



Area residents make good use of the shade on a hot day to take in a view of the Cooper River. PHOTOS BY DOUGLAS BOVITT/COURIER-POST

SPRUICING UP COOPER RIVER

\$4 million allocated for renovations

By Waldy Diez
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PENNSAUKEN — The Camden County Freeholders allocated more than \$4 million Thursday for more renovations as work continues to revitalize the 346-acre Cooper River Park.

"The park was in desperate need of renovation," said Freeholder Jeffrey Nash, liaison to the county Parks and Recreation Department.

"There was no revitalization in over 20 years."

The freeholders added \$4 million to the budget for renovations to the Cooper

River Waterfront as well as \$300,000 to construct new restrooms at Cooper River Stadium.

But according to county spokesman Dan Keashen, the permanent bathroom structures came in about \$100,000 over bid and have been rejected. New bids will be on next month's agenda and push the restroom construction into the fall.

Philadelphia consultant Cairone and Kaupp, Inc. are overseeing the \$23 million project. The plan divides the park into 15 zones and five phases that will take five to seven years to complete,



Portable restrooms will be replaced by new facilities when renovations are complete.

See COOPER, Page 2B

Cooper

Continued from Page 18

Nash said. The restrooms are part of Zone 5, which includes Jack Curtis Stadium.

According to Camden County Parks and Recreation Director Frank Moran, the old bathrooms were outdated and often fell victim to vandalism.

"We had to take them down last year," Moran said.

Portable toilets, camouflaged by greenery, are now in place. There are also public restrooms in the boathouse on North Park Drive.

The \$4 million allocation will pay for Phase 1 of the landscaping revitalization and includes work on Jack Curtis Stadium, water quality management and a large portion of improvements to the park's regatta course, Nash said.

The course features

six lanes that fit the required 2,000-meter length of Olympic races. But the course needs sprucing to help secure international regattas.

"There will be significant work done to the Cooper River to make sure all six lanes of competition are equal in depth," Nash said.

According to Keashen, the regattas are a huge economic generator for the four surrounding towns of Cherry Hill, Collingswood, Haddon Township and Pennsauken, bringing in about \$9 million to \$10 million annually.

Cooper River has hosted various high school and collegiate tournaments and championships. US-Rowing referee Joe Kieffer ranks Cooper River "in the top 15 percent of the (regatta) courses in the U.S." and said that "locally, it's one of the better courses.

"Cooper River has hosted some of the most prestigious regattas in the

United States, including the Scholastic National Regatta, the Intercollegiate Rowing Association Regatta, the NCAA Women's National Championships and the U.S. Rowing Club National Championships."

The park, bordered by North and South Park drives, Grove Street and Route 130, is one of 20 in the Camden County system. Rachel Pinkstone-Marx, walking the park with her friend Bryan Mead and her new dog, thinks the recent landscaping "looks amazing."

"I used to walk (the park) every day for the past two years," the Cherry Hill resident said.

Nash said that when the project is complete, "it's going to be a spectacular result." He hopes Cooper will one day experience Olympic fame.

"We are confident that if Philadelphia ever got the Summer Olympic Games, the Cooper River would be used for the water sports."