

Adult Bathhouses & Sex Venues Amendments Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The ban on bathhouses stems from discrimination and stigmatization of the LGBTQ+ community and creates barriers to safer spaces and sexual healthcare advocacy. It's time to address this historical wrongdoing.

Historical background:

Prior to being banned in 1988, bathhouses existed and operated in Minneapolis, as they do in other major cities in the US, and were gathering spaces mainly for LGBTQ+ folks. In the late 70s and 80s, efforts to target and criminalize the LGBTQ+ community, resulted in several raids of bathhouses that occurred unprompted. In December 1979 the largest raid on an adult bathhouse in U.S. history occurred in Minneapolis. Following raids, during the height of the AIDS epidemic in 1987, the City of Minneapolis took up a ban on “high risk sexual behavior” despite research indicating that closing bathhouses had no effect on slowing HIV transmission. In 1988 bathhouses were formally banned in Minneapolis.

Why repeal the ban on bathhouses?

A bathhouse or adult sex venue is a commercial business that may facilitate sex between consenting adults. These are community spaces, where people can safely connect with each other, as well as be able to receive sexual and public health resources. Banning these spaces did not eliminate a problem, i.e. the spread of HIV. Instead, public health advocates report that it did make it harder to disrupt the spread of HIV by driving the activity that happens in these spaces underground, making it more difficult to reach people. Allowing legal bathhouses and adult sex venues will create more opportunities for public health partnership to distribute educational, preventive, and testing resources where they will have the greatest impact and reach more people. In short:

- The 1988 ban was a fear-based response at a time when modern public health interventions (like PrEP and U=U) did not exist.
- Public health advocates and social science research tell us that bathhouses and adult sex venues are important for promoting safer sex and enhancing HIV prevention, testing, and treatment.
- When these spaces are allowed to operate legally, there is greater opportunity for these venues to partner with public health experts to more effectively combat the spread of HIV and STIs.
- These spaces already exist in the margins. By legalizing and regulating these spaces, we can ensure they are safer for patrons by adopting guidelines requiring training and education, and making sure they meet building, fire, and health code requirements.

Why is the City Council bringing this up now?

Community members, health advocates and council members have been advocating for and working to repeal the ban on bathhouses for several years. At a time when a hostile federal government is attacking our LGBTQ+ neighbors, it's critically important and urgent for the Council to listen to the community and take action to address historical marginalization taking place in our own city and facilitate the creation of safer spaces. Here is a timeline of the effort to repeal the bathhouse ban:

- In 2023, former Council President Andrea Jenkins and **then** Council Member Elliott Payne [authored amendments](#) to remove stigmatizing language from the High-Risk Sexual Conduct Ordinance. While these amendments were an important victory, community members and advocates have called for continued action on the bathhouse ban to address

broader impacts on sexual health, safety, and equity.

- In 2024 the City Council received a [Policy & Research report](#) and [presentation](#) on Regulations of Adult Bathhouses and Sex Venues. This report delineated City codes to be amended and created to regulate and legalize adult bathhouses/sex venues. The report also outlined a landscape analysis of other U.S. cities that have and regulate adult bathhouses and sex venues (ex. Chicago, San Francisco, Duluth, Dallas, etc.)
- In September 2025, the community leaders and advocates hosted a Town Hall meeting to raise awareness and engage community members on repealing the ban.
- In April 2026, in response to advocacy from the community, the City Council formally began the process of repealing the ban and legalizing bathhouses.

What do the amendments to the code do specifically?

The amendments that the City Council is currently considering take two actions:

1. Remove outdated and stigmatizing language that has been used to target and criminalize the LGBTQ+ community from the Minneapolis code.
2. Creates a pathway for the regulation and legalization of adult bathhouses/sex venues upon development of the business license code, eliminating barriers and removing contradiction. With these two actions the amendments maintain protections for employees of adult entertainment venues and maintain the authority of the Minneapolis Health Department to enforce all existing Health codes. The development of the business license code for these venues will be a longer process following the passage of these amendments and will be conducted by City Staff in partnership with the City Council.

Will repealing the bathhouse ban allow for bathhouses to open in Minneapolis?

Once the ban is repealed and outdated language is removed from City code, City Staff will be able to develop a regulatory framework and business license code for these venues to open. This process will be longer and will follow the passage of these initial amendments. City staff will conduct this process in partnership with the City Council and draw from existing regulatory frameworks from other cities that successfully license adult bathhouses and sex venues. In other words, repealing the bathhouse ban will not immediately allow for adult bathhouses and sex venues to open in Minneapolis, but will allow for the regulatory framework and license code to be created for venues to open in the future.

Who is driving this effort?

On the City Council, the co-authors of the Building Standards amendment to the Adult Entertainment Ordinance and the Amended High-Risk Sexual Conduct Ordinance are Council President Elliott Payne, Council Minority Leader Robin Wonsley, and Council Members Jason Chavez, Soren Stevenson, Aurin Chowdhury and Aisha Chughtai. In the community, a grassroots coalition of sex-positive, LGBTQ+ and public health advocacy groups formed to organize in support of repealing the bathhouse ban, called the Safer Sex Spaces Coalition (SSSC) They are dedicated to modernizing outdated policies and systems to reflect social realities and global advances in healthcare. By serving as a bridge between community experience and governance, they advocate for replacing stigma-based barriers with data-driven frameworks that prioritize safety, autonomy, and joy. They are a community-led effort to prove that by organizing around local issues, they can amplify underrepresented voices and work together to write policies that reflect the health and freedom of our neighbors. Together, the organizations that form the Safer Sex Spaces Coalition represent thousands of members across Minneapolis.