

# Park cost estimate stirs tempest over toilet

By OMAR PEREZ  
Herald Writer

Jim Shiver sees it as money down the toilet: A \$200,000 toilet.

The \$200,000 was the first estimate Metro-Dade Park and Recreation planners came up with to build a 700-square-foot restroom in Larry and Penny Thompson Park, 12451 SW 184th St. Since Shiver began questioning the amount two weeks ago, the estimate has dropped to \$176,000.

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**JIM SHIVER,**  
president of the Cutler Ridge Civic Association

"For that much money, I could buy a home with three bathrooms," said Shiver, president of the Cutler Ridge Civic Association.

"We're talking about putting up four walls, a divider, some toilets, and maybe some sinks. Let's be honest. Don't you feel like you could build one and have money

left over to build a house?" Shiver asked.

"This isn't just a regular house bathroom, so you can't go by that," said Beatriz Portella, spokeswoman for the Metro parks department.

The new restroom, with six stalls and electrical hookups, will replace one destroyed by Hurricane Andrew, and park officials hope the Federal Emergency Management Agency will pick up

the tab, instead of county taxpayers.

In evaluating costs, department employees consider certain criteria, including the price of building materials, permit and inspection costs, water and plumbing hookups and costs for other similar projects, Portella said.

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**BATHROOM, FROM 3**

One such project about to be built, is a 1,042-square-foot eight-stall restroom at Ruben Dario Park, Northwest Fourth Street and 97th Avenue. Bids on this work range from \$159,000 to \$260,000.

Samuel Amune of Amussco International, a South Dade construction company, said the average industry cost for commercial construction is about \$70 per

square foot. The cost for high-end condominiums, Amune said, is \$150 to \$170 per square foot.

Using the \$176,000 estimate, Thompson Park's restroom would cost \$251 per square foot.

"This is a commercial bathroom; it has to be made to withstand vandalism and weather abuse, among other things," Portella said.

"A lot of people don't under-

stand the process. This is just an estimate until it goes to bid.

There's nothing solid. We can't control what the industry charges. It's going to cost what it's going to cost."

Last week, the parks department filed a damage survey report to the Florida Department of Community Affairs for \$176,000. If the state agency OKs that amount, then it goes to

FEMA for final funding.

But the first damage report, filed within a year after Andrew stormed through on Aug. 24, 1992, estimated repairs on the bathroom at \$4,055 — for roof and skylight damage. FEMA approved those costs in October 1994.

But when repair work remained undone, the structure was declared unsafe and demol-

ished by park employees.

Jaime Reyes, chairman of the South Dade Community Council 15, said he is glad post-hurricane repairs have started in Dade parks, but he questions costs.

"My house cost less to build than that restroom," he said.

Added Shiver, "And this is just one example. How much more money are we throwing away?"