for many residents of the neighbourhood, those who dwell in SROs, informally housed, and those who frequent nearby shelters. The APT’s installation is a direct response to the growing public safety and health concern of the area, one of the utmost importance in discussing the lack of public toilets in the urban context of Vancouver. Within proximity to Pigeon Park, there are only two 24-hour APTs that service twenty-two hundred homeless in Vancouver with an increase to nearly five thousand at peak hours.\(^6\)

Compared to the North Plaza, the daily limitations of a single, or even two, APT is insufficient.

**Figure 28 - Automated Public Toilet at Pigeon Park, Vancouver. Source Google Earth, Emily Scoular.**

**Urine and Fecal-Matter in Alleys**

Insufficiencies are noted by Vancouver Coastal Health in their 2016 report, Washroom Design and Monitoring\(^7\) and by the City of Vancouver in their action plan for the Downtown Eastside.\(^8\) They are not dissimilar to those that were mentioned in the case of the North Plaza, though the issues are specific to the homeless demographic in the failure of providing APTs in lieu of larger public facilities.

Predominately the size of the APTs provided at in the DTES are smaller and are non-wheelchair accessible. As the two comfort stations in the DTES are underground, they are also non-wheelchair accessible. In both the reports by the Metro Vancouver and Vancouver Coastal Health Authority neglect to mention the abundant need for immediately accessible wheelchair washrooms in this area. This is especially the case as roughly thirty–three percent of the homeless population have a physical disability, while eighty-two percent of the homeless population have at least one health condition, which includes, addiction, mental illness, physical disability, or a medical condition.

A growing public health concern in the DTES is the amount
of fecal matter in alleyways. Human waste, fecal matter and urine, improperly disposed risks public safety at an infrastructural level by contaminating storm drainage, and immediate risk of contracting fecal-oral transmitted diseases, such as Hepatitis A. The risks posed by exposed human waste is not dissimilar to conditions that contributed to cholera at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Vancouver Coast Health promotes several strategies to promote better washroom health in the DTES, which are echoed by the city. Ultimately these can be summed up by what Clara Greed describes as the Golden Triangle of Toilet Provision. This includes Maintenance, regularly performed and checked by hired staff, Education; of the facility operators and maintenance crew and the public, and Hardware Design to ensure that the washroom is accessible and adequate for the full range of users.

**Concluding Principles**

Establish a clean, well maintained, visible washroom that encourages use from all socio-economic statuses. This will alter the cultural belief held that washrooms are unsafe and nefarious. The following principles should ultimately redefine public opinion.

Incentives should be in place for developments to include publicly-owned and operated washrooms throughout the downtown district, especially as CBS Decaux’s exclusive rights to APTs in Vancouver are up for renegotiation in five years, 2023. New policies should begin to be implemented, that incentify developers to work with community groups, designers and health authorities to design sensitive and sensible public washrooms. Funding models should be included in the policy, as maintenance funding in addition to the cost of construction is crucial for the success of public washrooms. Funding models should include optional revenue from BIAs and CACs as the inclusion of public washrooms is an asset to its surroundings.

Site public washrooms should also be considered in

Figure 30 - District Level Toilet Location Principles. Source: Clara Greed, Emily Scoular.
policy guidelines. Figure 30 is an example of Clara Greed’s inclusive urban design strategy.

At the microscale the design features should include lighting and street visibility, bold and legible signage, open-air ground planes and adequate ventilation, wheelchair accessibility, ease of cleaning and maintenance, and gender inclusion.

The overarching strategies of the public washroom as holistic, and humanising in nature. The above are best practices gleaned throughout contemporary literature on the subject and best established to move forward in design. The strategies would be best paired with community-based architecture.

NOTES
4 Installation, report, City of Vancouver. Note: “Experience in San Francisco, and to a lesser extent in Seattle, indicates that in areas with social issues, the units are subject to misuse with regard to drugs/prostitution, and particularly with regard to vandalism.”
10 Not only does this concern the prevention of “misuse” and drug overdose but the digestive regularity of any addict as well. All opioids cause bowel irregularities, and Opioid Induced Constipation is extremely common. The availability of public washrooms eases pressure on the bowels of those who are constipated, who if stressed could cause further damage to anal cavity.
11 Solving Public Urination: The Open Washroom Program, report, Langara College [2018], 6. Note: “Representatives of the City of Vancouver have acknowledged that they are concerned that a Hepatitis A outbreak could occur in Vancouver.”
Part VI: Precedents

Portland Loo (Victoria)
Design Response to the Automated Public Toilet
Location: Portland, Oregon (Original), Victoria, British Columbia
The Portland Loo is a successful design response to the Automated Public Toilet. It features fixed-louvres for cross-ventilation, stainless steel interior and exterior finishes, automated cleaning that drains to the street, and an exterior hand wash station. The Portland Loo has been featured throughout North America; the Victoria installation won Toilet of the Year in a Canadian competition.

Victoria Public Urinal
Design Response to Public Urination in Nightlife District
Designer: Matthew Soules
Location: Victoria, British Columbia
The Victoria Public Urinal is a design response to a business district’s public urination problem. The 24-hour open-air urinal is situated in Victoria’s downtown night-life district. The design features an open powder-coated steel structure that’s centrifugal shape removes the necessity of a door while providing enough clearance from the ground level to know when it is occupied.

Whyte Street Public Washroom, Edmonton
Design Response to “Eyes on The Street”
Designer: Shelterbelt Architecture
Location: Edmonton, Alberta
This public washroom facility provides spaces for both genders that is open and increases the user visibility, increasing the safety of the building. This works as a literal reversal of the “eyes on the street” mentality that many public washrooms guidelines suggest. It also features two male urinals on the exterior of the building for men, eliminating the need to enter the building.

Wreck Beach Bathroom Facilities
Design Response to Gatherings and Waste Management
Designer: Carscadden Architects
Location: Vancouver, British Columbia
The facilities at Wreck Beach provide much needed public washrooms to the remote site. These washrooms combine...
ease of access, open-air ventilation and ground-plane, and pit-toilet technology. The pit-toilet technology provides an ecologically-friendly facility while eliminating the risk of human contaminants in a crowded gather space.

**Pop-Up**
Design for Downtown Business Association of Winnipeg  
Designer: Bridgman Collaborative Architecture  
Year: 2017  
Location: Winnipeg, Manitoba

Created in partnership with Downtown Biz Winnipeg, this is a response to the city’s, and local businesses need for public washrooms. The program is shared with a kiosk selling water bottles and newspapers. As Canadian Architect notes, “Such a people-centred approach is distinct from automated self-cleaning washrooms and technically-driven tactics.”

**432 Park Avenue**
Designer: Rafael Vinoly  
Year: 2015  
Location: New York City, NY

This luxury tower typology, the pencil tower, is a New York City speciality as it is unrestricted by building height regulations and community consultation. It was one of the slenderest buildings in the world at its construction date with a building height-to-width ratio of 15:1. The regularity of the architecture is simplified, yet the structure, marketing, and ambition are at the forefront of the tower typology. This pencil tower signifies a shift for the private market, as the form maximises a site’s building area while conceding for unprecedented views and grandeur, allowing for the units to be sold from $25m to $90m, original asking price.


Opposite Page from top to bottom:  
Figure 33 - Illustration of Wreck Beach Toilets. Source Emily Scoular.  
Figure 34 - Illustration of Pop-Up. Source Emily Scoular.
Part VII – Site Proforma

Taking what was learned throughout Part I to VI, I propose to establish a guideline and policy principles that would incorporate public washroom and other programmatic elements into the redevelopment process. The subsequent design will actively engage with neoliberal policies and factors, specifically the Community Amenity Contributions, DCLs (for street remediation), and Downtown Vancouver Business Association. By engaging these factors, a clearer and hopefully more democratic means of spatial production can occur, while financing remains within the realm of the private sector.

By co-opting a bastardised variation of Vancouver’s current real estate model, one that exchanges rights to the limited production of architecture for public amenity, this project provides access to public space through the inclusive understanding of what it means for all to occupy otherwise privileged space within the City.

Site

The chosen site is the 1000 block of Granville and Seymour, Figure 35. Located within the Downtown District, and DVBIA, 1000 block of Granville and Seymour is the perfect mix of cultural and commercial activity and a vibrant socio-economic residential mix. It is at the south end of the Granville Street nightlife sector, within proximity to the Vogue Theatre, Venue, and the Orpheum, and borders Yaletown, a dense residential neighbourhood. 1000 Granville is home to two SROs, a boutique hotel, a hostel, and a social housing project for AIDS patients. The 1000 and 1100 block of Seymour has a mix of affordable and market rate high-rise housing. The existing buildings on the site are programmatic diverse and include heritage buildings, parking lots and buildings that have the potential for redevelopment. The existing site is also identified in Downtown District zoning as a site for potential live-work housing on Seymour Street.
The 1000 Granville block is zoned for commercial, except for existing heritage SROs and affordable housing. Heritage designation protects these buildings. Several single and two-storey commercial buildings are vacant, which increases the potential for redevelopment. However, Granville street has strict zoning protecting the building heights, to protect the character of the street, making a redevelopment application less likely to be approved. This can be a potential for density-bonusing in exchange for amenities, whether that is vertical density, or extending storefronts to the alley, doubling potential leaseable commercial space on Granville Street. That said, the alley has a variety of existing setbacks and staggered building heights which allow for laneway-infill design opportunities.

The 1000 block of Seymour, except for the City-owned apartment building, is below the current zoning, non-heritage, and reasonably valued, making it a candidate for redevelopment. The 900 Seymour block has already gone through a redevelopment stage, making the 1000 block’s transformation all the more inevitable. The Downtown District zoning identifies this section of Seymour as a site for potential live-work housing, meaning the potential for alley activation to include live-work studios enriches the site’s potential.

Overall the likelihood of redevelopment and infill design will be beneficial to densify the block with public programs.

Table 2 shows the cost of redevelopment (with DCLs included) in comparison with the necessary profits to be left as an investment holding for all sites with the potential for redevelopment. The minimum $/Sq. Ft. is the total necessary lease for each land parcel in order to maintain business in the current building. The overall cost per sq.ft. outpaces the current retail standards across Vancouver, Figure 38. The most promising sites for redevelopment proposal are 1001-1055 Seymour Street.

In Figure 39, the site the Granville Street side is restricted by the Granville Bridge viewcone, and the Seymour...
Street side is restricted only by the Queen Elizabeth Park viewcone. This allows the Seymour Street side of the site the potential for higher buildings. The FSR for Granville Street is FSR 3.0 with a building height restriction of 90ft., while Seymour street is FSR 5. In Figure 40, the site proforma is tested as to what building form might make the best use of the site parameters.

Taking the FSR and gross square footage, a financial model begins to develop. Table 3. This cost estimation is borrowed from Jay Wollenberg of Coriolis Consulting Corp. It takes into account the land value, developer fee, soft and hard costs, and levies to the city and region. The building form begins to be manipulated into a profitable form of architecture. Mimicking the financial modeling of typical developments, the outcome is situational to this project as one that still maximizes profit to cover costs but ultimately focuses on only a percentage of the gross square footage to be sold. This proforma produces a 312 metre tower, with 12 marketable parcels while providing 68 floors of accessible public washrooms.
Figure 39 - Site Map with Viewcones. Source: Emily Scoular.
Figure 40 - FSR Distribution. Source: Emily Scoular.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finance Modeling</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SITE LAND COSTS</td>
<td>$26,501,200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Size</td>
<td>18,000 sq.ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSR</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Building Area</td>
<td>138,000 sq.ft.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Profit Target    | 12.00% |
| Commission Rate  | 5% |
| Hard Costs       | $1,100 per sq.ft. |
| Soft Costs       | 15% |
| DCC's            | $10,000 per sq.ft of Gross Building Area |
| Interim Financing Rate | 10% of Hard Costs per unit on avg. of 50% of hard costs, soft costs and DCC’s for first year |

| Hard Costs       | $224,400,000 |
| Soft Costs       | $33,660,000  |
| DCC’s            | $120,000     |
| Subtotal         | $258,180,000 |
| Profit           | $43,200,000  |
| Land and Carry Cost | $27,711,000  |
| Interim Financing | $12,909,000  |
| Total Costs      | $342,000,000 |

| Unit Size        | 3,000 sq.ft. |
| Total Units      | 12 |
| Unit Sale Price  | $10,000 per sq.ft. |

| Gross Revenue    | $360,000,000 |
| less commission  | $18,000,000  |
| Net              | $342,000,000 |

Table 3 - Cost Estimation of the Site. Source: Emily Scoular.
Part VII: Pissing in Public

Taking what was learnt throughout my research, the design-phase shifted from focusing on the public washroom as a systematic solution-based design to an approach that exemplifies the reality of the existing systematic policy that hinders the production of an appropriate public realm. The resultant design is, as stated, no longer systematic nor solution-based but rather a direct result of the City of Vancouver’s own systematic solution-based policy around the public amenity’s that include the public washroom. The proposal’s original parameters are still in consideration as the site remains the same and the public washroom remains the primary focus. However, the public washroom’s role shifted from the site-specific, holistic form, to the maximised form of a pencil tower.

The pencil tower typology is the most novel contemporary form of architecture within North American cities. It originates from New York City, as development sites are unprohibited by design councils and building regulations. Though this is not necessarily the case in Vancouver, the mentality of the unregulated building is not unfamiliar. This project follows the natural line of production within Vancouver and is a critic of how amenity spaces are produced in singularity and without broader frameworks to contextualize the amendment. It is monstrous in conclusion, and exemplary of the City’s obsessions with growth, maximisation, and privately-funded public space. On that note, a variation of this project is a provocation of how we consider the role of the public realm with private development throughout the city, and that is treating the public in general inclusively and addressing local and specific needs of an area. A choreography of inclusion should be integrated into a design. So while this is monstrous in ambition, it still looks to address the needs of the public washroom through the lens of accessibility and inclusion.

Figure 41 - Exterior Render. Source: Emily Scoular.
The role of the public washroom exists as a byproduct of expansive yet latent neoliberal agendas: consumption-based citizenship, privatisation of public institutions, not limited to that of the health authorities, housing, and education, and fueled by an obsession with growth. Because of this, Citizenship within the city is reduced to a temporal occupation of the space within its boundaries, understood as a citizen’s claim to a variation of the city’s addresses. The power of such citizenship is limited to the power of productive participation. The result of which is a hybridised understanding of not only the role and right to public washrooms but the role and right to the city, and the collectives’ limited access to public-private space.

By co-opting a bastardised variation of Vancouver’s current real estate model, one that exchanges rights to the limited production of architecture for public amenity, this project provides access to public space through the inclusive understanding of what it means for all to occupy otherwise privileged space within the City. The City of Vancouver’s history of public washrooms dates back to its founding. What initially started as a response to taming the frontier-township in anticipation of a booming metropolis quickly slows by wartime and further by postwar-suburban shifts. It is not until recent decades that the public washroom reemerges with equivalent relevancy, especially as the downtown population continues to grow, and inequality with it.

Figure 42 - Isometric. Source: Emily Scoular.
Figure 43 - Night Render. Source: Emily Scoular.
Figure 44 - Render from Queen Elizabeth Park. Source: Emily Scoular.
The right to the washroom has become even more volatile in recent years as the push for access has taken the forefront of political, institutional and even commercial debate. Specific to Metro Vancouver, the health concerns of our region have increased to a point where fecal-mouth diseases, such as diarrhea, and hepatitis are at a level not seen since the gilded age. When a quarter of our population will need some level of assistance as they reach advanced ages, and when the homeless population has increased steadily for nearly a decade, by a third in just the last three years.

That said the City of Vancouver is in the most significant building boom of its history, and growth with it. It is at a stage of its evolution where the material makeup of the city is influenced by private-public partnerships, contractual agreements, and the financialisation of everyday life to provide a controlled supply of public amenity, and the public washroom is not excluded from this. The product of a contractual agreement with CBS Decaux, the public washroom is now disseminated throughout the city as silos of advertising, which react to their surroundings through exclusion and denial. In recent installations, the facilities inadequately provide for public gatherings, sanctioned or otherwise, ultimately leaving the facilities underutilised, unnoticed or underattended. This form of production mimics the broader mechanics of the city and its public realm as it interfaces with the private. Vancouver’s urban development is contingent on constant growth in real estate supply. Regulatory mandate stipulates contributions be made by private development in anticipation of growth to a neighbourhood. The result is a supply of public facilities amended to new construction.

Figure 45 - Diagramatic Section. Source: Emily Scoular.
Community Amenity Contributions, as it is known, set out to exchange amenity space for rezoning of a site, increasing height restrictions or increasing Floor Space Ratio. It establishes the land of Vancouver and its zoning in an intrinsic system of exchange, rather than the typical use value associated with a more traditional occupant of properties, leaving the city and its planning always in flux. The result is an attempt to maximise land for the public, with focused efforts on providing an ever-narrowing field of public amenities, such as heritage conservation, affordable housing, and childcare facilities. Though noble these efforts are, they make little impact on the mounting insufficiencies that are symptomatic of this continual growth.

The proposal is to reevaluate the Community Amenity Contribution to radically maximise the potential of the site for the public through the manipulation of traditional development practices. We began at the scale of the block. This sits at the literal intersections between the business and retail district of downtown, Granville Street North-West, and the residential neighbourhood of Yaletown, Seymour Street and South-East. It is unencumbered by restrictive view cones allowing for a height that is dictated by the North Shore Mountains.
Figure 47 - Site Plan. Source: Emily Scoular.
Figure 48 - Typical Floor Plan for Public Washrooms. Source: Emily Scoular.
The site block is dotted with heritage buildings and affordable housing eliminating them as redevelopment sites but which adds significant value as they have the potential for density transfers. This leaves us with five potential land parcels. As this intersecting of neighbours is present, a decision was made to remain dominant on the site and to create a central axis through the block.

After examining the zoning and FSR of the site, the maximisation of the building form is tested. The forms range from the conventional to the more iconic. The final form, one that is suited for a narrow footprint while again maximising restrictions of the site, is the tower. This allows for the floor space ratio to be distributed to Seymour Street, which is unprohibited by view cones, and envelope restrictions while leaving the Granville street parcel to become an open plaza—a rarity in the city.

Taking the FSR and gross square footage, a financial model begins to develop. This takes into account the land value, developer fee, soft and hard costs, and levies to the city and region. The building form begins to be manipulated into a profitable form of architecture. Mimicking the financial modelling of typical developments, the outcome is situational to this project as one that still maximises profit to cover costs but ultimately focuses on only a percentage of the gross square footage to be sold.
This proforma produces a 312-metre tower, with 12 marketable parcels while providing 68 floors of accessible public washrooms. In total the structure supports 300 public toilets showers and unprohibited free space. Each washroom is equipped with a shower, a toilet, ample counter space and seating, power outlets, and two switchable windows which provide spectacular views of the city, free to and for the public. The space is designed in a way that produces a unique opportunity. The individual rooms follow the British Columbia Accessibility Guidelines to ensure that no person is excluded while taking into account local practitioner recommendations of fixtures that are usually excluded from the public washroom program.

Joining the skyline as the tallest skyscraper in Canada, and the most slender in the world, it, is the world’s first true monument to contemporary life. With a height-to-width ratio of 26:1, the 312-metre tower rises to meet the divine North Shore Mountains, while a liberated public plaza in the heart of downtown Vancouver grounds the form within the vibrant, eclectic and existing public realm of the City.
Figure 51 - Interior Lobby Render. Source: Emily Scoular.
The opportunity is finally here; to foster and to support a quality of life that draws on a past embedded in natural beauty to represent a future of social, environmental and cultural abundance. The design of any building should be a function of the particular constraints and characteristics of their city and its people, and in the case of this tower, the solution that we have arrived at is very much a direct response Vancouver’s challenges. The net result is a unique building typology that undoubtedly creates a more breathtaking skyline, inclusive public realm and is the most advanced form of real estate.
Figure 57 - Interior Render. Source: Emily Scoular.

Figure 58 - Interior Render. Source: Emily Scoular.
Figure 61 - Interior Render. Source: Emily Scoular.
Figure 62 - Exterior Render. Source: Emily Scoular.
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Additional Readings.


