

July 21, 1982

Cultural Center for New Brunswick  
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Mr. J. E. Burke

Attached is some backup information that you can use in your discussions with Seward Johnson relative to a major commitment to the New Brunswick Cultural Center. I have attached a summary and highlights of the report which I believe will give you all the necessary key points. We are also in the process of forming a not-for-profit organization, "Art Council, Inc.," to acquire properties, to borrow money and to manage the facilities on behalf of the cultural interests in the community.

As you and I and Dick have discussed on several occasions, a grant in the neighborhood of \$3-5 million over a three year period would provide us with the wherewithal to bring this project to fruition.

John J. Heldrich

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Attach.

FROM THE DESK OF  
ANDY BAGLIVO

JJH JUL 8 1982

John:

This is a  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -page  
condensation of a 100-page  
report. Is it what you  
wanted?

andy

## SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS

## "A CULTURAL CENTER FOR NEW BRUNSWICK"

A Report of the New Brunswick Arts Development Commission

- Development of a cultural center in New Brunswick would represent an extension of the highly successful process that has been the catalyst for the physical and economic revitalization of the City. The partners in this cooperative venture would include New Brunswick Tomorrow, the New Brunswick Development Corporation, the City of New Brunswick, Middlesex County, Rutgers University, Johnson & Johnson, the independent theaters and all the public and private interests that make up New Brunswick.
- The key to the proposal is the concept of recycling existing buildings, all in excellent structural condition, in a strategically located block in downtown New Brunswick. This offers the opportunity to establish a cultural center for a fraction of the cost of newly constructed facilities and on a much faster timetable.
- The State Theater would be renovated to provide the centerpiece of the Cultural Center --- a performing arts hall of some 1,800 seats. Symphony, light opera, dance, drama, Broadway-type musicals, solo concert performances and other classical and contemporary musical events would be staged. A new performing arts hall would today cost between \$20 million and \$25 million. Estimates to renovate the State range from \$2 million to \$4 million.
- The New Brunswick YMCA, in close proximity to the State, is for sale and would be acquired. The ground floor would be converted to a 300-seat theater as a new home for the Crossroads Theater, New Jersey's only full-time black professional theater company. The upper floors of the YMCA would be converted to housing for graduate students of the nearby Mason Gross School of the Arts of Rutgers. The physical relationship between the State Theater and the YMCA offers an opportunity to link the two through an addition.
- The 62,000-square foot Arnold Constable Building is ideally suited for conversion to a Graphic Arts Center for the Mason Gross School. The building would be renovated to provide art studios for group instruction and individual work by graduate students, office-studios for faculty and gallery space for exhibitions.
- The Sisser Brothers Warehouse would be converted to an Administrative Arts Center to house New Brunswick's various arts organizations, including the Princeton Ballet, Opera Theater of New Jersey and Garden State Symphonic Pops Orchestra, which have made the City their home. The building would provide rehearsal and studio space, a small repertory theater and a variety of media and arts resource activities.

- The land occupied by the deteriorated VIP Hotel and commercial structures on George Street would be acquired, the existing buildings razed and the site used for construction of a complex of new 800 and 400 seat theaters. An 800-seat proscenium theater is a high priority of the Mason Gross School if it is to remain a downtown institution. The 400-seat theater would be the new permanent home of the George Street Playhouse. The Playhouse must be relocated to facilitate redevelopment of New Brunswick's "Golden Triangle" downtown block.
- The "Cultural Center" area also would accommodate a Media Center. Rutgers continues to operate its television/radio activities out of antiquated facilities. There is a pressing need to provide appropriate space for television production and broadcast studios for teaching as well as public service.
- The new construction costs of all these facilities would approach \$50 million, exclusive of land cost. The proposed program of renovation and limited new construction would approach \$20 million, a tremendous difference in cost.
- There are other advantages of an adaptive reuse strategy. Implementation of the Center would proceed on an "as needed" basis, without having costly new facilities stand vacant. Lower initial capital outlays mean lower financing costs, rents and user fees; savings that can be passed on to patrons as well as the users. The plan is flexible to allow changes and expansion as programmatic requirements change. Most importantly, the proposal is more likely to be accomplished than if it required massive fund-raising.
- For funding, the plan calls for full exploration of all available Federal and State sources, including UDAG and State-backed bond issues. Rutgers has indicated its willingness to dedicate certain land development revenues to the project. The City of New Brunswick and Middlesex County both have the capacity to issue general obligation bonds for public facilities. Private corporations, institutions, foundations and individuals looking to the future of the arts in New Brunswick, Central New Jersey and the State must be persuaded to join the effort to create the Cultural Center and sustain its future.

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