



CRYSTAL CHATHAM THE DESERT SUN

The city of Palm Springs is in talks with members of the community about converting the Welwood Murray Memorial Library downtown into a branch of the city's public library.

## Council kicks library proposal back to panel

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After more than two hours of debate — and a recess to try and come up with a different solution — the fate of the Welwood Murray Memorial Library

continues to be unknown.

Dozens of residents spoke during Wednesday's meeting to urge the council to scrap a proposed renovation and expansion for the city's first library, in-

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cluding several members of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation who handed out green sheets of paper with large print that read: "WELWOOD 100% AUTHENTIC" — and their efforts succeeded.

The City Council voted 3-2 to reject an appeal from City Councilmen Chris Mills and Lee Weigel that challenged the Historic Site Preservation Board's Oct. 12 denial of proposed plans for the library.

Mills and Weigel are on the council subcommittee that has collaborated with Palm Springs-based Escalante Architects, the firm hired by the city, and with the Palm Springs Library Board and Friends of the Palm Springs Public Library on the project.

"We know that in order for the building to succeed it's got to have vitality infused into it," said

Ron Marshall, president of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation. "The issue was really about maintaining its authenticity and that's why we had those signs ... and I think ultimately that resonated with the council."

Now the subcommittee is tasked with coming back with a redesign of the renovation for the 4,030-square-foot facility built by the city's first resident architect, John Porter Clark.

"Unfortunately we spent two years working on this, a collective of professionals, trying to really create a unique addition to downtown and to have it killed off by five people is a real shame for the entire city of Palm Springs," said Ron Willison, former member of the Board of Library Trustees that served on the subcommittee. "It was a waste of time and effort by a lot of people."

Among the major points of contention for those against the proposed renovation and expansion was the idea of demolishing the Billie Lu Floan Room to make room for a 1,589-square-foot building extension that would encroach on the site's existing courtyard, and the remodel of the building's interior that would add restrooms and a small community room.

The Billie Lu Floan Room, which is in the back of the library, was created in the 1950s when then-city officials approved to enclose what was originally an outdoor patio reading area, library officials said.

"This is a first-rate restoration," Mills said in defense of the proposed plans — a comment that was met with boos from the audience.

"The frustration for me here, as an architect, is that if John Porter Clark were alive today and he

came back and the library board approached him to do an addition to this building, would the same people be out here saying that 'No, you shouldn't do it, you shouldn't do it?' I don't think so."

While there is no set date as to when the library will reopen, City Manager David Ready said the city is committed to reopening the facility as soon as possible. The city has already allocated \$1.3 million for the renovation and the Palm Springs Public Library Board of Trustees has committed \$800,000 for furniture, fixtures and equipment for the library.

"If there are folks out there that are so hard-edged that they don't want anything to change, I'm not in your camp. But I certainly want to figure out a way that we can still continue to make sure that it holds up to the legacy of Welwood Murray and the deed," said Mayor Steve Pougnet.