

Cultural Center To Be Expanded

Village Board hears a new plan for larger stage, gallery space

By Michael Wright

Plans for a cosmetic facelift of the Southampton Cultural Center on Pond Lane have been transformed into an expansion of the municipality owned building with an eye toward providing a more versatile space for

performances, gatherings and exhibitions. Architect Michael Tortorice, a member of the Cultural Center's board of directors, presented the Southampton Village Board with preliminary sketches of the proposed

expansion, which he has designed at no cost, on Tuesday night. He said an expansion of the usable space in the building would be a far more judicious use of the \$1.2 million

See VILLAGE, Page A18

VILLAGE: Center To Be Expanded

FROM PAGE A1

left to the center by the estate of a former patron. Initially the Cultural Center's board had proposed using the bequest to alter the center's facade to match that of neighboring Veterans Memorial Hall.

"The original plans were pretty much a Hollywood set designed to mimic Veterans Hall, but there was no space gained at all," said Mr. Tortorice, who founded the Peconic Youth Orchestra, which is based in the Cultural Center. "When I got

*Mr. Tortorice called
the new plan a
"better gift
to the community."*

involved, knowing how much we use the space and the need for multi-tasking, I felt that adding square footage and being able to divide the room would be a much more practical use of the money and a better gift to the community."

The expansion plans submitted by Mr. Tortorice, an architect with Beauty, Harvey and Associates, show an addition of between 1,500 and 2,000 square feet to the rear of the existing center. Most of the added space will be dedicated to expanding the Cultural Center's main room, which currently hosts both the small performance stage and the gallery. The room is about 3,700 square feet now.

The expanded main room will have mobile dividing walls so that more than one event can be held at the same time without interfering with each other. The roof of the building will be raised to provide space for an enlarged and elevated performance stage with better acoustics and lighting.

The floor of the entire cultural center, which is now on three levels connected by ramps, will be reduced to a single level to gain additional space. A mechanical lift will be installed for

access by wheelchairs.

At the front of the building the project proposes large arched windows to allow natural light into the main room. The roofline will also be changed to soften the facade.

Mr. Tortorice said he should be able to present the village with more detailed plans by early next month. He said he hopes the project will receive an expedited review by the village's regulatory boards so construction could begin by early spring.

The Cultural Center is under a time limit to spend the money left to it for improvements to the building by the estate of Willard Levitas. Mr. Tortorice said Mr. Levitas' will stipulated that the project be 80 percent completed by the end of 2005.

"We have to spend the money, or we're going to lose the money," he said. "We want to use it and use it wisely."

Mr. Tortorice said the Cultural Center board is hoping to use the expansion project to launch a capital campaign to raise funds for further improvements to the building.

Mr. Tortorice said he is confident that the expansion will be completed as planned using the money from Mr. Levitas' estate. He noted that the addition is small and basic with little in the way of "fancy" features, though the center hopes to use privately raised funds to make internal improvements once the addition is finished. "It's still going to be the Cultural Center," Mr. Tortorice said. "It's not Carnegie Hall."

Town Says No to Purchase
Southampton Town informed village officials last week that it will not grant a request by Mayor Joseph Romanosky Jr. to use Community Preservation Fund money to buy a condemned building on Windmill Lane. The interior of the building, which once housed apartments but has been vacant for many years, is said to contain the intact frame of one of the village's oldest houses.

Historic preservationists have lobbied the village, town and the building's owner, Alex Demetriades, to be allowed access to the building to dismantle the historic structure so that it can be preserved and some-

day reassembled.

Mr. Demetriades, who has asked to be allowed to tear down the condemned structure and replace it with an office building, has thus far denied historians access to the building.

In light of the town's refusal to purchase the property, Trustee Edward Britt called for the destruction of the building as soon as possible out of fear that someone might get hurt if there is an accident at the site.

"I think we should get it down before there's a fire and one of our guys gets hurt or a kid gets in there," Mr. Britt said on Tuesday. "All the historic people say they want to restore it, but its been three years and they have not gotten in there to take one stinking board out."

Mr. Romanosky said that the town's refusal is unfair considering that village real estate sales have contributed well over \$14 million to the CPE while only three properties have been purchased in the village for a total of \$3.5 million.

Mayor Romanosky and Trustee James McFarlane were both critical of the town's refusal to offer CPE money for village properties. Town officials could not be reached by press time but have noted in the past that purchases using real estate transfer tax money must have willing sellers.

Contract Still Smoldering
For the third meeting in a row the Village Board failed to approve the Southampton Fire Department's contract with the newly formed Fire District.

With the contract approval up for a vote, Mayor Romanosky, a member

of the department's fire police, and Mr. McFarlane raised objections to the wording of the document presented by the Fire District's commissioners.

Mayor Romanosky took exception to a clause that would allow the district, which represents taxpayers who live outside of the village but is under the protection of the Southampton Fire Department, to withhold its half of the annual contribution to the department's reserve fund used for buying trucks and equipment until the money is needed.

In the past the outlying district has paid its share of the annual fund up front and allowed the village to manage expenditures.

But Mayor Romanosky said he doesn't like the idea of the five district fire commissioners being able to veto village decisions on capital purchases for the department. Mr. McFarlane agreed, noting that by agreeing to provide fire protection to the outlying district, the village is basically providing low cost fire insurance to property owners.

"We hold the key to everybody's mortgage in the outlying district and yet they're coming to us and bringing this contract down on the table and saying that what we're going to pay and when we're going to pay it," Mr. McFarlane said. "We are noting their fire protection at the cheapest price on Long Island and the fact that they continue to make demands is beyond comprehension to me."

The board agreed to not sign the contract until it can meet in person with the five district commissioners next month.

