Couple wants to build park, arch at site of former Stonegate estate

By Janine Landry Daily News staff

NEWPORT — Real estate brokers call Judy and Laurence Cutler regularly, hoping to convince them to sell a threeacre vacant lot next to their Vernon Court home, but they have other plans.

The Cutlers – whose proposal to open an art museum in their Bellevue Avenue mansion was rejected last June by the city's Zoning Board of Review – want to create a park and memorial arch on the vacant lot, once part of the grounds of the Stoneacre estate, which was destroyed by fire in the 1960s. The grounds had originally been designed by renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted.

The Cutlers are seeking permission from the city's Historic District Commission to tear up 30,000 square feet of old asphalt on the lot and replace it with a small lane and 18,000 square feet of parking. They also want to built a 20-foot high brick arch as a tribute to architect Louis Kahn.

Compatible in scale with the arch at Chateau-sur-Mer, the Louis Kahn Memorial Arch would be an exact replica of one Kahn designed for the India Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, India. The combination of the park and arch would comprise the first memorials in the nation to a landscape architect and architect.



David Hansen/Daily News photo

Vernon Court owner Laurence Cutler stands at the three-acre site he hopes to turn into a park with a memorial arch.

"I've had three different brokers calling me lately that want me to sell it for house lots," Laurence Cutler said. "I believe in open space."

Under current zoning laws, the lot could be divided into two 60,000 square foot lots each with a separate single or two-family residence.

As of Monday afternoon, the Cutlers had not received any objections to their Historic District Commission application. The commission is scheduled to hear the couple's petition at its

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next meeting, Tuesday, Dec. 21, at 7:15 p.m. in the City Hall council chambers.

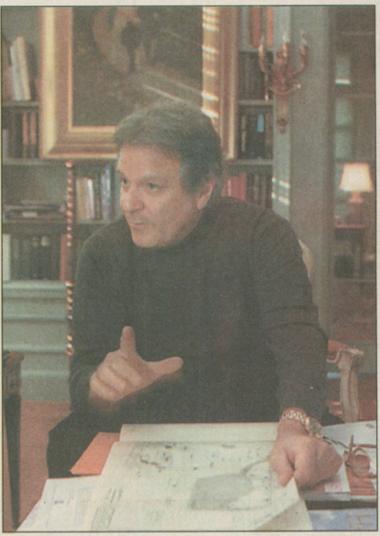
The Cutlers appealed the Zoning Board's ruling to Superior Court, however, their court case has been held up because there is not yet a written decision on file. Guy E. Weston, city zoning officer, said lawyers for objecting neighbors and for the Cutlers have disagreed over language in the decision, and the matter is still being reviewed.

Despite the setbacks, Laurence Cutler still says the planned National Museum of American Illustration and its collection of more than 2,000 paintings by N.C. Wyeth, Norman Rockwell, Maxfield Parrish and others will open next March 4. An article about the couple in this month's Architectural Digest magazine says the museum is scheduled to open in March and calls Judy Cutler "the undisputed doyenne of the American illustration market."

"I'd like to open on March 4 because I like the words: march ... F-O-U-R-T-H," he said.

"I am opening this museum. I am not stopping, and I am going to share this national treasure of paintings with the public," Laurence Cutler said

The Cutlers have pledged to keep the museum and the park on the tax rolls. The property would be in the name of the Alliance for Art and Architecture, a limited liability company owned by the couple.



David Hansen/Daily News photo

Laurence Cutler, owner of Vernon Court, discusses his plans for the vacant lot across from his Bellevue Avenue estate.