

Director says Westchester Children's Museum could add \$4M to economy

BY THERESA JUVA • TJUVA@LOHUD.COM • AUGUST 19, 2010

RYE — If the Westchester Children's Museum becomes reality on the Rye boardwalk, it could bring in millions of dollars a year in jobs and visitor spending, the board of directors said.

"The economic impact could be a \$4 million annual impact on the local and regional economy," Executive Director Tracy Kay said Wednesday during an interview with The Journal News Editorial Board.

Each visitor would bring \$5 to \$10 to local businesses, directors said, citing studies on spending around Playland Amusement Park and cultural sites in Westchester. The museum expects about 198,000 visitors a year.

But whether the museum gets its planned home in the restored bathhouses next to Playland is unclear. County Executive Rob Astorino recently announced the project is on hold until the county figures out what to do with the amusement park, which has been losing money for years.

Though the museum has raised \$8 million — enough to open — the delay on the lease may threaten the museum's goal of ultimately raising \$14 million, directors said. The county has already started work on the buildings.

"People have questions," board director Marc Oxman said. "They are concerned about their investments thus far, and their prospective donations will dry up if, in fact, we don't have that commitment. Therefore, we must move forward."

Board of Legislators Chairman Ken Jenkins, D-Yonkers, and the board's Democratic majority whip, Judy Myers, announced Wednesday they supported Astorino's request for proposals to revitalize Playland, but said the Children's Museum should be part of Playland's future.

Jenkins also has said he hopes the board still will ratify the museum's lease in September.

Museum directors responded to criticism that the learning center will be too similar to children's museums in Connecticut, Long Island or New York City.

"Westchester has a very rich artistic history, musical history, social history (and) environmental diversity," Corinne Zola said. "We want to bring all of that into that one place and let our children see who lives here and where we live."

Designs for exhibits include a place where children can explore animation, have fun with shadows and learn about how water moves. Using Playland Amusement Park as inspiration, another exhibit would challenge children to build their own roller coaster.