

# The Star-Ledger

## S. Orange trustees wrong on art project

3 admit U.S. grant cannot be applied

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Several South Orange trustees admitted at a meeting this week that they misspoke when they said no tax dollars were going to fund the Tony Smith sculpture project.

**Three trustees said at a meeting Feb. 27 that the village's \$250,000 contribution would be covered by a federal community development grant and said "no taxpayer dollars" would be used. But at a special meeting Monday night, the trustees -- Allen Rosen, William Calabrese and Arthur Taylor -- said they were misinformed when they gave that guarantee.**

The community development grant, they discovered, could not be used for the statue and must be applied to projects such as the new South Orange Performing Arts Center. Instead of using federal dollars, the village will take \$250,000 from the SOPAC capital fund and use it toward the \$410,000 project.

The money will be taken from a bond the village floated several years ago. The rest of the cost, \$160,000, is to be raised privately.

"When I spoke of it, some of my information was inaccurate," said Taylor.

Village administrator John Gross apologized to the trustees for not correcting them when they made the statements at their last meeting.

Controversy about the cost and funding for the project was stoked by resident Michael Goldberg, who accused the trustees of lying to the public.

"Is this the best use of tax dollars?" asked Goldberg. "I think the funding is not being accounted for and it's being misrepresented."

The questions come months before a fabrication of Smith's sculpture, "Tau," is to be erected in town near the train station.

Art enthusiasts initiated the project nearly four years ago as a way to recognize Smith, who was raised in the historic Montrose section of South Orange. The famous sculptor, whose friends included Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, died in 1980. One of his daughters, Kiki, has gone on to establish her own career as a highly acclaimed artist.

But like everything else in South Orange development, it has not come easily or without sharp criticism.

When a group of residents first pursued the project, they thought the village would be able to afford an original Smith piece, said resident Cheryl Arnedt, director of the Tony Smith Sculpture Project.

The market price of a real piece, however, would be at least \$700,000, far exceeding their budget. The Smith estate agreed to allow another artist to fabricate Smith's "Tau" for \$85,000. **Arnedt said they settled on "Tau" because it suited their budget** and fit the space they had in mind.

The sculpture, which will be 14 feet high and 21 feet wide, will be placed on Sloan Street, near the front door of the arts center. Village officials are hoping the large sculpture will serve as a symbolic anchor for its efforts to breathe life into its downtown.

Arnedt called the fabrication a gift because the sculpture's value will be in the ballpark of \$600,000.

The cost of the project, however, inched beyond the \$85,000 price tag because the site that was selected needs to be spruced up and revamped to accommodate the sculpture.

"I don't know of any gift that doesn't come with a price," Arnedt said.

The bulk of the extra costs will go to engineering, installation, transportation, lighting and landscape work.

The sculpture is scheduled to be installed this fall. Arnedt said she already has raised about \$60,000 and will have all of the money raised by the time the sculpture is put up. Although Goldberg raised questions about the project's funding, Arnedt said she is confident that most residents support the idea.

"I sympathize with residents who think the money should go elsewhere," Arnedt said. "I disagree."

When our elected officials are either lying or so out of touch that they can't understand finances and priorities, isn't it time to ask questions?

We think so.

Nearly a **half million dollars** is being dumped into a steel object when that money could be used for safety, parks and facilities repair.