

EDC Directs Arts Center Proposal to State

By Maeve Slavin

SOUTHBURY — In September, Kenneth Lundquist, Jr., founding principal KLJ, went before the Economic Development Commission with a proposal to build “the most comprehensive cultural center ever” right here in Southbury.

Southbury Corporate Park, the

venue suggested for this enterprise, is the 125 acres combining the Rosen and Volpe properties between Lakeside Roads and Main Street South, for which the town paid a total of \$5 million in two separate purchases.

The hope is to bring in a corporate headquarters on the scale of the IBM offices down the street

or failing that, anything short of big box superstores that would generate big commercial tax bucks.

The EDC is in charge of developing the marketing plan for this endeavor.

Until Mr. Lundquist came along, no one had thought of putting an art center on the site.

While his preliminary budget, estimated at some \$300 million, might seem somewhat mind-boggling to, say, the Board of Finance, or heaven help us, the Board of Selectmen, EDC expressed no such trepidation.

Instead, respectfully and politely, Mr. Lundquist was invited to return when his plan had matured further.

Two months later, in November, he was back, this time with a partner, Joan Kloth, president, Kloth Consulting, and an arts advocate, according to the information sheet passed out at the meeting.

Further elaboration is offered in the mission statement found on the website www.klothconsulting.com, “Providing support that goes beyond our every day lives to include business and employment growth and development.”

Without further ado, Mr. Lundquist announced that Southbury Corporate Park was off the table and that he was presenting a new proposal: The Sullivan Stage, named in honor of Ed Sullivan host of the Ed Sullivan Show, a one-time Southbury resident, to be located in the Moody auditorium at the Roselle School on the Southbury Training School campus.

Commission members’ interest immediately showed signs of waning.

Mr. Lundquist’s four-page proposal consists largely of boiler-

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plate, for example informing the commission that: “The town is bordered by Newtown to the south, Bridgewater to the west, Roxbury and Woodbury to the north, Middlebury and Oxford to the east.”

KLJ is depicted as assuming sole direction and execution of the project.

“As a subsidy of itself, this entity will establish the not-for-profit corporation The Sullivan Stage

Company. Actual funding for fulfillment is projected through state and local funds and bonds, federal and state grants, private interest, fundraising, sponsorship, membership and donations.”

However, a note of caution caught the attention of commissioners: “New feasibility studies and RFPs are needed to project realistic cost outlook. *Funding is necessary to continue to proceed with this project.*”

As delicately as possible, EDC Chairman John Turk tried to

explain the dare-not-speak-its-name state of the relationship between the Southbury Training School and the town insofar as future planning can be discussed.

Ms. Kloth spoke of the importance of preserving the historical character of the buildings; Mr. Lundquist waxed eloquently on the need for an arts center in town and the positive impact of culture on the region’s economy.

But to no avail. Mr. Turk’s best suggestion was to take up the status of the Southbury Training School with the powers-that-be in Hartford.

Voices