

NOVEMBER 15, 2019

Peekskill City Council Applauds News of Privately-Funded Art and Media Center

PEEKSKILL, N.Y. -- A quarter-century after Peekskill laid the groundwork to establish itself as a hospitable haven for artists, the northern Westchester river city at long last is going to have a permanent home for the arts.

Anticipated to start operating in 2021, the Peekskill Art and Media Center is a privately-funded development that will also house the Peekskill Art Center, an IRS-certified 501(c)(3) not-for-profit.

The entire project is conceived and managed by Ben Green. Known in Peekskill as a visionary developer with a strong civic conscience, among his properties is the historic Hat Factory, a commercial complex where half of the 100,000 square feet is leased to businesses involved in some form of media.

At a work session of the Peekskill Common Council on Nov. 4, 2019, backed by members of the Art Center's newly-named board of directors of local business leaders and arts influencers (see list below), Mr. Green officially unveiled plans for the Peekskill Art and Media Center. He also was accompanied by architects Ray Wobbe and Jonathan Walko, of the Stephen Tilly architectural design firm.

Time Is Ripe for an Art and Media Center

"For the past 25-30 years, Peekskill has earned a reputation as an artists' community," said Mr. Green. "Lately, the creative arts industry has been flourishing here as well. Yet Peekskill never has had its own arts center.

"We know this is a long time coming," he continued, "a quarter-century in the making. It feels right to do this now, to capitalize and expand on all the momentum that the community has contributed to over the past decades, and to deliver on the promise of Peekskill as a thriving artists' enclave. Everyone working on our team believes it is a privilege to make this project happen. Vibrant cities have art centers. It is time for Peekskill to join those cities."

'A Great Idea for Our City'

Council members, led by Mayor Andre Rainey, reacted to Mr. Green's remarks, and to detailed descriptions of the Center and its amenities, with enthusiasm, calling the project "wonderful," "really important," and "a great idea for our city."

The site plans call for the Peekskill Art and Media Center to occupy an existing 24,000 square-foot structure, located in the suburban city's walkable downtown grid, at the corner of James Street and Howard Street, north of Main Street. Erected in 1887, the edifice's history includes livery stable, auto repair shop, and light industrial storage.

Multimedia Ecosystem

Ben Green described his ambitious brainchild as "a private/public ecosystem built from the ground up," adding that "a partnership for commercial and not-for-profit activity fortifies and expands each other's potential and opportunity. In addition to Peekskill proper, it also will serve the surrounding region."

The mixed-use blueprint includes a visual art center, two art cinemas, classrooms, commercial office space, and a coffee roastery.

Showplace Gallery

The 4,000-square-foot visual art space features a showplace gallery, with see-through walls, suitable for exhibitions and public or private business and social events. Classrooms adjacent to the gallery will serve a full range of instructional arts programs for children, adults, seniors, and the differently abled.

Also in the planning stages is a 4,000-square-foot James Street Cinema and Playhouse, which would house two separate theaters. The larger cinema would have a seating capacity of 109. With the addition of a movable stage, it is easily could be converted to a live performing space that would seat 98.

The larger theater would be designed to meet the rigorous standards of theatrical union Actors Equity Association (AEA), allowing it to accommodate professional, as well as community theater, productions. The second art cinema would seat 49.

Above the art center, on the second level, will be a dozen commercial spaces for rent. Two of the spaces will be multimedia-ready, which means they will be connected to the larger theater, converting it into a sound stage for the production of audio, video, and multimedia content.

Ray Wobbe said Stephen Tilly Architects "has a lot of experience taking an older building and bringing it up to date." Its project portfolio includes Film Forum in Greenwich Village, Dobbs Ferry Playhouse, Lyndhurst mansion in Tarrytown, and Music Conservatory of Westchester in White Plains.

Mr. Wobbe said under consideration for the Center, to maintain a green-friendly physical plant, is solar energy and other 21st Century energy-efficient upgrades.

‘Filling a Very Important Niche’

“This looks like it’s going to be amazing,” enthused Peekskill Mayor Andre Rainey. “I see it being successful right away.”

“As a lifelong resident of Peekskill, this makes me really happy,” said Peekskill Councilwoman Patricia Riley.

Her colleague, Councilwoman Kathie Talbot, agreed: “All things come in their time. You’re filling a very important niche with a small theater and combined arts center.”

Peekskill as ‘Mediapolis’

Ben Green also is chairman of AIM, a marketing group that advocates Peekskill’s potential as a “mediapolis” where Art, Industry & Media intersect to stimulate job creation and overall economic development. He kickstarted AIM in 2017, subsequently spinning it off as a committee attached to the Hudson Valley Gateway Chamber of Commerce.

Board of Directors, Peekskill Art and Media Center

Officers

Ben Green, President

(Peekskill Hat Factory + Clay Studios owner, developer, entrepreneur)

Larry D’Amico, Vice President

(artist, educator)

Bruce Apar, Secretary

(marketer/writer/actor)

Lindsay la Fleur, Treasurer

(financial advisor)

Staff

Mara Mills, Director

(museum and theater administrator, director, educator)

Members at Large

Jessica Dubin

(Peekskill Clay Studios director, artist, educator)

Robin Kline

(Peekskill Arts Alliance president, artist)

Louie Lanza

(investor, developer, hospitality entrepreneur)

J.D. Lawrence

News Release--Official Announcement of Peekskill Art and Media Center

(entertainer/producer, director)

David Mauricio

(Peekskill Schools Superintendent)

Peter McKinley

(marketing company owner, creative director)

Wilfredo Morel

(artist, community influencer, philanthropist)

Ocean Morisset

(artist, community influencer)

Charles Newman

(insurance broker, philanthropist)

Bre Pettis

(technologist, philanthropist, entrepreneur)

Matthew Roach

(attorney, legal counsel, developer)

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