

## **Our view: CRDA's renovation of Atlantic City Boardwalk bathrooms is an investment in tourism**

Many an eyebrow rose last October when the state Casino Reinvestment Development Authority said it would spend more than \$4 million renovating bathrooms on the Atlantic City Boardwalk.

For ordinary homeowners, redoing a bathroom costs thousands, not millions. And it better not be many thousands.

Even considering there were seven public bathrooms being redone, the average price for each was well over half a million dollars. That's like waving a red flag in front of journalists, especially those stationed elsewhere who seem inclined to show Atlantic City in a bad light when they can.

Mercifully, that hasn't happened much. Perhaps journalists and most people are jaded now about the high cost of plumbing and renovation work, the extra high cost of anything in the ocean's harsh environment, and the routine overpayment for most anything by government in New Jersey. If people were surprised by the project's cost, they might not be paying enough attention to their tax bills.

We weren't surprised. We were pretty impressed with the scope and details of the work.

Three of the seven restrooms, at more than 2,000 square feet each, are the size of modest homes. They've been made practically new -- not just plumbing, toilets, urinals and fixtures, but new heating and ventilation systems too.

The furnishings are of course durable enough for public use, and operating nearly all of them is touchless -- a timely upgrade as the pandemic wanes. And even the cleaning of these comfort stations has been made largely touchless. The surfaces and designs allow the use of the Kyvak touchless cleaning system. The CRDA and the designer on the project, SOSH Architects, seem to have done the excellent job needed and paid for.

Good thing the project had an architect, since one of the restrooms is of historic significance and improving it needed the approval of the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office. Bathrooms typically may be upgraded at will at historic sites, since they are not the primary spaces of the building. But in this case, the Mississippi Avenue restroom itself is historic -- with its vaulted ceiling and arch system. Visitors can easily combine a necessity with the appreciation of a historic structure.

CRDA officials were justifiably proud of the completed project in the Tourism District. Board Chairman Robert Mulcahy said it "modernizes the Atlantic City Boardwalk." Executive Director Matt Doherty said, "As a tourist destination, we realize the importance of having clean restrooms and providing a higher standard for visitors and their families."

Doherty's comment touches upon one of the more important aspects of the project for us -- it underscores the welcome Atlantic City gives to the majority of people not fortunate enough to live in an oceanfront community.

Many Jersey Shore municipalities do all they can to block the less fortunate. All citizens are entitled to ocean bathing and fishing, and by law the sands washed by the tide belong to the public and must be accessible to

people. The state Department of Environmental Protection has been battling for decades to ensure such access, and recently stopped one of the worst offenders -- the borough of Deal in Monmouth County -- from banning anyone but residents from parking near the beach.

Some shore municipalities deprive visitors of public bathrooms as a way to keep them out of the privileged town. In frustration, a few years ago the DEP proposed requiring a public bathroom every half mile along the public's beach and ocean, but after opposition to this and many of its other proposals the agency settled on working with each town to achieve adequate access.

Atlantic City and Ocean City stand out even among the municipalities that welcome visitors for their thoughtful and compassionate provision of restroom facilities.

The Atlantic City Boardwalk bathroom renovations benefit a large portion of the public. Three of them will stay open year-round.

That's the kind of government spending New Jersey could use more of.