

Performing Arts Center proposed in Ossining

by Adam Stone

A developer is proposing to build a four-story, 50,000-square-foot performing arts center at 155 Main Street in Ossining, where four businesses were lost in a 1995 fire.

The \$8 million project would include 20,000 square feet of retail space, which would include a restaurant, and potentially a bookstore, a gallery, and a public access station.

Three state-of-the-art live performance theaters would be located on the third and fourth floors. The fourth floor would also contain a conference facility for businesses and civic groups.

The arts center would also have the necessary equipment to screen films.

Assorted stage performances and other cultural events would be held at the venue.

"This would make Ossining a viable downtown," said Peter Stolatis of the Pleasantville-based Stolatis Group. "Investors wouldn't question the downtown. It would erase any (negative) perceptions."

Mayor John Perillo said he's concerned whether Stolatis would be able to fund the project.

"I told him, 'show me the money,'" Perillo said.

Deputy Mayor Eugene Napolitano also said he has reservations about the proposal.

"There are some stumbling blocks they'll need to overcome," Napolitano said. "We wouldn't want to get tied up in a contract and figure out five or six years from now that they didn't have the funds."



Illustration of proposed Performing Arts Center

But Stolatis remains optimistic and said he hopes to start the 12 to 15 month construction process by the end of 2003.

The village owned property is worth roughly \$200,000.

Stolatis compared the benefit of the project to what the Jacob Burns Film Center did for revitalizing Pleasantville's economy and energizing the culture of the community.

"It would also serve as a destination other than the prison," Stolatis said. "There is a

veritable goldmine of painters, sculptors and other artists in Ossining."

Artists in the community have mixed feelings about the proposal at this time, said Steve Worthy, president of the Ossining Arts Council.

"It's a noble thing Mr. Stolatis wants to do, I just don't know how it's going to work in terms of parking and accessibility of hours," said Worthy, who is involved in film, video and music art. "I don't want it to turn

into a Peekskill art district where there is only access from Wednesday to Saturday from 12 to 5. Also, I'd rather see something smaller that works rather than something big that's empty."

Since the 1995 fire, artists in the community painted a mural at the site, which recreates the line of stores that burnt down.

The office manager at the Jacob Burns Film Center said the theater has become the cultural hub of Westchester County.

"There are also no more storefronts with 'for rent' signs and people are walking around and spending money at night," Julia Rosen said. "The (Ossining) arts center would just have to define its mission to separate itself."

Stolatis said unlike Peekskill's initiative to lure artists to the community, Ossining already has the people to support such a project.

"I see this as creating a house for performers and artists who are already here," he said.

A nonprofit organization would control the performing arts center. However, the foundation intends on paying real estate taxes due to the retail component of the plan.

"This is a public benefit," said Stolatis, who received 300 signatures at the Ossining Village Fair on June 14 in support of the project. "I'm confused why the village government is not more pro-active. It's such an obviously beneficial program for the community."