

## Ossining trustees say performing arts center plan lacks \$\$

"Show me the money."

That was the bottom line from Mayor John Perillo last Thursday night as plans for a possible \$8 million performing arts center in the village's downtown were unveiled by an Pleasantville developer.

The Stolatis Group would build the four-story facility on the site of the April 1995 fire which created four vacant lots in the downtown's historic "Crescent."

Though recently paved to serve the area as a "temporary" open-air parking lot, Mayor Perillo reported that the site is currently under "strong consideration" by another entity. This other plan—also for a four-story structure—would have eight retail stores at ground level, offices on the second floor and an unspecified number of condominiums on the third and top floors, said the mayor.

The Stolatis Group, on the other hand, is envisioning what would primarily be a cultural facility that would be leased by "smaller performing arts companies" which lack the facilities available to their larger counterparts, according to principal Peter Stolatis. He said that four performing arts companies are serious prospects as tenants.

There would be a 500-seat theatre that could be divided into two or three smaller theatres as needed. And there would be some limited retail, about 2,200 square feet, to help generate revenue to offset construction and maintenance cost. The retail portion of the project would also generate property tax revenue, though the bulk of the structure would be tax-exempt, he explained.

The entity that would own and operate the building, Mr. Stolatis continued, would be a new not-for-profit organization, the Hudson Arts Foundation, which has recently been incorporated. Currently, it has no assets. Fund-raising activities and various donation initiatives would be undertaken to raise the \$8 million needed to build the facility, he said.

Mr. Stolatis and various supporters of the project were before the Board of Trustees last Thursday night to ask that the village give the new foundation up to 18 months to come up with the funding to acquire the site and begin the building.

"If we give you a shot at this for up to 18 months, that other guy is walking," Trustee Anthony Parise told Mr. Stolatis.

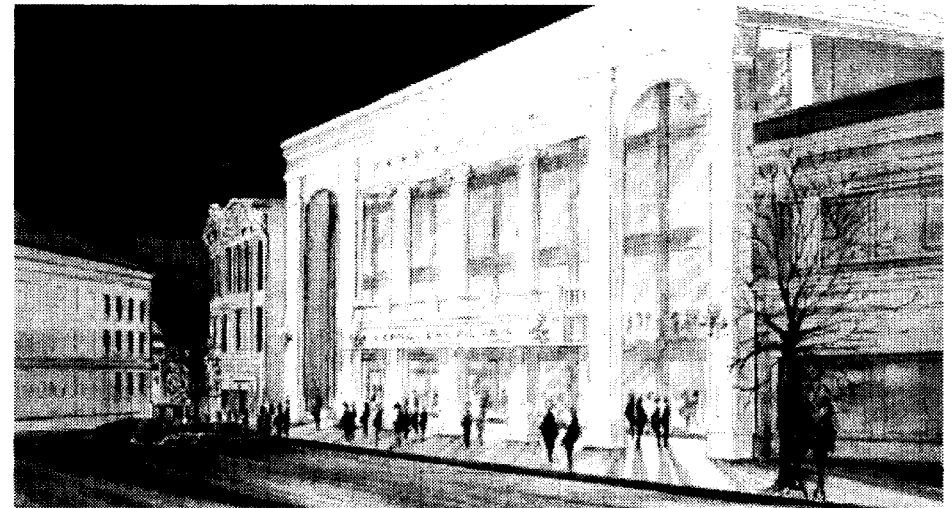
Mr. Perillo said he sympathized with the intent, and indicated he would like a performing arts center in the downtown, but that as mayor he has a fiduciary responsibility to act in what he believes to be the village's best interest.

"This is village-owned property. It's not my property. It's the people's property. We're not talking about private property" and deals that can be made between private parties, he said of the site.

As well, if that evening's conversation were taking place a year or so earlier, when there was no other viable prospect on hand, "it would be a different story," Mr. Perillo said. He explained that if there were no other interest in the approximately one-third of an acre, there would essentially be nothing to lose if the Stolatis Group were given a specific time period to fund-raise but the project didn't pan out. After all, "Zero from zero equals zero."

However, if the other party now interested in the property goes away, "What are you going to say to me in six months if it [fund-raising] isn't going as well as you had hoped?"

Jan Morglim, a resident of Ossining and audience member, told the board members that favoring the "other" plan was short-sighted. She said that if she wanted to go shopping locally, there are many options, while a performing arts center "would be an attraction" that would have a significant draw from throughout the region and benefit existing businesses in the downtown and attract new ones.



**An artist's rendering of a proposed performing arts center on Ossining's Main Street.**

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Trustee Parise agreed that a performing arts center would be a nice addition. "My business would double with that," said the man, owner of Parise's Steak House a half-block away from the site.

Mr. Perillo seemed unimpressed with a petition presented to him, containing a reported 500 signatures of people in support of The Stolatis Group's plan.

"If I wasn't the mayor, I would have signed the petition," claimed Mr. Perillo, adding that his "business" judgment of the proposal doesn't mean he doesn't appreciate cultural resources as well as anyone. "I go to the performing arts center at Purchase (College) once a month... I get on the train and (attend shows in New York City)."

"You're not looking at just a grumpy 52-year-old man," he added.

Trustee Miguel Hernandez suggested that were The Stolatis Group's proposal not financially firm enough for the board to accept for the Main Street site in question, other municipally-owned properties

in the downtown—which also currently provide open-air parking—could be considered at a later date.

Plans are moving forward to build a 300-plus space parking structure on two municipally-owned parking lots off Brandreth Street. The mayor has repeatedly said his vision is that all village property in the downtown now occupied by open-air parking be sold for development.

Near the conclusion of Thursday night's discussion, Mr. Perillo suggested that if The Stolatis Group is so certain of its plan being viable, it should be willing to put up the money, build the performing arts center and then sell it to the not-for-profit Hudson Arts Foundation once it is capitalized. That idea didn't go over well with Stolatis representatives.

The mayor subsequently reduced the stakes.

"Show me a million and a half dollars, and we'll get serious," he said.