



IS THERE A RIGHT ANSWER for Today's Locker Room/Restroom Design?

DAVID W. LARSON, AIA
TMP Architecture, Senior Vice President

BIO

David Larson is a Senior Vice President of TMP Architecture and is the co-leader of the firm's sports and recreation design group. He currently holds leadership roles for sports/recreation projects with the City of Dearborn, Eastern Michigan University, and Dexter Community Schools.

Larson has over 40 years of architectural design experience, leading the firm's efforts for aquatics and sports/recreation projects, completing hundreds of new construction and renovation projects for this complex facility type. He is actively involved with NIRSA, Athletic Business, and MRPA, often serving as a juror, presenter, and exhibitor. He has an extensive history of presentation and public speaking experience related to municipal, recreation and sports-related projects.

Locker rooms and restrooms have been a hot topic recently with rigorous discussions defining the very nature of privacy, dignity, wellbeing, and gender identity. Architects are on the front line in this discussion and are examining solutions to accommodate evolving societal attitudes and values.

Without the current legislation necessary to mandate appropriate existing facilities, institutions are responsible for determining what is appropriate for their patrons. This raises the important question for these institutions, "How do we build these facilities without engaging in a debate around the political and social issues that surround them?"

Today administrators are taking the time to look behind the doors and address the associated issues of school restrooms. When determining the correct strategy for the addition of gender-inclusive restrooms in your facility, it is important to weigh the sensitivity of the topic. Feeling unsafe, embarrassment, or a risk of disciplinary action may all deter nonconforming students from utilizing currently offered spaces. The needs of every user must be considered when deciding what to include in a new or renovated facility. By considering the architectural issues and implementing smart design choices, the debate over which restrooms students are mandated to use could be equalized. The answer lies in incorporating design decisions that will ultimately eliminate the element of choice and by challenging the norm and re-creating a new, unifying design standard.

Traditionally, communal showers and restrooms were implemented to increase efficiency and capacity in the space. Grouping toilets together in a row of stalls with short dividers across from a row of opposing sinks allows for easy maintenance and repairs and accommodates the largest group of users. This cost saving design improves efficiency from a facility maintenance point of view, but does not fully embrace the user experience. Issues arise as a result of a patron's unwillingness to use the facilities due to social stigmas, embarrassment, or bullying. By rethinking the traditional restroom design and eliminating choice, users are more likely to find comfort in all areas of the facility.

CITY OF DEARBORN *Ford Woods Pool*

When the City of Dearborn, Michigan decided to replace an existing community pool they saw an opportunity to explore options other than the traditional male and female locker rooms. With the current popularity of family changing rooms, the City asked TMP Architecture if there could be way to provide more family changing rooms in the new facility.



*Individual Changing Rooms
City of Dearborn, Ford Woods Pool
TMP Architecture, Inc.*

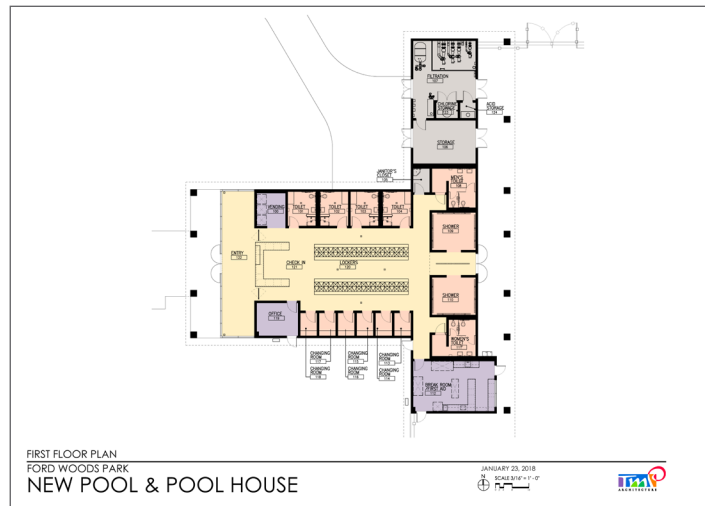
It was ultimately decided to provide individual changing rooms exclusively, with a large common locker area to store clothing and other valuables after having changed into bathing ware.

This approach maximizes the ability for a young child to stay with his/her parent and to provide privacy for people uncomfortable with changing in sight of other patrons, whatever the reason.

Dollars were also saved by not providing as much plumbing inherent in traditional male/female locker rooms.



*Open Locker Area
City of Dearborn, Ford Woods Pool
TMP Architecture, Inc.*

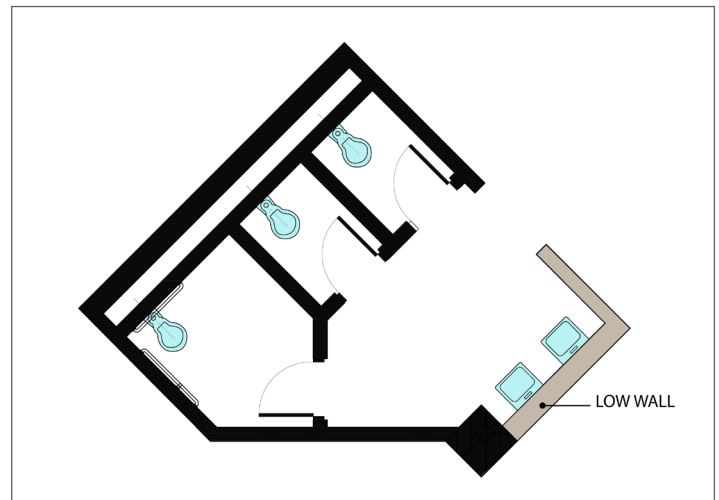


*Floor Plan
City of Dearborn, Ford Woods Pool
TMP Architecture, Inc.*

The best design solutions are those which provide adequate facilities to accommodate all users. Designers must employ an empathetic approach in designing new and renovated facilities. Historically, architects design for the default user without taking in account the needs of the user with a different perspective, including small children or persons with disabilities. Incorporating revolutionary designs and using 21st century design principles promote a safe and secure environment, without bringing awareness to the subject. Viable options to consider include single stall restrooms, eliminating gender-specific signage, and an open concept layout in shared spaces.

DEXTER COMMUNITY SCHOOLS *New K-12 Elementary School*

Dexter Schools, located adjacent to Ann Arbor, Michigan, is part of an explosively growing metropolitan area with an increasingly diverse population. When TMP Architecture was commissioned to design a new K-2 elementary school for the district, they were challenged to design restrooms that were visible from public spaces. With such a young student population, with a wide range of cultural experiences, the district wanted to provide easy and passive supervision of these spaces. The solution included individual enclosed toilets adjacent to an open hand wash area, contained by low walls. Staff can easily monitor the area without actually entering a toilet room. Any need for assistance is immediately noticed without compromising privacy.



*Open Toilet Room Design
Dexter Community Schools, New K-2 Elementary School
TMP Architecture, Inc.*

“The answer lies in incorporating design decisions that will ultimately eliminate the element of choice and by challenging the norm and re-creating a new, unifying design standard.”



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ABOUT TMP

TMP Architecture was founded in 1959 with the goal of designing the finest buildings for education. For 59 years we have focused our practice on educational clients. Our vision statement "Life. Long. Learning." encompasses the passion, creativity, strength, and commitment we bring to each client. TMP's offices in Bloomfield Hills and Portage, MI have grown to serve the broad spectrum of needs for institutions across the country.

Through the years, as a natural outgrowth of our work for education clients, TMP has developed national recognized expertise in the design of libraries, recreation/sports centers, and performing/fine arts facilities. These challenging building types, in addition to our K-12 and college facilities, have been the primary focus of our practice. Over 500 national, regional, and state level awards for design excellence attest to our ability regarding innovative design within budget and schedule.

Some considerations when considering the approach that is most appropriate for your institution:

SIGNAGE

The message implied by the label associated with toilet and locker facilities is subjective and should reflect the culture and values of the institution.

OPENNESS

An open concept is inherently easy to supervise and minimizes mishaps and behavioral incidents.

MATERIAL SELECTION

With an open approach there is an opportunity to coordinate the architectural image with adjacent public spaces.

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

The open concept is not for everyone. It is essential that the approach to locker rooms and toilets are in sync with the culture and values of the institution.

COST

An open concept will not necessarily reduce construction cost particularly when considering repurposing existing space. Existing structural, mechanical and code conditions need to be considered before a solution is adopted.

It is not an overnight solution or a radical change in procedures; but rather the decision to begin considering the options and assessing your facilities for areas for improvement. All public spaces have an opportunity to positively impact students, faculty, and your facility by revitalizing the space and implementing a practical approach to addressing future needs.