

Economic spinoffs from theatre good for town: consultant

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Whitchurch-Stouffville council voted in September to have the Ventin Group architects come up with a concept and business plan for the project.

At Monday's meeting, almost all the information presented by Paul Sapounzi of the Ventin Group and Roger Jones of Roger Jones & Associates was positive.

Residents had an opportunity to give their opinions verbally or by filling out a comment sheet.

ARTS GAIN IMPORTANCE

"Performing art is becoming as important in communities as the library, ice pads and swimming pools," Mr. Jones said.

After consulting with many of the performing arts and cultural groups in town, the consultants suggested a 300 to 350-seat theatre. The building would be designed for live theatre, dance productions, films, musicals and musical performances, lectures and business functions. It would contain a reception area that could be used in conjunction with performances or activities in adjacent Civic Square or Memorial Park. It could also be used for birthday parties, baby showers, wedding receptions and community celebrations.

A good sized lobby is required, which could merge with the auditorium for large-scale events, the consultants said. A good stage area with an efficient loading dock, quality dressing rooms, technical shop, wardrobe area and good lighting and sound were also on their list.

An arts and culture centre in the heart of town would increase retail activity in the surrounding area.

"The economic spinoffs are \$2 to \$4 for each \$1 spent," Mr. Jones explained.

Arts and crafts, such as needlework and rug hooking, painting, pottery and sculpture, could be taught in the facility.

The theatre would attract local performers as well as summer stock and travelling performance companies.

After building numerous similar facilities throughout southern Ontario, Mr. Sapounzi said at first the economic impact is not overly significant, but theatre facilities generate strong positive economic outcomes in the long term.

Stouffville resident Roger Glazin asked whether professional touring companies would require the new arts and culture centre to have professional staff such as a general manager or director and technical director.

At least three professional staff would have to be hired by the town, Mr. Jones said.

Parking was one contentious

issue. There isn't enough of it and visitors would most likely have to park around the town and on side streets.

"As an owner of a business downtown, I would be very happy to have people parking around the area," Eric Button, chairperson of the Stouffville Business Improvement Area said. People walking from their cars to the theatre facility would add to the revitalization of the downtown core.

MEETING PLACE

The facility would create a pedestrian area for people to meet on a daily basis, theatre proponent Pam Mandich said. Another resident said increased activity on the street at night would reduce vandalism.

Mayor Sue Sherban noted there are close to 400 parking spaces in the vicinity of 19 Civic Ave., at the Care & Share thrift shop, Latham Hall and the Lebovic centre.

Bloomington resident Bob Lewis asked, since 48 per cent of the facility's income is based on the theatre, "have you consulted other people who would use the facility?"

That would be very difficult to do, Mr. Jones replied. The consultants use data from other theatres of a similar size to see what possible outcomes would be.

Jim Thomas, one of the original



STAFF PHOTO/JIM MASON

The old town hall in downtown Stouffville could be the site of a performing arts centre. The town is studying a plan for the property.

Clock Tower Theatre Association members, who tried for almost a decade to have a theatre in this location, praised the town for taking on this project. Without its support, he said, "this would never be realized."

The consultants estimated the building would be ready in three to

four years at the very earliest, depending, in part, on when provincial and federal funding came through.

The Ventin Group and Roger Jones & Associates are to complete a further report with designs, some costs and program information early in the new year.

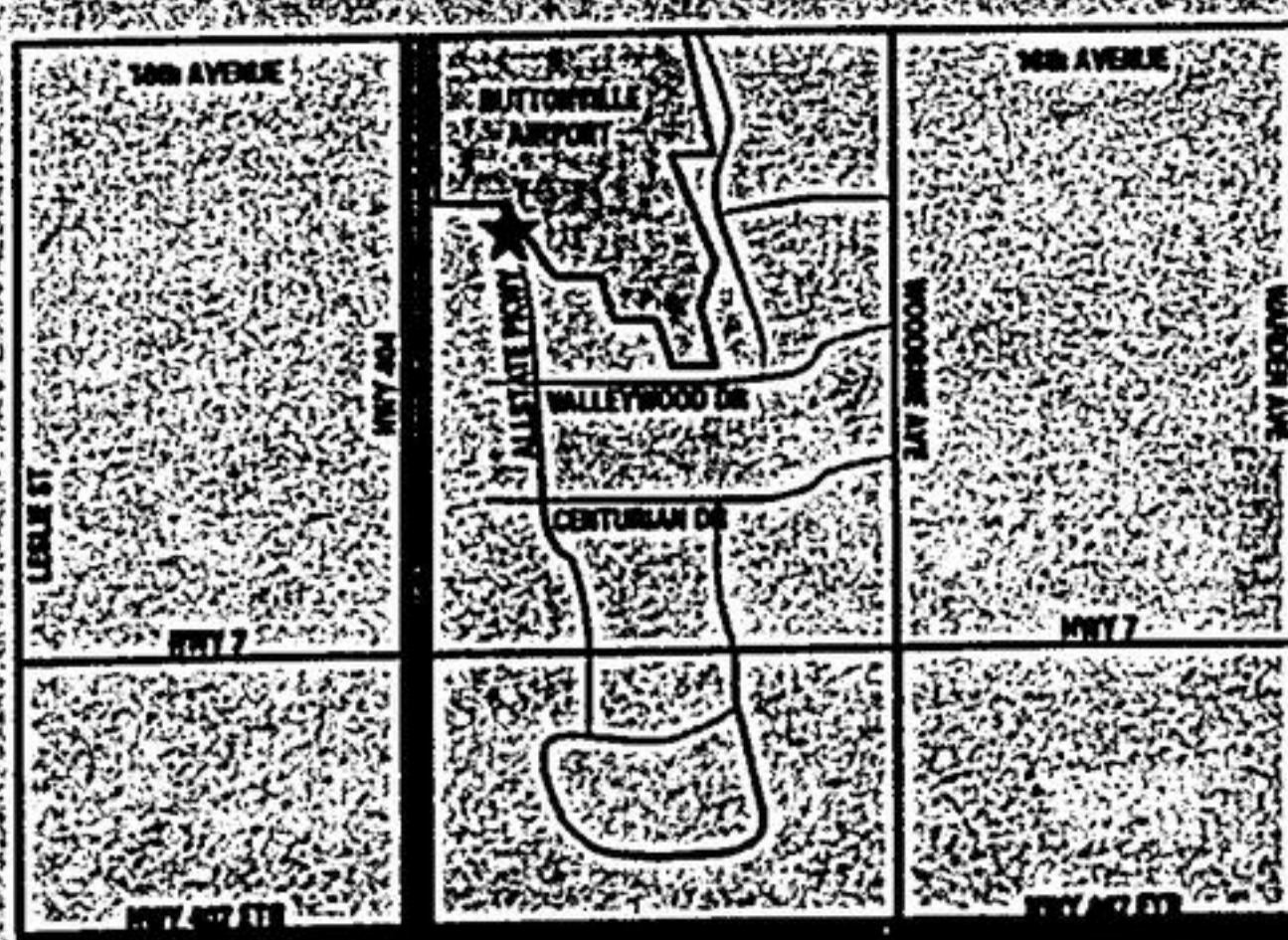
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