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N.J. TO SPEND \$2 MILLION TO REVAMP BOARDWALK HALL RESTROOMS

ATLANTIC CITY -- They won't be gold-plated, but the new \$2 million restrooms at historic Boardwalk Hall, approved unanimously Tuesday by the state Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, will be "timeless" in design and state-of-the-art in function.

"This project seems to be stirring up a little bit of discussion. ... There has been a misconception in the press about what we're doing," CRDA Chairman Robert Mulcahy III said of the renovation project. It is expected to begin by March 1 with a \$1.7 million contract between Spectra Venue Management, which is Boardwalk Hall's management company, and R. Wilkinson & Sons Construction Inc. of Absecon.

Mulcahy noted that there had been some public rumbling about the CRDA's spending \$2 million on the restroom areas, but said before the unanimous vote that "world-class facility like historic Boardwalk Hall demands first-class facilities" for the public. The arena is used year-round for events that include trade shows, indoor rodeos, large concerts, and the Miss America Pageant.

Cost overruns are not approved for the project over \$2,002,564, according to the contract, which calls for renovation of four men's and four women's restrooms on the first and second floors. One of the restroom areas has not been used since the 1930s, and the rest were last remodeled in the 1950s and have not been used in decades, according to Chris Menchin, a principal with SOSH Architects, designer of the project, which is expected to take four to five months.

Boardwalk Hall has numerous other restroom areas that will not be affected.

Menchin said the project would replace all plumbing, electrical wiring, and various other systems and infrastructure for the restrooms in addition to new fixtures throughout.

"You think of the shiny things that go into a restroom when you think of a restroom renovation, but there is a lot going on beneath the surface that needs to be replaced in a project like this all the way down to the masonry," Menchin said.

"There's a lot more involved than just throwing some new tiles up on the wall."

Entering the old restrooms to have a look at the space was like walking into a time warp for SOSH designer Arley Sochocky.

She immediately noticed the separate hot and cold faucets that were de rigueur in public restrooms and at-home bathrooms from the time indoor plumbing became common in the early 20th century.

"That was a surprise to see," said Sochocky, who said she designed the restrooms to reflect the historical nature of the building, which opened on Atlantic City's Boardwalk in 1929 as Convention Hall. It was a marvel of its time because of its unusually large clear-span space, with no supporting columns to block views in the 200,000-square-foot arena.

Sochocky said her designs, which will use Carrara marble on the floors and prominent greens and browns on the walls, will accentuate the period of the late 1920s and early 1930s, when Boardwalk Hall opened to the public. The fixtures -- toilets, sinks, exhaust systems -- will be state-of-the-art, she said.

The construction will not disrupt operations because the restrooms being renovated are all off the main lobby areas and have not been open to the public in years.