

Arts groups see Ossining as stage

Town OKs theater facility while village considers another

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The Journal News

OSSINING — Theater buffs may be looking to Ossining soon if the town and village move ahead with plans to build two performing arts centers.

On Tuesday, the Town Board approved a licensing agreement with Blueberry Pond Arts Center to move its Yorktown-based operation to the Shine House building at Cedar Lane Park. The former meeting hall for disabled World War II veterans will be renovated to accommodate a 49-seat theater once the town

Planning Board gives its approval, Supervisor John Chervokas said.

Meanwhile, the village is considering an \$8 million proposal by The Stolatis Group to build a four-story performing arts facility with three theaters, a restaurant, art galleries and retail stores at the "We Can Do It Wall" site. Village officials have been trying to find suitable occupants for the downtown location since 1995, when a massive fire destroyed four 130-year-old commercial and residential buildings there. Right now, the space is taken up by a plywood wall that students painted with a mural.

"It's a wonderful proposal for the community, but the fact is that I'm overly concerned about them raising the money," May-

or John Perillo said. "Show me the money and then we can talk about the 'We Can Do It Wall.'"

Until then, Perillo said, the burned-out property will be converted into a temporary 44-space parking lot while the village completes its plans to construct a roughly 350-space parking structure near Brandreth Street.

"When our parking structure is completed, then that lot will be for sale," he said.

Earlier this month, The Stolatis Group promoted its ambitious proposal to residents at a village fair, Associate Director Van Stolatis said. More than 300 people signed a statement supporting the performing arts space, Stolatis said.

The development group is securing the necessary funding from private donors and corpo-

rations, and is looking at various theater groups to bring in, he said.

"I think this would be a big plus for the area," Stolatis said. "It would help turn a lot of things around in the village."

Two years ago, The Stolatis Group purchased an old mill building at 36 N. Water St. to convert into a 121-unit condominium complex. The group has not yet filed a formal application to begin the waterfront project, Perillo said.

While The Blueberry Pond Arts Center is a considerably smaller venture, Chervokas said he does not foresee any problems with having two theaters in Ossining.

"They would not be dueling theaters," Chervokas said. "This is a small theater with a lot of emphasis placed on workshops."

The arts center was founded in

The arts center was founded in March 2002 and produces original material by Westchester playwrights, said Stephan Summa, the organization's secretary. The nonprofit center has more than 80 members, including county-based actors, writers and directors.

The group will move into the space free of charge on the condition that it renovates the Shine House, said Summa. Renovation costs are expected to be approximately \$30,000, he said. In addition to the theater, a meeting room will be used to conduct free workshops for playwrights and actors.

"We've been floating around different facilities in Yorktown," said Summa. "We've been looking for a permanent location to do more work and allow Westchester-based actors, playwrights and directors to hone their crafts. The Shine House is a beautiful site and

will serve our needs."

The group also has agreed to accommodate office space for the Ossining Arts Council, said Chervokas.

If the village approves The Stolatis Group's proposal, Summa said, having two performing arts centers in close proximity might work to their advantage.

"From what I understand, we will not be hindered," he said. "In fact, theaters tend to be mutually supporting. Blueberry Pond is all about supporting the arts, whether it's with for-profit or nonprofit groups."

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