




City Manager's Office

May 4, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager   
Subject: Throne Portable Restroom Update and Upcoming Removal

### **Introduction**

This report provides an update on the City of Berkeley's eight-month pilot program that deployed two Throne Labs portable restrooms, one at the Park at the Waterfront and one that spent 6 months at Civic Center Park and two months at Strawberry Creek Park. The pilot was designed to produce data on visitor usage and evaluate the suitability, desirability, and cost-effectiveness of Throne's sensor-enabled "smart" restroom units compared with other temporary and permanent restroom options. This project was funded by an allocation of General Fund and Parks Tax totaling \$130,000.

### **Current Situation**

During T1 Phase 2, staff began projects to install "smart restrooms" at Ashby and Adeline, San Pablo and University, and Spinnaker Way, but these projects were halted during the design phase due to increased costs of other T1 Phase 2 projects. In the summer of 2025, staff identified Throne Labs, Inc., a provider of high-quality, technology-enabled "smart" restrooms with electronic entrance control and electronic sensing for cleaning and pump out needs, for a pilot in Berkeley. Over 110 Throne units have been successfully deployed in city and transit agency locations in Los Angeles, Michigan, Washington, D.C., and several Bay Area cities including Martinez, Palo Alto, Redwood City, and Sunnyvale.

After executing a contract on September 5, 2025, Throne portable restrooms were placed at Civic Center Park and the Park at the Waterfront; on January 18, 2026, the pilot was extended for an additional four months. On March 18, 2026, staff had the Throne at Civic Center Park moved to Strawberry Creek Park to gather data at a different high-use park.

The Throne 8-month pilot ends on Thursday, May 5, 2026, when the restrooms will be removed. There is currently no funding to extend this pilot project.

### **Discussion**

The 2020 Citywide Restroom Study highlighted the importance of monitoring restroom use, both permanent and portable, to better understand user demand, user experience, and the cleaning and maintenance needs of restroom facilities across the City. The Throne portable

restrooms have been successful in demonstrating how sensor-enabled restrooms can improve service delivery in a cost-effective manner and inform long-term planning of the City’s public restroom infrastructure.

All Throne restrooms are ADA accessible and provide the following features:

- Controlled access via cellphone and phoneless access cards
- Running Water Sink
- Flushing Toilet with vacu-macerator pump
- Robust ventilation and climate control
- Cleaning, maintenance, repairs, & supplies
- 24/7 remote monitoring for servicing needs, visitor usage, and visitor assistance
- Visitor usage reports
- Baby changing station
- Graffiti-resistant wrap

**Pilot Program Metrics and Findings**

**Throne Restroom Visitor Usage Data - Berkeley vs. Nationwide Results**  
 (Data is from first six months of Berkeley pilot September 2025 – February 2026)

	<b>Cesar Chavez</b>	<b>Civic Center</b>	<b>Strawberry Creek</b>	<b>Nationwide Avg. per Park</b>
Total Visits over 6 months	12,210	6,723	N/A (1)	varies
Total Visits per Day (average)	57	34	85	30
Return Visitors Rate	28%	28%	23%	25%
Visits under 15 min Rate	99.8%	99.84%	99.9%	99%
Visits by Tap Card	3	7	0	2
Cleanliness Rating (out of 5) (3)	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.3
Destructive Vandalism	0	0	0	3 (2)
Peak Visit times	Afternoons to Sunset	11am-5pm	11am-5pm	varies

(1). Six-month data is not available. Over 30 days, data indicates 2,915 visits to the restroom.  
 (2). The average for Destructive Vandalism at Thrones throughout U.S. is 3 per year.  
 (3). Reported by users.

## Community Feedback

Public response has been overwhelmingly positive. Detailed feedback was solicited by two methods; a) an on-line Community Questionnaire using survey monkey (118 respondents); and b) visitors have provided feedback via text messages throughout the pilot period.

In summary:

- More than 99% of respondents gave the Throne units the highest rating for comfort, cleanliness, attractiveness, and desirability.
- Approximately 98.2% of respondents stated that the city should provide high-quality public restrooms such as these.
- User sentiment indicates a strong demand for clean, well-maintained public restrooms that offer a predictable and comfortable experience.

Below are more detailed responses to the On-line Community Questionnaire:

- **Should the City of Berkeley be providing public restroom facilities?**

- \* Yes: 98.2%
- \* No: 0
- \* Don't know: 1.72%

- **Some residents say they feel unsafe in public restrooms. How did the Throne make you feel compared to other public restrooms/portables?**

- \* Safer: 91%
- \* Same: 9%
- \* Less Safe: 0%

- **What do you think about the Throne as a public restroom option for Berkeley?**

- \* Only keep the two pilot Throne restrooms: 3%
- \* Add additional Throne restrooms at more locations: 97%
- \* Remove all Throne restrooms: 1%

- **What do you like best about the Throne restroom? (rate your top choice)**

- \* 86% Cleanliness
- \* 42% to 49%: Running water; Touchless use for access; and Reliability of restroom.
- \* 23% to 37%: Lighting; Smell; Better behavior/accountability; Real-time servicing; and the 10-minute anti-loitering feature.
- \* 10% to 19%: Music; texting your feedback; ADA access; Creates local jobs to service the restroom; Hours open; Menstrual products; Baby-changing station.

### **Additional Comments received by Throne via the questionnaire or by text:**

- **Saturday Farmers Market:** Daniel McChesney, Berkeley Farmers' Market Program Manager:

I am writing to express my appreciation for the Throne restroom pilot and my support of its continuation. In the time the Throne was in Civic Center Park the feedback I received from the general public and our vendors was overwhelmingly positive. I did not experience any issues related to safety or sanitation and found the Throne team easy to reach anytime I needed to contact them. I think that accessible public restrooms are a valuable part of a vibrant civic center and would encourage you to bring this one back.

- **Claudia Kawczynska, co-founder, Off-Leash Area, The Park at the Waterfront, and former chair, Berkeley Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Commission:**

The Throne was a welcomed amenity for many of the users of The Park at the Waterfront. It was a good substitute while we wait for the restroom to be installed. Perhaps once that is done, perhaps a Throne can be moved to the area of the park that is nearer to both the OLA, and picnic table area, where it surely will also be appreciated. Great program to address a pressing need!

### **Individual quotes from Throne visitors sent via cellphone:**

- Thank you for providing a safe, clean, modern bathroom.
- I was skeptical but I think they are great
- Was very grateful to be able to use this with my small children while at powwow and farmer's market. Didn't use baby changing station but would be very grateful for one that is clean and safe when needed.
- I will happily choose to allocate my tax dollars toward inclusive, easily accessible, clean public restrooms. this feels like a very obviously beneficial choice for a society and community to make. I would also add that including child sized / lower toilets includes more family / little people and is a very easy add (see Taiwan's public restroom system in Taipei for another municipal example)
- Like them. Hope the company is set up to keep them in a high state of cleanliness and safety. Love the accessibility
- Thanks a lot. Makes going to the Farmers Market less hurried.
- Great that they are so clean and can't be "taken over" by loiterers

- It's the best restroom ever. Absolutely clean and reliable — they have a cleaning service team on call and they're super fast and responsive. I do wish they had protective toilet seat covers but I understand some people are very messy and inconsiderate. In areas of high homelessness maybe I would consider having an ambassador/attendant. I think it's a really great and super accessible, I'm very grateful! I think they should replace all the park bathrooms. I think that it's great for first responders too, I used the Cesar Chavez park one a lot when I was working on my boat at the boat yard and I saw everyone using them! Thank you guys so much for this!!!
- I love this bathroom its just amazing 100% better than porta pottys thank you so much throne!!
- Safe clean bathroom access should be considered a basic human right. Throne bathrooms address that need with grace beauty and dignity. This is a simple beautiful and graceful response to that human right/human need. Thank you soooooo much
- The throne at Cesar Chavez Park deserves a 10 out of 10. It is fantastic. I hope it stays.

**Cost Analysis**

The pilot allowed for a comparison of costs across restroom types currently used in Berkeley. as summarized in the table below using 2026 dollars:

<b>Restroom Type</b>	<b>Level of Cleaning Service</b>	<b>Services included</b>	<b>Annual Cost</b>
Throne Portable Smart Restroom	High	Rental of restroom; staffing, cleaning, supplies, maintenance, repairs, vandalism, water, solar power, and utilities; and data on usage trends, restroom availability, and cleanliness ratings.	\$105,000
City Restroom (Portland Loo)	High	Annual operating cost (staffing, cleaning, supplies, maintenance, repairs, vandalism and graffiti, and utilities). (Does not provide visitor usage monitoring data).	\$110,000 (plus \$538,000 capital installation)
City Restroom (park)	Medium	Annual operating cost (staffing, cleaning, supplies, maintenance, repairs, vandalism and graffiti, and utilities). (Does not provide visitor usage monitoring data).	\$28,000 (plus \$500,000 capital installation)
Conventional Portal Toilet (ADA unit)	High	Rental of unit and daily cleaning service only. Graffiti, repairs, and replacements can be an additional \$2,000-\$3,000 per year. (Does not provide visitor usage monitoring data).	\$12,000 to \$15,000

In sum, conventional portable toilets are significantly less costly but are frequently damaged and are considered fairly undesirable by the general public. Throne rental costs are

comparable to the operating costs of a new high-use permanent restroom (e.g., the Portland Loo at Telegraph & Channing), but offers additional advantages such as rapid deployment and moveability, no upfront capital costs, visitor usage monitoring, and far more responsive servicing as-needed.

### **Environmental Sustainability and Climate Impacts**

Providing public restroom access can reduce open defecation, which benefits stormwater quality and public health. There are no identifiable climate impacts associated with the recommendations in this report.

### **Equity & Dignity**

Every Throne is ADA-compliant and wheelchair-accessible, and users can enter through four pathways: 1) the Throne phone app, 2) a phone text message, 3) a phone QR code, or a phoneless tap card, ensuring access regardless of income or device. These entry methods support the concept of accountability. During the pilot, 100% of users exited within 15 minutes, with zero loitering incidents recorded, demonstrating that a well-designed public restroom can be both welcoming and self-managing.

### **Preliminary Conclusions**

In sum, findings from the pilot suggest that Throne Restrooms can play a valuable role in addressing public restroom needs in high-use or high-priority locations. While relatively costly per year as compared to conventional portable toilets, Throne units offer an exceptional user experience, reduced need for staff time and utilities, and visitor usage data that helps the City respond more efficiently to visitor needs at specific areas of the City not only for restrooms, but for the provision of parks and open space, and other public amenities.

cc: David White, Deputy City Manager  
Jenny Wong, City Auditor  
Farimah Brown, City Attorney  
Mark Numainville, City Clerk  
Matthai Chakko, Assistant to the City Manager  
Jordan Klein, Director, Planning and Development Department

Attachments: photo



Throne unit at Strawberry Creek Park with solar power and ADA accessible ramp