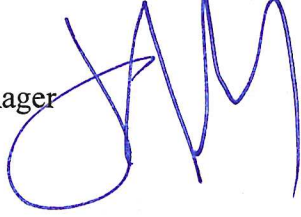


MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Joseph A. Melder, City Manager 

DATE: June 14, 2022

SUBJECT: Proposed Ordinance Amendment to 2018 International Plumbing Code – Privacy Requirements for Non-Separated Facilities

I. PURPOSE

This memorandum is provided as a follow-up regarding the International Plumbing Code (IPC) amendment that was approved by City Council on May 12, 2022.

Since the adoption of the updated plumbing code ordinance amendment, several concerns have arisen from some residents and members of City Council that this updated ordinance would allow for the construction of unsafe conditions in shared bathroom facilities. There are some misconceptions about what this updated plumbing code would allow. First, this updated ordinance does not change the standard of privacy in shared bathroom facilities. Secondly, it is important to underscore that plumbing code is not building safety. And thirdly, our building review and inspection process would also safeguard against a misuse of plumbing code that would create unsafe conditions.

Still, we understand that the concerns noted about privacy and safety are sincere and meaningful, and that there are portions of the international plumbing code that should be tailored to the local needs and standards of Savannah. To this end, we will be preparing updates to this amendment for your consideration in July, that would strengthen local privacy standards for shared bathroom facilities to ensure water closets in shared bathroom configurations (which are already allowed in local and state plumbing code), are completely private and safe in design. In the meantime, our Development Services Department will not issue any permit pertaining to the new updated ordinance before Council considers a further amendment in the coming weeks.

Additionally, I want to emphasize that these international plumbing code updates provide options, but businesses and facilities are not required to have shared bathrooms configurations. There are many examples where these types of configurations are exceedingly appropriate, and businesses should have the flexibility to provide safe and private shared bathrooms. In other instances, property owners may opt for more traditional configurations, which are also appropriate.

II. BACKGROUND

Prior to the recent adoption of the amendment, the adopted 2018 IPC already allowed non-separated bathrooms (i.e. “shared bathroom”) in the following situations per Section 403.2 Separate facilities:

- (1) Separate facilities shall not be required for dwelling units and sleeping units.
- (2) Separate facilities shall not be required in structures or tenant spaces with a total occupant load, including both employees and customers, of 15 or fewer.
- (3) Separate facilities shall not be required in mercantile occupancies in which the maximum occupant load is 100 or fewer.
- (4) Separate facilities shall not be required in business occupancies in which the maximum occupant load is 25 or fewer.

The following additional two exceptions were added to the 2021 IPC for greater flexibility in usage of space and were added via the local code amendment to the 2018 IPC:

- (5) Separate facilities shall not be required to be designated by sex where single-user toilet rooms are provided in accordance with Section 403.1.2.
- (6) Separate facilities shall not be required where rooms having both water closets and lavatory fixtures are designed for use by both sexes and privacy for water closets is provided in accordance with Section 405.3.4. Urinals shall be located in an area visually separated from the remainder of the facility or each urinal that is provided shall be located in a stall.

The code section 405.3.4 referenced in exception (6) concerning the level of privacy required for the water closets is very vague and gives no guidance on privacy requirements, thereby leaving it to the design professionals to determine what constitutes privacy as follows:

405.3.4 Water Closet Compartment.

Each water closet utilized by the public or employees shall occupy a separate compartment with walls and a door enclosing the fixtures to ensure privacy.

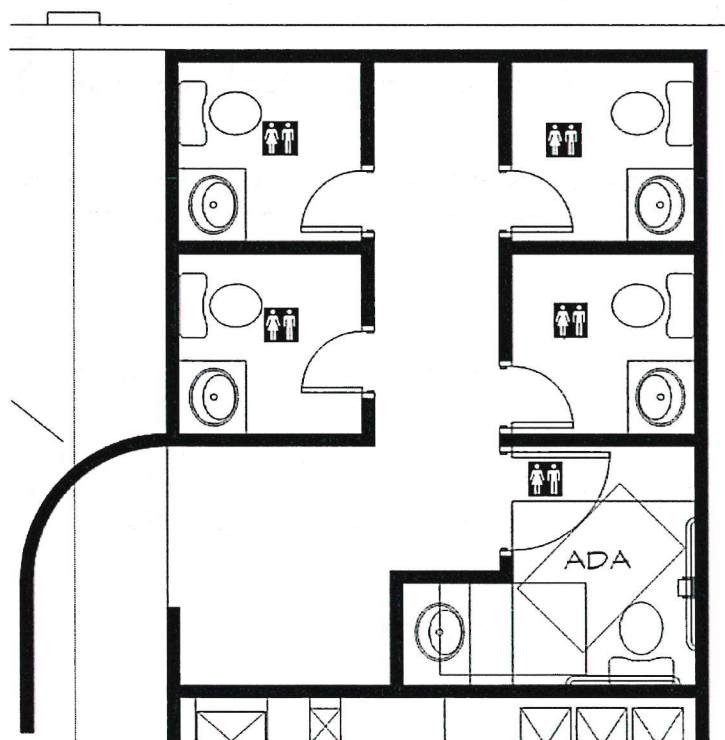
III. Proposed New Amendments to Strengthen Safety and Privacy Standards

To help alleviate some of the concerns about this vague privacy requirement, we propose that a new section be added to the code to better define the level of privacy required, and, ensure that the shared lavatory area is not closed off by a door to the remainder of the building to increase safety. The following is our recommendation on that new section:

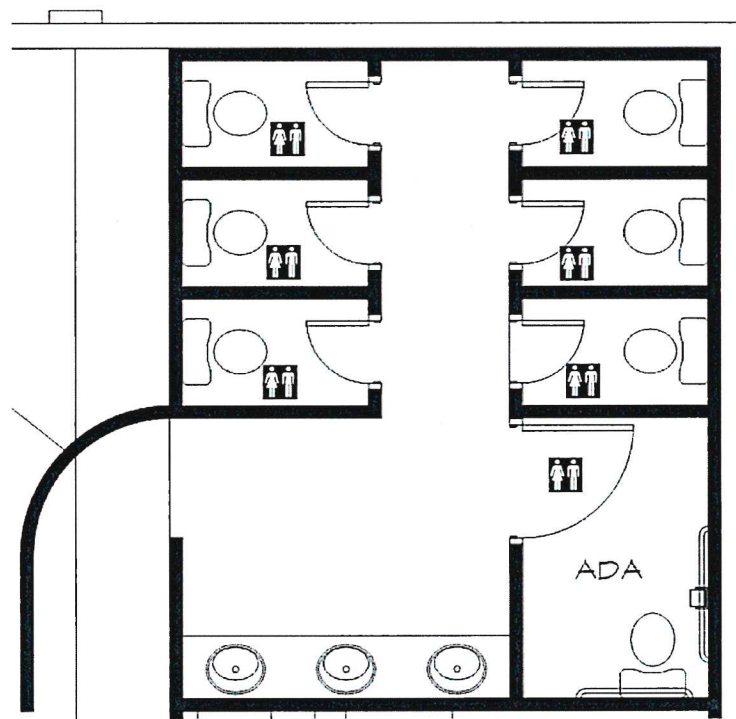
403.2.2 Privacy for Non-Separated Facilities.

Where shared facilities are provided per Section 403.2 (6), each water closet utilized by the public or employees shall occupy a separate compartment with walls that extend from the floor to the ceiling and a lockable door enclosing the fixtures to ensure privacy. The common lavatory area shall not be closed off by a door to the remainder of the building.

Attached are two bathroom layout examples for comparison. One design meets the current 2018 IPC where the individual water closets and sinks are located in their own rooms, but these rooms are also located in a separate common bathroom area. The other design is also a separate bathroom area where the water closets are located in their own rooms, but the sinks are located in a common area. Both options have floor to ceiling walls for the water closets, with a lockable door enclosing the fixtures to ensure privacy.



Bathroom example that meets current 2018 IPC. Water closets have walls from floor to ceiling and individual sinks.



Bathroom example that meets the 2021 IPC. Water closets have walls from floor to ceiling but the sinks are located in the common area.

IV. Next Steps

Staff will prepare these amendments, that strengthen privacy and safety standards for shared bathroom facilities, for consideration at a July Council meeting. In the meantime, our Development Services Department will not issue any permit pertaining to the recently updated ordinance until Council considers a further amendment in the coming weeks.

Please contact me with any questions or concerns.