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COURIER-POST

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South Jersey's Newspaper

75 cents

DRPA to delay toll hike on four bridges

Fare increase pushed back to July 2011 due to economy



JOHN ZIOMEK/Courier-Post

Tolls for cars on the Delaware River Port Authority's four bridges will not increase in 2010.

By EILEEN STILWELL Courier-Post Staff

CAMDEN

The Delaware River Port Authority gave motorists a 10-month reprieve Wednesday by postponing a toll hike on its four bridges until July 2011.

It also adopted operating and capital budgets for 2010

totaling about \$408 million that included no raises next year for most of the authority's 900 employees.

And in a flurry of walk-on resolutions designed to resolve a number of year-end issues, the board hired a \$180,000-a-year chief public safety officer, paid off \$3 million in old debt to NJ Transit and approved a \$250,000 contribution this year to the Army-Navy game and for each of five games through 2017 when it is in Philadelphia.

CEO John J. Matheussen got a round of applause Wednesday when he announced the nine-year-long paint job of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge was complete. Budgeted for \$90 million, the project came in at

\$87 million.

Instead of raising tolls for passenger cars from \$4 to \$5 in September 2010, as planned, the new rate will kick in July 2011. PATCO riders are not so lucky. Fares will rise 10 percent in September as previously announced.

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N.J. puts freeze on arts funding

By DEBORAH HIRSCH Courier-Post Staff

CHERRY HILL

South Jersey arts groups could be among the victims of the state budget crisis.

The state Treasury has frozen more than \$12.4 million in New Jersey State Council on the Arts grants as officials try to resolve a mid-year budget deficit.

Last week, municipalities heard that \$20.6 million in state aid payments would not be made. Nearly \$3 million in grants through the New Jersey Historical Commission were also affected.

The fate of that funding will be announced by Christmas when Gov. Jon S. Corzine presents a budget-balancing plan, said Treasury spokesman Tom Vincz.

If the arts grants aren't released, local groups said, it could mean the end of school programs, canceled concerts and maybe even shuttered doors.

"Now we're in a fiscal state of crisis here," said Pam Brant at Symphony in C, which has received none of its promised \$227,700. "We're scrambling to have

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Vatican won't block merger of 2 parishes



AVI STEINHARDT/Courier-Post

Parishioners at St. Vincent Pallotti Church in Haddon Township expressed their sentiments about preserving the parish in August 2008.

St. Vincent Pallotti in Haddon Twp. sought action

By JIM WALSH and WILFORD S. SHAMLIN Courier-Post Staff

A Vatican body has refused a request by parishioners to block a planned merger of two parishes, St. Vincent Pallotti in Haddon Township and St. Aloysius in Oaklyn.

"No recourse is considered operative at this time," said the Congregation of the Clergy, responding to an appeal made by members of St. Vincent Pallotti.

The parishioners — unhappy that St. Aloysius would be the seat of the merged parish and concerned over the fate of their Haddon Township church — requested "recourse" from the Congregation last year.

Bishop Joseph Galante announced the planned merger in April 2008 as part of a restructuring that is to cut the number of parishes in the Diocese of Camden from 124 to 68. He said the cutbacks are needed to address several factors, including a priest shortage, demographic changes and flagging membership.



DENISE HENHOEFFER/Courier-Post

Monsignor Louis Marucci celebrates Mass at St. Vincent Pallotti Church in Haddon Township last year.

The proposed changes have stirred grass-roots opposition at several parishes that face mergers.

So far, Galante has issued seven decrees for mergers involving 15 parishes. The latest merger occurred Wednesday, when three parishes — St. Luke in Stratford, St. Lawrence in Lindenwold and Our La-

dy of Grace in Somerdale — became Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish.

A diocesan official welcomed the Congregation's decision, which was announced in a letter to Galante and the St. Vincent Pallotti parishioners.

"We are grateful that the

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Same-sex marriage vote is delayed

Assembly committee will hold hearing

By MICHAEL SYMONS Gannett State Bureau

TRENTON

State senators have postponed a potential landmark vote that had been planned for today on legislation that would grant gay couples the right to marry in New Jersey, with the proposal's fate far from certain.

In a change of course, the bill's next step will apparently be a hearing in the Assembly Judiciary Committee, most likely in early January. The proposal is expected to have a clearer path in the Assembly, which has been waiting for the Senate to act.

Sens. Raymond Lesniak, D-Union, and Loretta Weinberg, D-Bergen, the bill's sponsors, Wednesday asked Senate President Richard Codey not to post the bill for a vote so the Assembly committee can take testimony on it. Codey said the vote is postponed "until further notice."

"The public needs another opportunity to engage legislators on this issue," Weinberg said. "Moreover, the Senate committee has substantially amended its version to include sweeping, additional protections for religious institutions. We believe that members of the public need to be afforded an additional opportunity

to debate this new provision as well."

Those amendments protect religious societies, institutions and organizations and their employees from lawsuits if they refuse to provide space, services, advantages, goods or privileges for same-sex marriages; clarify that the bill wouldn't alter law letting parents opt their child out of health, family life or sex education classes; and require partners in civil unions to pay the usual fees if seeking a marriage license.

Senators in the region have refused to tip their hands, an indication of the delicate political calculations going into the marriage vote. Only Sen. Philip E. Haines, R-Burlington, has let it be known that he opposes the bill. An aide estimated that up to 85 percent of the 600 to 700 calls and e-mail messages Haines' office received about the vote were in opposition.

Other local Senate offices also reported a flurry of calls and e-mails about the bill. It was impossible to discern how much of the communiques were from actual constituents and which were from lobbying groups, aides said.

Dana Redd, the mayor-elect of Camden, has refused to say which way she

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Evesham gets stimulus funds for sewer work

By JEREMY ROSEN Courier-Post Staff

EVESHAM

A sewer system project needed for decades in Evesham is one of the last in the state to be awarded federal stimulus funding this year.

The state has granted the Evesham Municipal Utilities Authority about \$3.55 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act stimulus money for a pro-

ject that officials said will cut operational costs, improve the local environment and create jobs.

The project, planned since the late 1980s, was the 40th of 41 to earn a share of \$213.5 million in stimulus funds distributed for sewer projects by the state Department of Environmental Protection, according to a DEP spreadsheet. On Nov. 16, Evesham's MUA was authorized by the DEP to take

bids for the project.

"You have to jump through a lot of hoops for this money," said Rocco Maiellano, Evesham MUA executive director. "We just made it above that line; it was really close."

The DEP awarded millions of stimulus dollars for six of about 40 sewer project applications filed by tri-county entities, including Camden and Camden County, according to spread-

sheets. Department officials are continuing to distribute millions in state aid for some remaining projects.

For projects bonded with stimulus money, half of the loan is forgiven with no repayment necessary and the rest can be paid back with a low-market interest rate recently quoted near 1.5 percent on a 20-year plan. For projects bonded with state aid, a quarter of the loan is at market rate and the re-

mainder is federally funded with repayment at a zero-percent interest rate.

To fund the DEP-ranked top priority sewer project in the state, Camden was awarded \$7.5 million in stimulus money and \$2.5 million in state aid. Also in October, the city was authorized by the DEP to take bids for about \$5.5 million worth of drinking water

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WEATHER

South Jersey: Windy and much colder. High 36. Low 17.

Down the shore: Mostly sunny, blustery. High 40. Low 22. Page 2A



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