

## Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive Poolhouse at the City of Rochester Aquatics Center with Scranton Products® Aria Partitions®



The Soldiers Field Park Aquatic Center in Rochester, MN, had been a community staple for decades. However, as part of a broader renovation plan identified in a 2015 system-wide assessment, the facility needed a complete overhaul to better serve the city's growing and diverse population. The Rochester Parks Department secured funding and engaged community stakeholders to help shape the new design.

The renovation project, which began in 2023 and was completed in 2024, included significant upgrades: a 50-meter activity pool, a lazy river, a three-slide tower, and a wading pool with interactive splash features. The poolhouse was also a key aspect of the renovation, being completely modernized with a focus on inclusivity, privacy, and accessibility. Two small men's and women's restrooms were included to meet minimum code requirements, but the majority of the space was designed as a fully inclusive, all-gender facility. The poolhouse is possibly the first gender-neutral locker room in the state of Minnesota.

### Creating a restroom for everyone

Traditional changing spaces and restrooms divided by gender were no longer the best solution for the diverse needs of the Rochester community. The city sought a modern, welcoming approach that offered:

- Gender-neutral spaces that accommodate all visitors.
- High Privacy partitions to enhance security and comfort.
- Durable materials suited for high-moisture environments.
- ADA-accessible stalls and changing rooms to support individuals with mobility challenges.



“We really wanted the facility to be welcoming to everyone,” said Ben Boldt, Recreation & Sports Facilities Division Head for the City of Rochester Parks Department. “The goal was to provide security and privacy while making the space open to all visitors, whether they’re individuals, families, or those with accessibility needs.”

To achieve their goals, the design team proposed a layout featuring individual changing stalls, restrooms, and shower areas, all equipped with Scranton Products® Aria Partitions®. These high-privacy partitions provide floor-to-ceiling enclosures, ensuring users feel secure and comfortable. The city had initially expressed interest in metal partitions but realized that high-quality HDPE would provide better durability, and vandal resistance, prevent rust, and ensure easy maintenance.

In total, 45 stalls were used in the space to meet the needs of up to 1,200 occupants per day.

“One of the biggest concerns was ensuring privacy in a fully gender-neutral space,” said Martina Foss Ashworth, Architect at Miller Dunwiddie. “We spent a lot of time working with our product rep to make sure we specified everything needed for high privacy.”



The floor isn’t level across the whole building due to the drainage system, which meant special attention had to be paid to the bottom of the partitions to make them truly floor-to-ceiling for optimal privacy. Customizations included installing trim to close gaps between the partitions and ceiling and adding a sweep to the bottom of each door to eliminate any visible openings due to the uneven floor. Throughout the installation, the team tested for potential sightlines by measuring gaps on-site.

“High privacy was a crucial design priority that we addressed all the way from schematic planning to final walkthrough,” said Foss Ashworth.

**Opting for a retrofit over a rebuild**

“We explored different options, including constructing a new building, but ultimately decided to retrofit the existing poolhouse, originally built in 1998, to maximize efficiency,” said Foss Ashworth. “This came with significant design challenges because we had to work within the existing concrete structure while ensuring we met accessibility and occupancy requirements.”

The project required precise fixture placement to ensure compliance with capacity requirements. “Even a few inches made a huge difference in making everything fit,” Foss Ashworth noted. “We had to shift stall partitions and plumbing fixtures by inches in some cases to maintain accessibility and functionality.”

Beyond functionality, aesthetics played a key role in making the poolhouse feel welcoming and modern. The design team selected a neutral, sandy color palette to complement the beachy atmosphere of the aquatic center.

**Embracing the gender-neutral layout**

Since the project’s completion, the feedback from the Rochester community has been overwhelmingly positive. Visitors have embraced the gender-neutral layout, appreciating the privacy and flexibility it provides.

“We had a brief adjustment period for returning visitors who were used to the old locker room setup,” Boldt noted. “But once people understood the new layout, they felt comfortable and appreciated the privacy and security the partitions provide.”



The new restroom and changing area design has also improved efficiency, allowing visitors to move in and out of the space more quickly and comfortably. Families and groups now have greater flexibility, with designated areas that accommodate their needs while maintaining privacy. The modern, welcoming environment reflects Rochester's commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that all community members feel welcome and have their needs met when using the facility. To learn more about Scranton Products Aria Partitions, please visit [www.scrantonproducts.com](http://www.scrantonproducts.com) or call 800-445-5148.

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