

Ossining balks at arts center plan

By WILLIAM P. SIRIGNANO II

At the recent Ossining village fair, the Stolatis Group, a small real estate development and management company, presented its proposal for a modern performing arts center in the heart of the village's downtown district.

The downtown site, which is owned by the village, has been vacant for almost nine years. The village put out a request to development companies for possible ideas to develop the site. The Stolatis Group's proposal has the attention of village trustees, who have asked for further details for the project. Past ideas included a multiplex movie theater and apartments. The multiplex was a viable proposal that had sufficient funds, but came at the wrong time, during a cutback in the theater industry.

The Stolatis plan calls for a four-story facility with a restaurant on the first floor and three theaters on the top two floors. The theaters will seat 75, 150 and 225 people. Space would be available for a coffee shop or bakery next to the restaurant. The second floor will have art galleries and more retail space. State-of-the-art meeting rooms on the fourth floor would allow businesses to conduct meetings and conferences. The projected construction time for the project is 18 to 24 months.

If approved, the building would contain 50,000 square feet and cost around \$8 million, \$2 million more than the previous estimate. About 10,000 square feet would be retail space. Rents from the retail spots alone would cover the village property taxes. A nonprofit charitable foundation would be set up to manage the center. When asked if the foundation would seek exemption from the village property taxes, Van Stolatis said, "Not at all. That is why we think our proposal will benefit the community. We are not looking for a free ride."

Stolatis is assistant director of corporate affairs for the Stolatis Group that is headed by his father, Peter. The company has seven employees.

COUNTYWIDE INTEREST

The center is expected to sustain itself with funds generated from renting the theaters, retail space and meeting rooms. Petitions signed in favor of the project have led village planners to



expect people from as far as Croton-On-Hudson and Peekskill to use the center. They have been talking with theater groups from around Westchester County, especially those looking for smaller, more intimate theaters in which to perform.

Greater Ossining Television (GOTV), a public access cable station, has verbally committed to using the facility, should it be built. GOTV would like its studios and offices in the center. A couple of restaurant owners and theater groups have also shown interest in the art center.

The Stolatis Group's design has taken into consideration the site's surroundings. The proposal attempts to integrate the structure and its surroundings while providing a modern presence. The idea is that during the day the brick façade will match the nearby buildings.

At night, however, the brick will fade away and the glass wall behind will become visible with precision lighting. Possibly symbolic of the present and future of the village, some have said the building will resemble Lincoln Center, and that the village would be enriched both culturally and economically with the presence of a performing arts facility.

FINANCIAL PLANS

The Stolatis Group has not yet secured sufficient financial backing for its project. The village board of trustees

will not further consider their proposal until sufficient funds are raised. Village Manager O. Paul Shew said the board must see "full financial backing before they get involved with the project." John Perillo, the village mayor, suggested Stolatis finance the project itself and then raise the money to cover the costs. Stolatis is not interested in such a financial plan.

In the meantime, the site is being turned into 44 parking spaces. The additional spaces will provide temporary relief for the loss of parking across the street where the village is constructing a four-story parking garage. The municipal structure will provide an extra 350 to 450 parking spots and will take between six months and a year to complete.

The Village Board is hoping that this added central parking facility will encourage development in the downtown district. All of the village parking spots will be for sale, even the 44 temporary spaces across the street.

"People always ask what came first, the chicken or the egg. I say parking," said Perillo. "We simply cannot afford to tie up municipal land in a project that is not financially secure."