

Architects decry plan to destroy building

Palm Springs High wants to tear down Wexler-designed structure to make way for new performing arts center

By Maricar Mendoza

The Desert Sun

PALM SPRINGS — The pending demolition of a local school building has garnered significant opposition, including objections from nearly two dozen valley architects.

The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation sent an Architects' Open Letter — signed by 22 local architects — to the Palm Springs Unified School District on Tuesday.

The letter requests that the district "abandon its plans" to level the Palm Springs High School Administration Building designed by renowned midcentury modern architects Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison.

The demolition is slated for this summer to make way for a new

9,000-square-foot Performing Arts Building.

The project is estimated to cost \$4 million.

"The administration building is an excellent example of the modernist architecture for which the city of Palm Springs is known throughout the world," according to the letter.

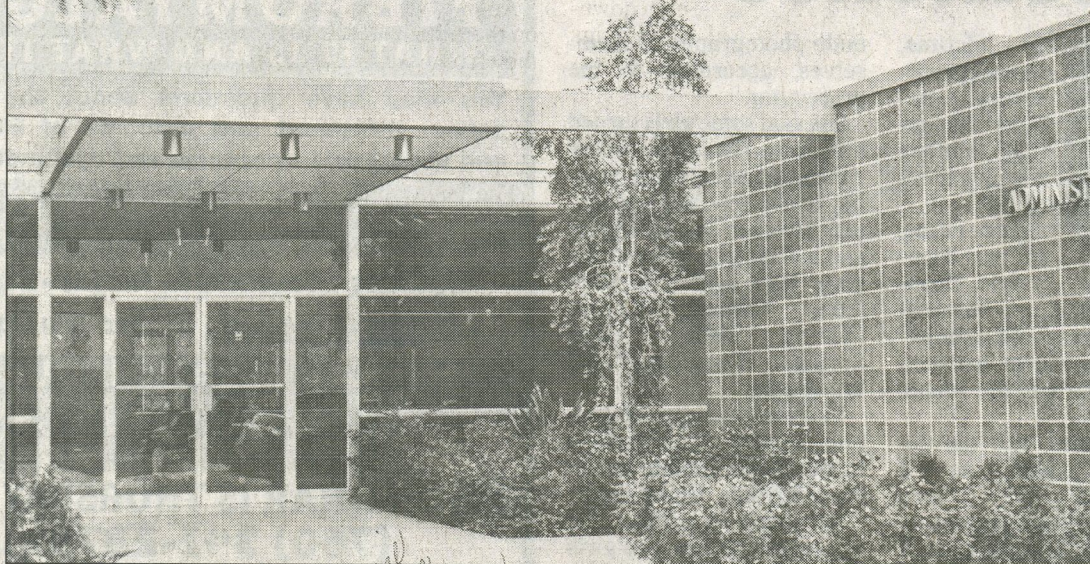
Julie Arthur, executive director of Facilities Planning for the Palm Springs Unified School District, told The Desert Sun that the new Performing Arts Building is necessary for the school's growing program, which currently has nearly 200 students participating in the band program alone.

The idea is to also have it designed to fit the style of the façade facing Ramon Road, which make

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In an open letter, 22 local architects criticized the Palm Springs Unified School District plan to tear down Palm Springs High School's administration building. DESERT SUN FILE PHOTO



The Palm Springs High School Administration Building, built in 1957, was designed by Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison. The site is slated to be demolished this summer. COURTESY OF THE PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BUILDING

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use of arches, Arthur said.

"The proposed building, while its function is laudable and necessary, it looks like a very banal solution," said local architect John Gilmer, who signed the open letter.

"If you're going to tear down a building by one of our own noted architects, at least replace it with something better."

Those seeking to save the building believe district officials need to do more research and look into other sites on campus.

"I believe it is extremely short-sighted, in countless ways, to proceed with this ill-conceived plan," Palm Springs resident Victor Otero said. "Not only does it not make fiscal sense to demo an irreplaceable building important to the community, but you would also be 'demo-ing' the goodwill that Palm Springs High School has with the countless art supporters who are also modernism supporters."

Otero lives in one of the famous Wexler steel homes and is involved in Modernism Week.

"It is important to create a

ARCHITECTS UNITED

Twenty-two architects from Palm Springs and other California cities have joined the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation's fight to save the Palm Springs High School Administration Building. The 1957 building was designed by renowned midcentury modern architects Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison.

Here's a list of the architects who, on Tuesday, signed the Architects' Open Letter to the Palm Springs Unified School District:

- James R. Harlan
- Patrick McGrew
- Susan Secoy Jensen
- Doug Hudson
- Lance C. O'Donnell
- Craig M. Hammond
- Eric Corey Freed
- William Krisel
- James Cioffi
- James Schmidt
- Ana Escalante
- Rick Phillippe
- Christopher L. Sahlin
- William Fauber
- Stephen Michael Rose
- Hugh Kaptur
- Michael Darner
- Anna Marie Howell
- John Gilmer
- Philip de Cancio
- Eric Shamp
- Mark Rios

space for these young musicians to create, but I implore you to do so without the destruction of yet another Wexler masterpiece," Otero wrote in an email to district officials.

The issue is slated to be discussed at the May 8 Palm Springs Unified School District Board of Education meeting, preservation foundation President Ron Marshall said.

"I certainly hope that as the

discussion continues that people realize what great architecture we have in this city and that the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation is not anti-growth, but advocates for smart growth," said Gary Wexler, son of the famous midcentury modern architect.

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