

Bar at Welwood Murray library patio OK'd

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(Photo: Desert Sun file photo)

A divided library board of trustees narrowly approved a proposal to allow a bar and restaurant operation to encroach into the rear patio of the Welwood Murray Memorial Library.

The library — prominently placed in the middle of downtown Palm Springs on the corner of Tahquitz Canyon Way and Palm Canyon Drive — is in the middle of a \$1.3 million renovation and is due to reopen in February. A restaurant, proposed in the building just to the east of the library, has asked the city to lease space in the Welwood's rear patio to be used for dining service. In exchange, the restaurant would take on the patio's renovation, cleaning and security.

However, the restaurant is also proposing that a 15-seat outdoor bar operate in the patio space, according to a site plan supplied to the Palm Springs Public Library Board Trustees.

"My concern all along has been the bar," said Ron Willison, a member of the library board and one of the members most ardently opposed to the idea. "I don't feel that a bar, backing up to those windows that were put in in 1941, it's just going to cause a lot of noise."

"If he wants to put the bar inside, I think that's fine," Willison added.

The library board voted 3-2 in favor of the restaurant proposal with Willison and David Gray voting against. The library board also debated a range of conditions, like reducing the number of patio seats from 61 to 30 or 35, eliminating the outdoor bar from the plan, setting the rent for the space at commercial market value and other concerns. The final measure — which operates as a recommendation to the Palm Springs City Council — was approved by the board and left the outdoor bar and number of seats mostly intact.

"the bottom line for me is I'm not opposed to considering this and being open to it," said Linda Futterer, a trustee.

"There has been a great collaborative effort with the Welwood Murray Memorial Library. It's a great collaboration from city, from friends, the Historical Society," she added.

"I hate to think that we would open up our new library with any kind of cloud of disagreement or controversy," said Futterer.

The project is also being closely watched by the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, which opposes the outdoor bar and restaurant idea.

"We fail to understand why this proposal was not rejected outright," wrote Erik Rosenow, president of PSPF in a recent letter to Mayor Steve Pougnet.

City officials advise that the agreement between the library and restaurant should be of licensing nature.

"Not a lease, not an easement, but a license. A license that allows them to have that access that we could terminate," Doug Holland, Palm Springs city attorney, told the library trustees at their meeting Thursday.

And numerous conditions addressing concerns like noise, hours of operation and other concerns could be built into the licensing agreement, Holland pointed out.

Other library board members were open to the idea of a restaurant using the space, saying the city needs to consider the changing nature of libraries which now function largely like community centers, often with cafes inside.

"What you're proposing, what this could be, is very much like a Starbucks near a college campus, where people bring their computers, can work, and isn't that what a library facilitates," said Fred Jandt, a member of the library board of trustees.

"I think it's a viable plan. I think there could be maybe a little bit more negotiation, perhaps in hours of use, or sound levels, or things of that kind. But the plan itself, I think, it could work," he added.

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