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## Editorials -

## Open this museum

Newport has the opportunity to help develop a new institution — a museum of illustration - that could attract national attention and draw new sorts of visitors. But much more must be done to promote this idea so as to reduce neighborhood opposition, which has so far blocked the museum. State officials, among others, should talk up this exciting project.

We're talking about plans by Judy and Laurence Cutler to set up the National Museum of American Illustration in five rooms of Vernon Court, their mansion, on Bellevue Avenue.

They certainly have a wonderful venue for a museum, and a superb core collection: 120 Norman Rockwell paintings and drawings, as well as hundreds of original works by such masters of American illustration as N.C. Wyeth, Maxfield Parrish and others. The museum could become a nationally, even internationally, known institution.

The problem is that Newport's Zoning Board of Review failed to give the Cutlers' proposal to set up a museum for paying visitors the 4-to-1 approval it needed, instead handing them a 3-to-2 vote. The Cutlers have challenged the board's decision in Superior Court. The hope is that the court will send the matter back to the zoning board, where, perhaps the needed four votes can finally be obtained.

All this is particularly frustrating because both the city planning board and the Historic District Commission have approved the Cutlers' plan to open a museum.

Neighborhood opposition had a lot of to with the Cutlers' failure. Neighbors are concerned about more tourists coming to the Bellevue Avenue area. But the couple, eager to defuse concerns, has promised it would not arrange for tour buses, weddings, auctions and other big crowd drawers. The aim is to have a quiet, if famous,

Given the tour buses that flood into the driveways of neighboring mansions run by the Preservationist Society of Newport County, we don't understand the big deal that some neighbors are making about a proposed institution that would tend to draw a quiet and scholarly group of visitors — and would be a big feather in the caps of Newport and Rhode Island.

Perhaps the Cutlers jumped the gun too much, for instance advertising a September opening before acquiring the necessary city permits. This apparently riled up some neighbors.

Having said that, it would be sad if the creation of something unique of this quality were to be blocked. As Newport Mayorelect Richard Sardella noted: "I think if we're serious about cultural tourism, this is the kind of idea we need." He noted it would also have far less disruptive impact on the neighborhood than the tours of the Preservation Society mansions do now.

Illustration is a much admired but sometimes critically ignored branch of the arts. The works in the Cutlers' collection are a beloved part of American culture (whether "high culture" or "popular" we will let the critics argue). Furthermore, Rhode Island hosts many wellknown illustrators, among them such contemporary luminaries as David Mac-Cauley and Chris van Allsberg.

The National Museum of American Illustration is a wonderful idea.