

03/14/2024

Women swimmers request an essential “change order” for the Barton Springs Pool Bathhouse Rehab

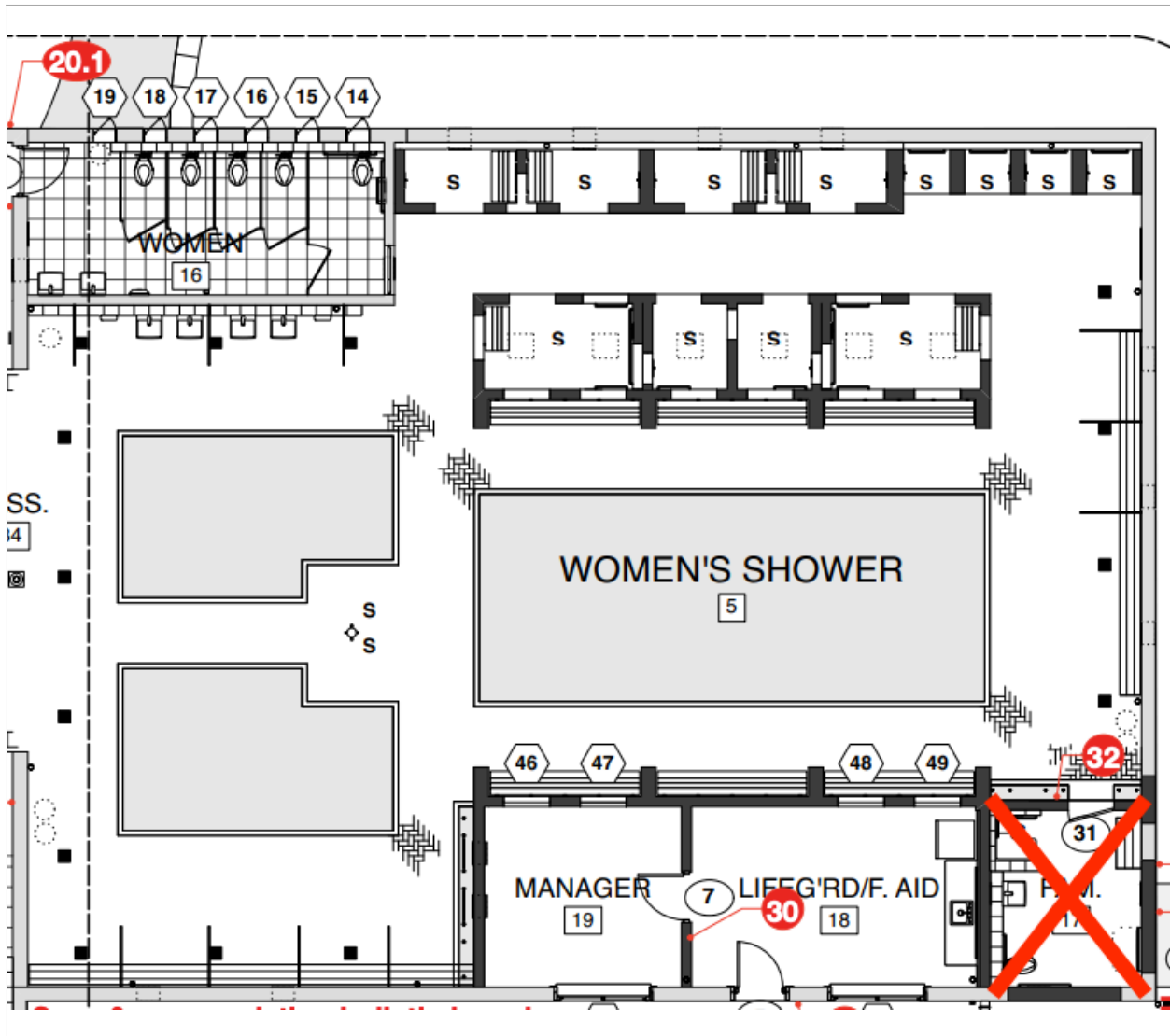
For consideration by the Parks Board and Council Members

03/14/2024

Contact: Diana Prechter

dianaprechter@gmail.com

512-922-0113

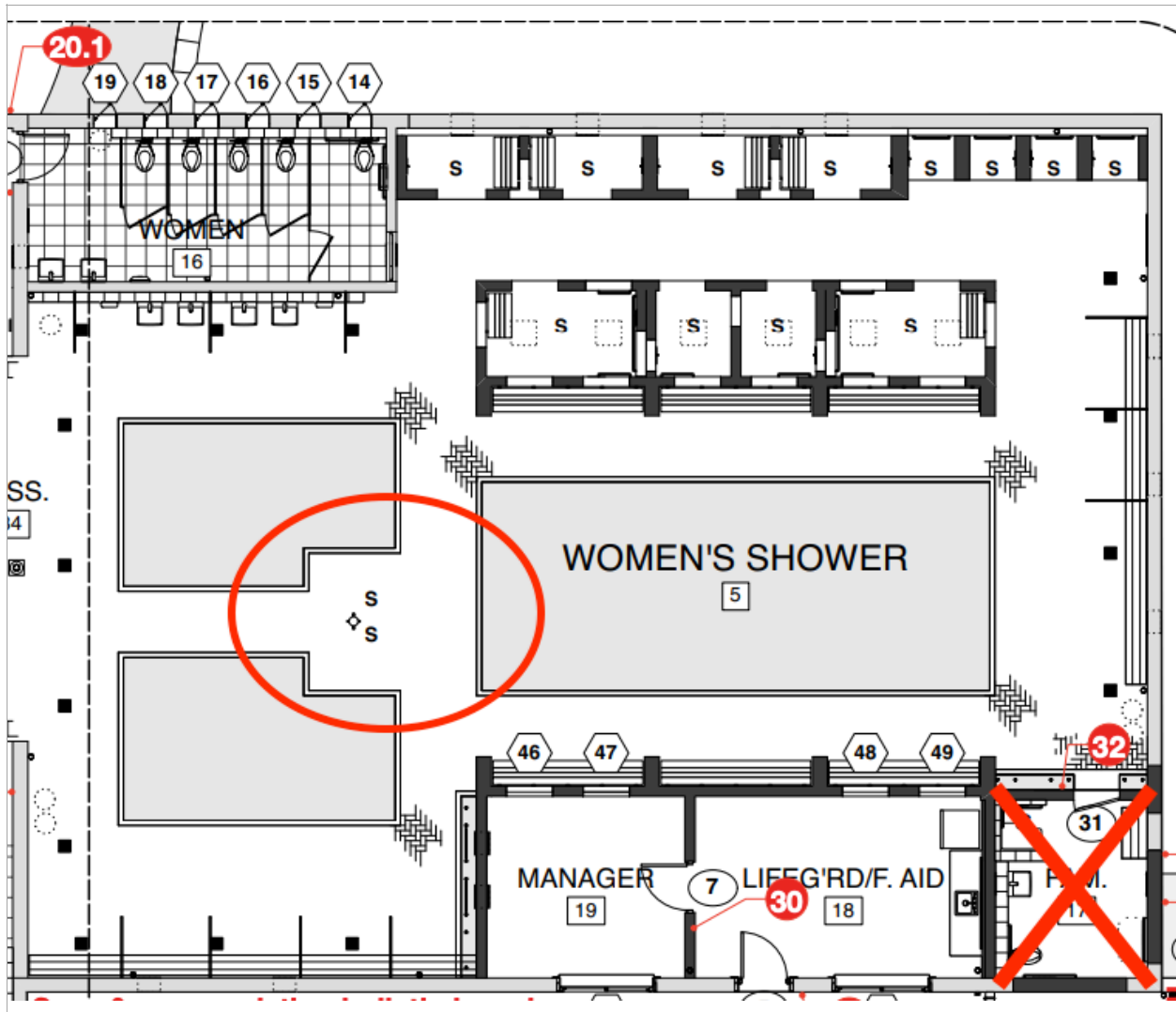


I have an update and a request regarding the Barton Springs Pool Bathhouse rehab design.

Our self-appointed Women Swimmers Technical Advisory Group met with Director McNeeley, ACM Hayden-Howard and members of the bathhouse project team on 2/29/2024. Our swimmers' YouTube video explaining our concerns and our reasonable proposals has now received 547 views. We are waiting to hear the response from ACM Hayden-Howard.

However, we have one essential concern that we want to express to Council Members and the Parks Board.

We are asking Council and the Parks Board to please ensure that the City Manager's Office directs the project team to remove the SE corner family restroom proposed for the women's shower and dressing area.



The “red oval” is the open-air women’s shower in the middle of the courtyard.

If family restroom #5 is intended to be used by families with young children, it violates the privacy of both the women showering and of the children.

The men’s courtyard has no such family restroom opening into their showers. Please give women the same privacy.

If family restroom #5 is intended to serve gender-fluid people, it fails the test because they have been forced to walk through the women’s corridor and showers.

Let me explain why **women’s safety is compromised by this corner location of a family restroom.**

Zilker Park is a metropolitan park that allows overnight parked vehicles. The pool and bathhouse offer select hours of free admission daily. The facility is open to the public from 5 am to 10 pm which includes many hours of darkness.

I have often been in these showers, completely alone, on a dark summer night — once I was startled to find a man hiding by the toilets. I have been in these showers while there was a woman screaming, experiencing mental health issues. I have been here in the morning when feces were discovered in a shower from an overnight hidden guest.

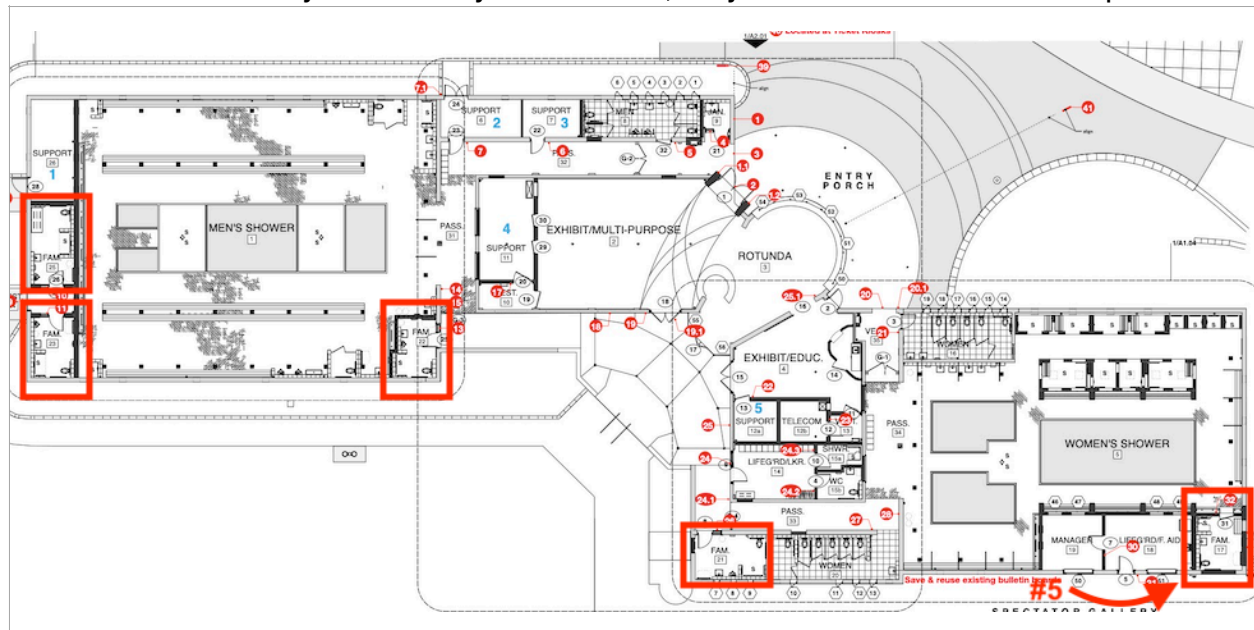
The existing women's corridor family restroom is frequently abused. Lifeguards are tasked with cleaning a family restroom when it looks like a crime scene with blood, feces and needles. Staff has explained to us: If they don't have time to clean it, they lock the door.

The Pool Manager's official explanation for the frequently locked handle is different: He wrote me to say:

I would suspect that there is something faulting with the door handle mechanism that is causing it to not open properly vs us locking it. When door handles of that type fault the only way to open it is by use of the key which would lead to the conclusion that it is "locked". I can take a look at it tomorrow when I'm on site and if it is something that can easily be fixed, I will attempt to do so." (As of 3-13-2024)

Is the family restroom frequently locked because of door handle malfunction?

Pool Staff have told us that it is kept locked by design, most of the time, to prevent "misuse" of the facility. On the day that I asked, they offered to unlock it on request.



**The proposed site plan contains FIVE family restrooms:
Family restroom #5 is not needed.**

Families with children and gender fluid people have many options for privacy with family restrooms #1-4. There is no need to build family restroom #5.

To remove family restroom #5 is simple: Put an “X” over that corner. The contractor can then finish the room as staff space or storage. Removing family restroom #5 from the plan will certainly reduce cost with less plumbing, tile and fixtures.

Please add your concern to that of the women swimmers.

Removing family restroom #5 will improve privacy and safety for women swimmers who will use the bathhouse for generations to come.

Please contact the City Manager’s Office and request that family restroom #5 be removed from the women’s bathhouse SE corner.

Please draft and approve a recommendation:

WHEREAS the Barton Springs Pool Bathhouse is undergoing a large rehabilitation project;

WHEREAS change orders approved as soon as possible will prevent project delays;

WHEREAS there is a family restroom proposed for the southeast corner of the women’s nude shower and dressing area (referred to below as “family restroom #5”);

WHEREAS the bathhouse has a history of incidents — formally recorded by staff and reported to management* — of individuals experiencing mental health issues and drug addiction who are known to occupy for extended times the existing women’s corridor family restroom; and a family restroom located near women’s showers may expose women to unsafe behaviors;

WHEREAS “family restroom #5” of the women’s area violates women’s privacy and safety while providing no clear benefit for privacy for families with children or gender-neutral individuals;

WHEREAS there would still remain four family restrooms, two of which will be non-gendered by means of access through an exterior entry, and two of which are to be accessed through male and female gendered corridors;

THEREFORE, recommend that the PARD planners and designers draw an “X” over “family restroom #5 and consider alternatives for Staff to utilize that space.

Note I will have the reports of official incidents from a PIR I have submitted; I will provide these as confirmation of potential safety threats for women while using the bathhouse if a family restroom is located inside the women's shower and dressing courtyard.*