

Newport Daily News, Wednesday April 30, 2014, Page A06

OUR VIEW

Mansion row is becoming museum row

Bellevue Avenue in Newport, already known as “mansion row” for its collection of well-preserved “summer cottages” built during the Gilded Age, soon could be known as “museum row.”

Joining existing museums in historic buildings, including the International Tennis Hall of Fame & Museum and the National Museum of American Illustration, will be a museum showcasing billionaire Larry Ellison’s collection of 19th-century art in the Beechwood mansion, and an antique car museum on the first floor of the Audrain Building.

The most recent proposal for the Audrain Building, which is being renovated by Nicholas Schorsch, the chairman and CEO of American Realty Capital, was approved by the Zoning Board of Review on Monday night.

“These guys have at least 100 antique cars,” said attorney Turner Scott, who represented AR Ribela V0001 LLC, Schorsch’s firm that bought the Audrain Building for \$5.5 million on Oct. 3.

According to the plan filed with the board, 14 cars would be on display at the museum at any given time. The museum will be a “complimentary addition to an existing commercial section of storefronts,” and for tourists and visitors to the city “one of a number of pleasurable stops in their itinerary,” according to the application.

That number is growing — and diversifying.

Including the venerable Newport Art Museum and Redwood Library and Athenaeum on the other side of Memorial Boulevard, the Preservation Society of Newport County’s historic properties — museums in their own rights, in many ways — and Doris Duke’s Rough Point estate at the far end of Bellevue, there will be something for just about every interest and taste just along “museum row.”

That is not to forget the other museums in the city, including the Museum of Newport History, the Museum of Yachting at the International Yacht Restoration School and the **Museum of Newport Irish History**, all on Thames Street. In fact, Newport soon could be known as “museum city.”

Unlike other recent proposals in the city, Ellison’s plan to install a 114-foot-long, 34-footwide reflecting pool in front of his Beechwood Art Museum — which has been encased in scaffolding for the better part of two years — and recreate gardens and other historic elements of the estate, and Schorsch’s historic renovations of the Audrain Building — which currently is wrapped in plastic — just down the block from the Tennis Hall of Fame have not received much, if any, opposition. And both would keep the museum properties on the city’s tax rolls.

We are confident that when the scaffolding comes down and the plastic is removed, both projects will give tourists and residents alike even more reason to visit “museum row.”