



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE • EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

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City of Cambridge Policy on Unisex Bathrooms

1. Rationale for Policy

Unisex bathrooms (sometimes referred to as gender-neutral bathrooms) are an increasingly common design feature in public facilities being constructed throughout the United States and the world. Unisex bathrooms offer an increased flexibility of use for a wide variety of users and reflect a growing trend to promote a human-centered design philosophy in modern societies. A lack of unisex bathrooms may pose a threat to the health and safety of adults caring for children of the opposite sex, individuals who require personal care attendants who may be of the opposite sex, transgender individuals and others who frequently have difficulty finding public bathrooms that are not designated for the exclusive use of either men or women. Children or adults who need assistance from a caretaker of the opposite sex may have to forgo using a bathroom, use a bathroom without being accompanied by a necessary caretaker or face potential embarrassment by using a bathroom intended for use by the opposite sex. Transgender individuals in particular have faced such embarrassing situations and at times have even experienced harassment or assault when using gender specific bathrooms. Therefore the community at large would benefit from a policy that encourages City-owned buildings to provide single-stall unisex bathrooms, to the extent permitted by law.

2. Requirements of the State Plumbing Code

The current State Plumbing Code requires that a specified number of bathrooms in public buildings, on each floor, be designated as men's bathrooms and women's bathrooms and specifically identified as such. The formula for the actual number of bathrooms required to be designated as men's bathrooms and women's bathrooms under the State Plumbing Code is based upon the size of the building, the use category of the building (i.e. restaurant, theater, office building), and the capacity of the building. Currently the State Plumbing Code allows one bathroom out of the total number of required gender specific bathrooms in a building to be designated as a unisex bathroom. In certain circumstances, the State Plumbing Code allows bathrooms that are provided in excess of the required number of gender specific bathrooms to be designated as unisex bathrooms. Additional unisex bathrooms beyond those allowed by the State Plumbing Code may be allowed by obtaining a variance from the State Plumbing Code. Variances may be granted for good cause.

3. Policy Recommendations

A. Newly Constructed or Substantially Renovated City-owned Buildings

A minimum of one single-stall bathroom in every newly constructed or substantially renovated City-owned building (where renovations include new bathrooms) should be designated as a unisex bathroom, as allowed by the State Plumbing Code and as space permits. Additional single-stall bathrooms in City owned buildings, beyond the minimum number required to be designated as gender-specific bathrooms, should be designated as unisex bathrooms where the requirements of the Code can be met and as space permits. At the City's discretion, any such single stall unisex bathrooms may also be designated as handicapped accessible bathrooms if suitable as such and as permitted by law. Single-stall unisex bathrooms should be located in areas of the building accessible to members of the public where reasonably possible and as space permits, and there should be signage indicating where the unisex bathrooms are located.

B. Existing City Buildings

City-owned buildings that have any single stall bathrooms currently designated as men's or women's bathrooms should have at least one or more of those single stall bathrooms designated as unisex bathrooms if allowed by the State Plumbing Code where reasonably possible and as space permits, with the goal of achieving a minimum of at least one single stall unisex bathroom per building. To the extent that unisex bathrooms already exist or can be designated as described herein, there should be signage indicating where such unisex bathrooms are located. At the City's discretion, any such single stall unisex bathrooms may also be designated as handicapped accessible bathrooms if suitable as such and as permitted by law.

4. Outreach and Education

Consistent with the adoption of this policy on unisex bathrooms in City-owned buildings, City staff should take measures to educate private owners of public use buildings throughout the City on the need for a greater number of unisex bathrooms in such privately owned public use buildings, including publicizing and distributing the City's policy with respect to City-owned buildings. The City should educate private owners of public use buildings about the need for creating or designating unisex bathrooms to the extent allowed by the State Plumbing Code when buildings are newly constructed or substantially renovated (where renovations include new bathrooms). In addition appropriate City staff should publicize the benefits to the public at large of having other private property owners voluntarily comply with the City's policy on unisex bathrooms in City-owned buildings.



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