

The Palm Springs High School Administration Building was built in 1957. DESERT SUN PHOTO

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Parents, students: Tear down Wexler building

Structure stands in way of new performing arts center

By **Mariecar Mendoza**

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PALM SPRINGS — Controversy over the fate of the Palm Springs High School Administration Building continues, but this time parents and students are pleading with officials to tear the old building down.

During a Palm Springs Unified School District Board of Education meeting Tuesday night, nearly two dozen people with the Palm Springs High School performing arts program urged district officials to move forward with a plan to build a new 9,000-square-foot Performing Arts Building.

The project would require the demolition of the 55-year-old administration building, which was designed by renowned architects Donald Wexler and

Richard Harrison.

This is the first time a group favoring demolition has come forward to publicly oppose the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation's bid to retain the existing structure.

The proposed Performing Arts Building has been in the works for the past five years and would cost an estimated \$4 million.

Randy Vaughn, a band parent and pres-
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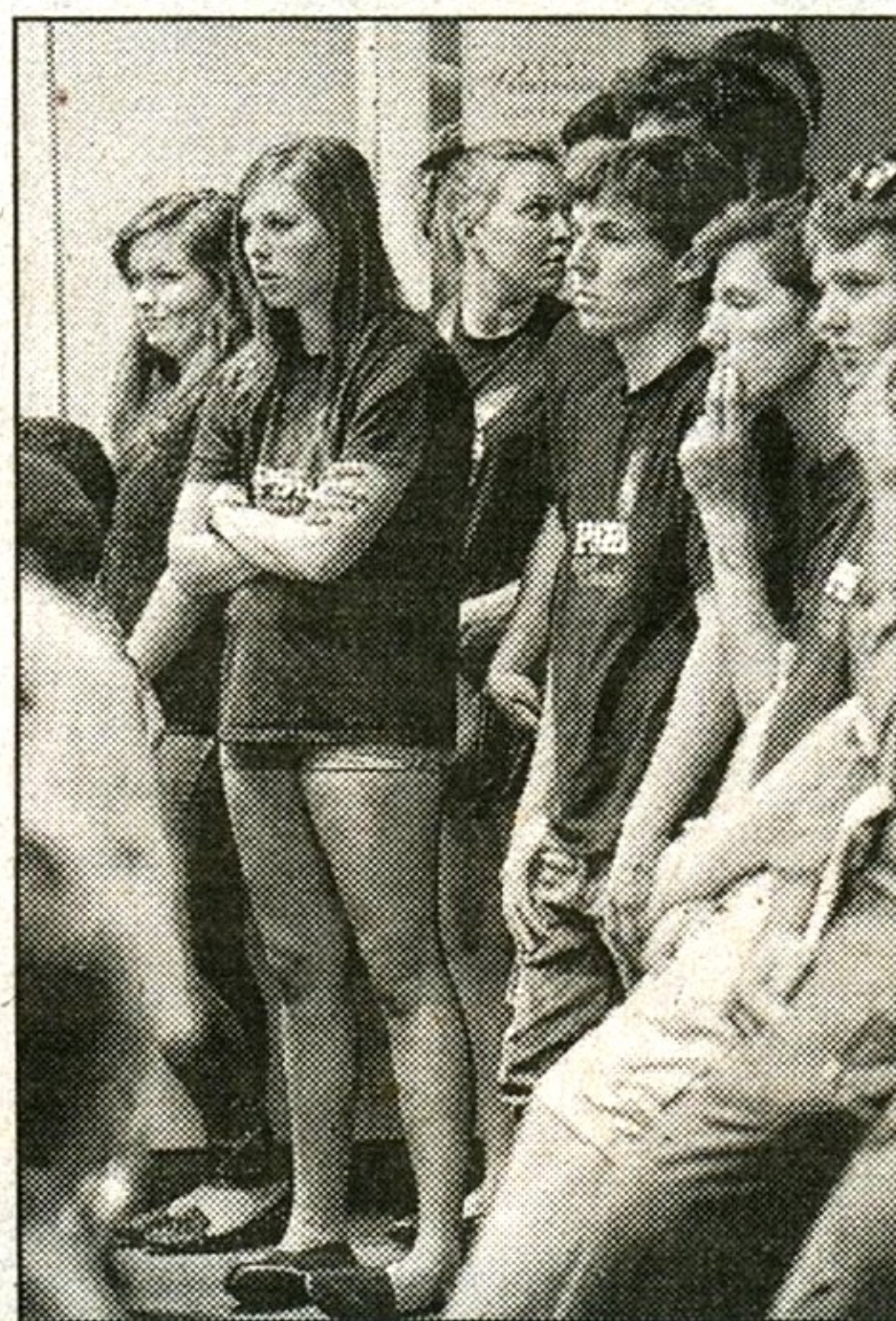
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ident of the Spirit of the Sands Band Boosters, which raises funds for the high school's music and visual corps programs, said: "We know you have a big decision to make. I would just like to say the decision needs to be made with the kids coming first."

"It's their turn," he told the board. "They've waited long enough."

Maya Brewer, a PSHS senior and member of the Spirit of the Sands marching and symphonic band, told the board it would be difficult to fit nearly 200 students into the current band room.

In an email rallying PSHS band supporters, band booster and parent Anjala Marriot called the overcrowded facility a danger to students because it "has no sprinkler or fire suppression equipment, and is sore-



Members of the Palm Springs High School Spirit of the Sands band attend Tuesday's Palm Springs Unified School District board meeting.

RICHARD LUI/ THE DESERT SUN

ly lacking in proper evacuation paths given an emergency situation."

"After five years of planning and cutting through the red tape involved with getting a new facility built, this group wishes to deny yet an-

other cycle of students a proper facility," Marriott said of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation.

Prompted by a summer demolition date, the preservation foundation sought to bolster its efforts by publicizing an Architects' Open Letter signed by 22 local architects who want the district to save the midcentury modern building.

Preservation foundation President Ron Marshall and Vice President Gary Johns attended Tuesday's meeting but did not address the board.

"A lot of people are shocked that in the year 2012 we're demolishing a perfectly good Wexler and Harrison building in Palm Springs, especially since there's been this upward trajectory of interest in midcentury architecture," Marshall told The Desert Sun after the meeting. "To the band parents, I would say, 'There are better options.'"

Preservationists would like district officials to explore other sites on campus that could be demolished to make way for the new building or consider adaptive reuse of the old building.

According to Marshall, Wexler is even willing to work as a consultant if the district opts to renovate the building for the growing performing arts program.

While board members didn't comment on their positions, board member Justin Blake did say that when the board votes it will be "with our mission statement in mind ... to provide the best possible education with the best possible conditions for the children in the area we serve."

The issue will be formally discussed during the board's May 8 meeting.

"We won't always please everyone," Blake said, "but we'll do our due diligence."

Mariecar Mendoza can be reached at (760) 778-4669 or mariecar.mendoza@thedesertsun.com.