

## \$2M approved by freeholders for planetarium

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TOMS RIVER — Two million dollars to renovate the Robert J. Novins Planetarium at Ocean County College was among \$18 million in spending approved or introduced by Ocean County's freeholders yesterday afternoon.

The planetarium will get a major renovation, its first ever, as part of the plan to bring it back to life.

A companion fundraising effort to pay for new equipment for the planetarium is underway by the college, its foundation, and the Save the Planetarium Fund, a group of private supporters of the facility.

William Gumper of Holiday City at Berkeley said he hopes the planetarium will raise half its annual operating budget once it is back in operation.

"Otherwise it will become a welfare case," Gumper said.

Freeholder Director John P. Kelly said the planetarium will not raise that sum, but the renovation plan includes more classroom space. Students attending classes there will pay tuition that will cover the annual operating expense of the facility, Kelly said.

Concern about the annual operating deficit and the need for major upgrades prompted the OCC Trustees to close the planetarium as an economy move when state aid to the college was slashed.

A donor came forward, promising millions to restore the planetarium, but those promises never materialized.

That led the trustees, freeholders, and foundation to agree to pay to reopen the renovated facility.

Much of the pressure to do that came from the Save the Planetarium Fund, headed by Richard Gamba of Bay Avenue.

"Thank you for supporting us," Gamba told the freeholders yesterday. He said the OCC "trustees came through — all minds met," and the future for the facility is bright.

Freeholder James F. Lacey said the fund drive has produced \$675,000 in pledges or donations.

Kelly said the "planetarium is a community service ... a very important component of education," and the county needs to refurbish it because it is a county-owned building.

The public hearing on the planetarium funding is set for 4 p.m. July 18 in room 119 of the county Administration Building at 101 Hooper Avenue.

So is the hearing on a plan to spend \$12 million to rebuild the intersection of West Bay Avenue, Lighthouse Drive, and the Garden State Parkway in Barnegat.

Approved after a public hearing at which no one commented was a plan to spend \$4 million to buy a site and build a western regional garage for the county road department in Manchester Township.

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