



Featuring a sculpture, a nearly 300-foot shoreline and other amenities, the Harrison Township Waterfront Pavilion and Park will see coastal and bathhouse overhauls in time for next summer.

Photo by Dean Vaglia

Harrison Township Waterfront Park to see \$1.3 million project

By: [Dean Vaglia](#) | [Mount Clemens-Clinton-Harrison Journal](#) | Published July 26, 2024

HARRISON TOWNSHIP — Nestled between Jefferson Avenue and Lake St. Clair, Harrison Township Waterfront Park is everything it is advertised as. A playscape, half-size basketball court, public art, pavilion and grills all provide the epitome of the municipal park experience, but nothing quite tops the free access to 275 feet of shoreline that makes the park known as a prime fishing spot.

Soon, that shoreline and the fishing boardwalk on it will look a lot different. The Harrison Township Board of Trustees in June approved a \$1.3 million improvement project that will “soften” the shoreline and build a new fishing pier into the lake. Harrison Township Supervisor Ken Verkest said upgrading the park has been considered for a long time due to the deteriorating seawall but that funds were not always available.

The township received a \$156,000 Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant in 2018 to replace the seawall with a softened shoreline, but no bidders were found for the project when the township first sought contractors. American Rescue Plan Act funds were made available to the township in 2021, \$1.52 million of which was rolled into the general fund. Verkest says those rolled-over ARPA funds and the natural resources grant will pay for the shoreline projects at Waterfront Park.

“The grant was based on us softening the shoreline,” Verkest said. “The idea is that seawalls ‘harden’ shorelines. Ultimately (seawalls are) a good way to secure your land, but a natural shoreline absorbs wave energy, and a hard shoreline kicks that wave energy back out into the lake, which leads to turbidity. It eliminates potential for fish habitats and is just unnatural.”

Shoreline softening takes on many forms but ultimately aims to replace harder sea walls with erosion-prevention methods that hold land naturally. Verkest says Waterfront Park will use a method similar to the Lake St. Clair Metropark and Harley Ensign Boat Launch shorelines. Large and small rocks will interlock and slope into the lake.

As the stony slope will require the removal of the existing boardwalk, a 150-foot fishing pier will be constructed in its place. New pathways will be built to connect the pier to the parking lot and pavilion, making the addition compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. A ramp for launching small boats like kayaks will be built as well. Construction firm EC Korneffel Co. is contracted to build the soft shoreline, pier and ramp.

“They most recently did the pier at Blossom Heath Park in St. Clair Shores, and they also did the Detroit RiverWalk, so definitely a well-qualified contractor to construct our pier, which is smaller than either of those projects,” Verkest said.

Along with the work to the shore and pathways, the bathhouse will receive general upgrades over the colder months. The township’s Building Department will handle the task of finding what needs to be fixed and hiring contractors for the work. But spruced-up bathrooms will not be the only thing park-goers will find different about the bathhouse — Detroit-based and globally exhibited artist Pat Perry will paint a mural on the bath house as part of the DIA Partners in Public Art program.

Acquired through the work of Harrison Township Beautification Commission Chair Susan Keehn, the mural will face Jefferson Avenue and focus on a yet-to-be-determined subject. Township officials have already spoken with Perry and concepts are being discussed.

“Having a mural in our community from the community as basically a gift speaks volumes to our residents and visitors and allows them a different view of the community,” Keehn said. “Art speaks to everybody in a different way and different types of art are really lovely to have, and to have the DIA sponsor this and get amazing artists to choose from was really special. We’re in the throes of this right now and really enjoying talking to the DIA and to the artist, putting our thoughts together on what kind of mural we actually wanted.”

Much of the work is set to take place ahead of summer 2025. The shoreline projects are scheduled to begin in October and end around spring 2025, while Perry is expected to complete the mural this fall.