



May 2, 2012

Mr. Richard Clapp
President, Board of Education
Palm Springs Unified School District
980 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Suite 101
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Subj: Scheduled Demolition of the Palm Springs High School (PSHS) Administration Building
by the Palm Springs Unified School District (PSUSD)

Dear President Clapp,

Thank you for hearing the issue of the scheduled demolition of the PSHS Administration Building at your May 8, 2012 meeting.

It is our view that the demolition of the PSHS Administration Building is unnecessary, wasteful and deprives the city of a valuable cultural resource. We also believe that there are numerous ways to address the programmatic needs of the performing arts program that do not require the demolition of the PSHS Administration Building.

We would like to provide you and the board with additional information to help you reach a similar conclusion:

Architectural Significance of the PSHS Administration Building

The PSHS Administration Building (1957), designed by the architectural firm of Wexler & Harrison, appears to be significant as a clear, high-quality example of Desert Modern Architecture, a regional style of Modernism that developed in the Coachella Valley starting in the late 1940s. This regional style—pioneered by architects such as William Cody, E. Stewart Williams, Clark & Frey and Wexler & Harrison—promoted the idea of “California living” through simple silhouettes, large expanses of glass, open floor plans, a blending of indoor and outdoor spaces through a collaboration of architecture and landscape design, and the use of common, inexpensive materials like concrete block, glass, steel and other local materials. The PSHS Administration Building exemplifies these midcentury modern design principles. Notable features of the building include its simple form, with horizontal overhangs and large glazed walls; its indoor-outdoor orientation, including the partially covered entrance; the use of inexpensive building materials such as concrete block; its unique open and variable floor plan; and its location on Ramon Road, where many examples of the work of the master designers of this period were built.

Significance of Don Wexler's Body of Architectural Work

The breadth and quality of Wexler's architectural work has become increasingly recognized in recent years and can only be expected to become more appreciated. In March of 2012 one of Wexler & Harrison's residential projects (Steel Development House Number 2) was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. A summary of Wexler's professional accomplishments is provided (attachment 1).

In 2010 the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation (PSPF) released a tribute journal entitled *Donald Wexler: Architect*. The book quickly became the foundation's most popular and best-selling tribute journal (a 2nd printing is already being contemplated). In 2011 the Palm Springs Art Museum held a major retrospective of Donald Wexler's work. The popular exhibition included the publication of a hard cover catalogue of Wexler's work entitled *Steel and Shade: The Architecture of Donald Wexler*.

Particular Significance of Wexler's School Projects

A senior PSUSD official has been quoted as saying "while the school knows of Wexler's contributions to the school and the revered midcentury modern architectural reputation of Palm Springs, the administration building isn't an example of Wexler's signature work...It's a block building that's really not under his area of expertise," referring to Wexler's signature steel-framed buildings.

This belies a profound lack of understanding of Wexler's body of work. Wexler's school projects were his important projects. In *Donald Wexler: Architect*, author and architect Patrick McGrew makes the following point:

Although Wexler's popularity and fame derive primarily for his residential work, he thinks of himself primarily as an architect of schools. Over the course of his career, Wexler completed more than 100 school projects involving more than thirty schools.

Further, California State Polytechnic University Professor Dr. Lauren Bricker, Ph.D., co-author of *Steel and Shade: The Architecture of Donald Wexler* has written:

Wexler's involvement with public or civic projects began with his innovative steel classrooms for the Palm Springs Unified School District. Locally and nationally, the late 1950s and early 1960s was a period of great innovation in school design, as school districts were increasingly aware that the physical setting was integral to a child's education. The trend, especially in California, was for expansive one-story buildings where classrooms were organized into bars or L-shaped wings embracing outdoor play and eating areas. The exterior of the schools was typically enclosed by simple, masonry walls, softened by landscape. Internally, classrooms were designed to be flexible, making it possible to change their size and configuration, and furniture was likewise designed to permit various groupings. Most American children were exposed for the first time to architect-designed modern buildings in their schools, since most middle-class housing was typically of a more traditional design.

Wexler was, of course, fully aware of the contemporary architectural trends in school

design. Having already pioneered the use of steel classrooms in the desert, he brought the use of steel into his new school projects. The first opportunity to design a new campus was the Palm Springs Junior High School (1960-1966), renamed the Raymond Cree Middle School. Wexler was steadily hired to design schools for the Palm Springs Unified School District through the next three decades; he was ultimately responsible for the design and/or remodeling of 31 schools. So dominant was Wexler's reputation in the area of school design that a large Los Angeles-based firm acquired his office in 2000. Their view was that Wexler's extensive portfolio of school projects, as well as his civic work and engagement with building technology, meshed well with their own practice.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Legal Considerations

It should be noted that the CEQA requires public agencies (including the California Department of Education) to review the environmental impacts of their proposed projects. In hindsight, the PSUSD has a long history of insensitivity to historic resources and the PSHS campus is rife with past demolitions of historically significant buildings and insensitive alterations to other important structures. Wexler's projects and those of other important architects deserve a professional evaluation and should not be subject to the personal and unqualified opinions of the senior PSUSD staff. If the current PSHS campus were to be reviewed by a professional historic resources evaluator they would undoubtedly discover a number of unevaluated structures that are potential historic resources. Our view is that it is the immediate obligation of the Board of Education to direct that the PSUSD staff engage the necessary professional expertise to conduct an historic resources inventory of the PSHS campus before any additional demolitions and alterations are contemplated.

A summary of CEQA legal considerations is provided (attachment 2).

The Demolition of the Palm Springs High School Administration Building is Inconsistent with the City's General Plan

While we recognize that the PSUSD is not bound by the city of Palm Springs' General Plan, the PSHS campus is a hugely important part of the community and the PSUSD should at least be aware of these overarching public priorities. The General Plan is replete with significant references to the importance of our historic resources, the "character" of our city and the importance of sustainable or "green" development.

The proposed demolition of the PSHS Administration Building directly contradicts many of the city's General Plan values and priorities including:

- "unique architecture" (page 1-12)
- to "Promote the...use of...existing construction to minimize resource depletion and conserve resources for future generations." (page 1-12)
- to "Preserve and uphold the high quality of architecture and the unique visual and aesthetic form in buildings...that distinguish Palm Springs from other cities." (page 1-13), and perhaps most to the point,
- to "Recognize the importance of adaptive reuse for architecturally and historically significant resources." (page 1-13)

The Destruction of the PSHS Administration Building will Damage the Reputation of the City

On April 12, 2012 the Desert Sun newspaper published a Valley Voice column by PSPF board member Jim Harlan entitled "Historic Palm Springs school building should be restored – not demolished." In the column, Harlan makes a compelling case for restoring the PSHS Administration Building and points out both the building's architectural merits and the sustainability rationale for adaptively reusing the building (attachment 3).

There is a reasonable expectation that a city that derives so much of its revenue through architectural and cultural tourism be a good steward of the historic resources which bring visitors. The demolition of the PSHS Administration Building might be expected to generate significant negative publicity as the demolition and bulldozing of the site will undoubtedly be locally covered by the press.

Increasing the potential for negative press, on June 3, 2009 the Palm Springs city council voted unanimously to support the city's application to become a "Preserve America Community." On October 7, 2009 the city of Palm Springs was officially designated a Preserve America Community in a letter from the White House signed by First Lady Michelle Obama. The Preserve America program recognizes communities that:

- protect and celebrate their heritage;
- use their historic assets for economic development and community revitalization; and
- encourage people to experience and appreciate local historic resources through education and heritage tourism programs.

While the PSUSD may try to distinguish their actions from those of the city, the mere fact that this demolition would be occurring within city limits will be sufficiently ironic for many observers to condemn both the city's and the PSUSD's actions in this matter.

Finally, on April 17, 2012 we provided the local press with a news release which forwarded an "Architects' Open Letter to the Palm Springs Unified School District" (attachment 4). The open letter, signed by 22 local and California architects, asked the PSUSD to "abandon" their plans for the scheduled demolition of the PSHS Administration Building and also asked the PSUSD to "pursue the adaptive reuse" of the building. This collective condemnation of the PSUSD's demolition plans by so many prominent local architectural professionals has lent significant credibility to our contention that the scheduled demolition is wasteful and ill-advised.

Adaptive Reuse of the PSHS Administration Building

More often than not, existing historically significant structures can be altered to accommodate new uses. It is difficult to understand why the program for the new \$4,000,000, 9,000 square foot Performing Arts Building cannot be accomplished with a 3,500 square foot addition that could conceivably bring the price down significantly. The PSUSD has stated publicly that the performing arts program requires the following components: band room, small practice rooms, audio recording studio, changing rooms, restrooms, and instrument and costume storage. There is nothing in this program that would prohibit an adaptive reuse of the 5,800 square foot PSHS Administration Building and a smaller, two-story supplemental structure. In fact, as recently as 1987, such complementary

two-story structures were considered in the expansion of the PSHS campus.

The PSHS Administration Building is still remarkably intact. Many of the minor, unfortunate changes to the building could be easily reversed. For example, while the original cylindrical canister lights were removed and replaced with unflattering “safety lights” the original light mounting points remain. Much of the front glass entryway was filled in and covered with stucco compromising the transparency of the original design. Terrazzo flooring has been covered with linoleum tile. Fortunately, all of these changes are reversible and much of the original design could be restored at a fraction of the cost of new construction.

The firm of Wexler & Harrison was justifiably proud of the PSHS Administration Building project and the building appeared in a commercial brochure of Wexler & Harrison’s work published in the early 1960s. A one-page excerpt from that brochure is provided (attachment 5). Additionally, the architectural press commented on the building (called “*administration building palm springs*”) in great detail (attachment 6). In many cases documentation of this type is unavailable, despite the fact that midcentury buildings are relatively new. In fact, the archives of many of Palm Springs’ most notable architects are either incomplete or non-existent. Accordingly, the foregoing vintage documentation on the building not only bolsters the architectural credibility of the building but, by describing in detail the “structural and aesthetic reasons” various materials were used, is an invaluable resource for the proper rehabilitation of the building.

When and How Did the “Process” Fail To Achieve a Reasonable Result?

In a March 24, 2012 Desert Sun newspaper article, a senior PSUSD staffer was quoted as saying that the adaptive reuse of the PSHS Administration Building had been analyzed in 2008, but that this option had been rejected as cost prohibitive. At the March 30, 2012 meeting between PSPF representatives and PSUSD officials (with you and Superintendent Anderson present), PSPF asked for a copy of the 2008 analysis. Incredibly, the response was that the analysis was of limited value because it applied to the PSHS Music Room and not specifically to the PSHS Administration Building. (It is important to point out that this misinformation still has not been retracted by the PSUSD). In short, it appears the negative results of the Music Room evaluation (referred to in a Facilities Planning email of October 15, 2008 as “an evaluation and cost estimate associated with upgrading the Auditorium and existing Band Room/Choir building [Music Room] at PSHS”) were questionably, and in our opinion improperly, extrapolated to the PSHS Administration Building.

There are additional contributing factors that have led the PSUSD to the flawed conclusion that the demolition of the PSHS Administration Building is necessary. One of the most glaring errors of omission remains the PSUSD’s failure to conduct any assessment or inventory of the historic resources on the PSHS campus. While buildings become historic slowly and incrementally, an assessment of the historic resources on the campus is arguably many years overdue. The responsibility for understanding and integrating future development with these historic resources rests solely with the PSUSD who is charged with the stewardship of the facilities under its responsibility.

A third contributing factor that has led the PSUSD to the flawed conclusion that the demolition of the PSHS Administration Building is necessary is the lack of any sustainability, or “green,” consideration given to development on the PSHS campus. An evaluation of the present plan to demolish the

perfectly intact PSHS Administration Building would show that the investment in energy in the present building (equivalent to roughly 70,000 gallons of gasoline) would result in a huge net loss of embodied energy...before the energy required to demolish the building is even factored in. The principles of green development have moved into the mainstream of thinking and can no longer be viewed as an exotic or esoteric agenda. The rehabilitation of a building like the PSHS Administration Building is an environmentally responsible practice and is essentially a recycling program. Older buildings like the PSHS Administration Building were often designed to be energy efficient through their use of good ventilation, durable materials and siting. A huge advantage of older buildings is that the building already exists; therefore energy is not necessary to create new building materials and the infrastructure is already in place. Minor modifications can be made to adapt existing buildings to compatible new uses and systems can be upgraded to meet modern building requirements and codes. The positive characteristics of many older buildings prompted National Trust for Historic Preservation president Richard Moe to assert that, "The greenest building is the one that's already built." By ignoring the principles of sustainability, the PSUSD has effectively locked itself into 1970s-era thinking about new construction and development.

Impediments to Providing Adaptive Reuse Options

We have been hamstrung in our efforts to provide more detailed options for the adaptive reuse of the PSHS Administration Building due to a lack of authoritative documentation about the PSUSD's plans for the Performing Arts Building. Despite one board of education member's assurance that the school district greatly values "transparency," the PSUSD staff has been less than forthcoming in providing programmatic information, floor plans, etc., about the new Performing Arts Building and details about the scheduled PSHS Administration Building demolition. Both the Performing Arts Building floor plan and the 2008 cost analysis were requested at the March 30 meeting (attended by you and Superintendent Anderson). These documents were either not provided because the PSUSD staff unilaterally considered them "not relevant" (in the case of 2008 cost analysis) or, in the case of the Performing Arts Building floor plans could not be provided, according to Superintendent Anderson, "due to post-9/11 security concerns." A written request for programmatic information about the Performing Arts Building by PSPF board member Susan Secoy Jensen was likewise rebuffed by the PSUSD staff just a few days later.

Accordingly, on April 10, 2012 we were forced to submit a California Public Records Act Request to the PSUSD for all documents "regarding the proposed demolition of the PSHS Administration Building, the construction of the proposed Performing Arts Building (including site plan(s), floor plan(s), programmatic considerations and feasibility studies (as well as the oft referred to "2008 study")." In a letter dated April 20, 2012, the PSUSD informed us it could not meet the standard 10-day response time and invoked the PSUSD's "right" to respond at the end of an additional two weeks (May 4, 2012). PSPF delivered a letter on April 25, 2012 asking that the PSUSD at least provide a smaller, interim response (as is the PSUSD's prerogative) to assist PSPF in preparing alternative schemes to the proposed demolition. The records requested were "the 2008 cost feasibility study and a sampling of relevant programmatic information (e.g., only executive summary-level material) on the new Performing Arts Building." PSPF requested these records be made available by close of business April 27, 2012 based on the reasonable assumption that after two full weeks at least some cataloguing of the records had occurred.

On April 30, 2012 we were informed by the PSUSD staff that a partial response to our records request

would be made available for pick-up by noon on May 1, 2012. Unfortunately, the 34 pages of hardcopy documents provided (emails, memos, etc.) were marginally relevant and the single electronic document provided (entitled "Schematic Design 05-29-09") was a 12-page document that featured an outdated design of the Performing Arts Building that bore no resemblance to the design released to the local newspaper by the PSUSD.

Conclusion

We hope that the foregoing information leads you and your fellow board members to reach the same conclusion we have, i.e., the adaptive reuse of the PSHS Administration Building, in conjunction with a new two-story addition, is a smart and reasonable alternative to the demolition of the PSHS Administration Building and would result in a project that:

- Preserves an important historic resource;
- Is architecturally superior;
- Is potentially less expensive;
- Is far greener; and
- Is possibly larger in terms of square footage.

Sincerely,



Ron Marshall
President

Attachments:

1. Professional Accomplishments of architect Donald Wexler
2. CEQA Analysis and professional qualifications of preparer Patrick McGrew
3. Desert Sun Valley Voice column by Jim Harlan entitled "Historic Palm Springs school building should be restored – not demolished" dated April 12, 2012
4. Architects' Open Letter to the Palm Springs Unified School District dated April 16, 2012
5. Wexler & Harrison Commercial Brochure (undated, circa 1960)
6. *Concrete Masonry Age* magazine article entitled "administration building palm springs" dated January 1958

Copy to:

The Desert Sun
Palm Springs Modern Committee
City of Palm Springs (Historic Site Preservation Board)



Resumé

Donald A. Wexler, FAIA (1926–present)

Address:

Professional Park
199 South Civic Drive
Palm Springs, California 92262

Education

1950 University of Minnesota, Bachelor of Architecture
1952 Registered Architect, State of California C#1538

Architectural Practice and Associates

1952–1961 Wexler & Harrison, AIA
1961–1968 Donald A. Wexler, AIA (Sole Proprietor)
1961–1964 Wexler & Perlin-Boggio, Architects & Engineers
1969–2000 Donald A. Wexler Associates, AIA A California Corporation
2000–2002 WWCO/T / Donald A. Wexler

Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (FAIA)

The College of Fellows, founded in 1952, is composed of members of the Institute who are elected to Fellowship by a jury of their peers. Fellowship is one of the highest honors the AIA can bestow upon a member. Elevation to Fellowship not only recognizes the achievements of the architect as an individual but also elevates before the public and the profession those architects who have made significant contributions to architecture and to society.

Professional/Civic Organizations:

American Institute of Architects
Charter Member, Inland Chapter of the California Council of the American Institute of Architects
Charter Member of the Solar Energy Development Institute, Palm Springs, California
Architectural and Environmental Review Board, City of Rancho Mirage, California
Energy Commission, City of Palm Springs, California
Architectural Advisory Committee, City of Palm Springs, California
Joint City/County Design Review Committee City/County of Riverside, California

Honor Award from California Desert Chapter of the American Institute of Architects for:

1987 Hope Square Professional Center, Rancho Mirage
1987 California Federal Savings & Loan, Palm Desert
1987 Palm Springs Police Department & Jail Facility, Palm Springs
2004 **Inducted as Fellow of the American Institute of Architects**

Awards and Honors

Award of Excellence in Design with Masonry from the Masonry Institute for Indio Juvenile Hall Detention and Treatment Center, Indio, California
Golden Palm Awards (one for Design, the second for Energy Conservation) for the Desert Water Agency, Palm Springs, California
Honor Award for Outstanding Use of Masonry from the Masonry Institute for the Bank of Palm Springs, Palm Springs, California
Award of Honor for Creative Use of Concrete for the Union Oil Station, Palm Springs, California
Architectural Record Award of Excellence for house design for development house in Palm Springs, California
Palm Springs Walk of Stars, February 15, 2007
Alumni Award, University of Minnesota, 2004

INTRODUCTION TO CEQA AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires all public agencies, including the California Board of Education to review the environmental impacts of proposed projects that are assessed as having historic significance.¹ Even properties which are not formally listed as historic resources but are otherwise determined to be historically significant, based on substantial evidence, would also be considered "historical resources."

ASSESSMENT OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE PALM SPRINGS HIGH SCHOOL (PSHS) ADMINISTRATION BUILDING AT 2248 RAMON ROAD

The following is professional assessment of the property's historic significance, and is not intended to represent a formal determination of eligibility. Such a determination would be made by the staffs of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) and local registers, and has not been performed at this time.

Based upon this assessment, the PSHS Administration Building appears to be eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 1 (Events) and Criterion 3 (Architecture), and thus would likely be considered a historic resource for the purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Criterion 1: Events (or pattern of events)

The PSHS Administration Building (1957, Wexler & Harrison) appears to be significant as a clear, high-quality example of the pattern of *events* that saw the emergence of Desert Modern Architecture, a regional style of Modernism that developed in the Coachella Valley starting in the late 1940s. This regional style—pioneered by architects such as William Cody, E. Stewart Williams, Clark & Frey and Wexler & Harrison—developed the idea of "California living" through simple silhouettes, large expanses of glass, open floor plans, a blending of indoor and outdoor spaces through a collaboration of architecture and landscape design, and use of simple materials like concrete block, glass, steel and other local materials. The Administration Building Road exemplifies many of the mid-century modern design principles used in Desert Modern buildings.

Notable features of the building include its simple form, with horizontal overhangs and large glazed walls; its indoor-outdoor orientation, including the partially covered entrance; the use of natural, local building materials such as concrete block; its unique open and variable floor plan; and its location on Ramon Road, where many examples of the work of the master designers of this period were built.

¹ The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code Sections 21000-21178) is the foundation of environmental policy and law in the state of California. It encourages the protection of all aspects of the environment (including historic resources - Section 21084.1) by requiring agencies to prepare informational documents on the environmental effects of a proposed action before carrying out any discretionary activities. Under CEQA, evaluation of the potential for proposed projects to impact "historical resources" is a two-step process: the first is to determine whether the property is an "historical resource" as defined in Section 15064.5(a)(3) of CEQA; and, if it is an "historical resource," the second is to evaluate whether the action or project proposed by the sponsor would cause a "substantial adverse change" to the "historical resource."

Criterion 3: *Architecture*

The PSHS Administration Building also appears to be significant as the work of master architects Wexler & Harrison. The building is not widely known to be one of their masterworks, but as one of the firm's earliest educational commissions, it is a design which well represents the firm's contributions to the field of Desert Modernism in the mid-twentieth century.

The PSHS Administration Building does not appear to be significantly associated with any notable persons (Criterion 2: Persons). No assessment of the property was made in relation to archeological resources.

Integrity

In order to be eligible for listing in local, state, or national historical registers, a property must possess significance and have historic integrity. The process of determining historic integrity is similar for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), California Register of Historic Resources (CRHR), and under local regulations. The same seven variables or aspects that define integrity—location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association—are used to evaluate a resource's eligibility for listing.

According to National Register Bulletin #15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, these seven characteristics are defined as follows:

Location is the place where the historic property was constructed.

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plans, space, structure and style of the property.

Setting addresses the physical environment of the historic property inclusive of the landscape and spatial relationships of the building.

Materials refer to the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form the historic property or people during any given period in history.

Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history.

Feeling is the property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.

Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.

The PSHS Administration Building has undergone only minor alterations since its original construction, and thus retains a high degree of integrity. It has never been moved from its location in on Ramon Road, and thus retains its integrity of location and setting in a residential neighborhood.

The building's major character-defining features—such as its form, massing, recessed entrance, and indoor-outdoor relationships—are intact. It continues to convey its original design intent, architectural style, and original finishes, and therefore has integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The building

retains integrity of association with its original use as an administration building, and retains its integrity of feeling as a mid-century modern structure.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties

A proposed project involving an historical resource will be evaluated to determine if it qualifies for a categorical exemption under Class 31 (CEQA Guidelines Section 15331), if the project requires the preparation of a Negative Declaration or a Mitigated Negative Declaration, or requires the completion of an Environmental Impact Report. Normally, a project will qualify for a categorical exemption if the change or alternation is minor and if the implementation of the alteration will meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Structures (the Standards). The Standards provide guidance for working with historic properties and are used by Federal agencies and many local government bodies to evaluate proposed rehabilitative work on historic properties. The Standards offer four sets of standards to guide the treatment of historic properties: Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Reconstruction. Obviously, a proposed demolition of an historic resource does not meet the Standards.

Typically one set of standards is chosen for a project based on the project scope. In the case of the PSHS Administration Building, the Standards for Rehabilitation are the most applicable:

- 1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.*
- 2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.*
- 3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.*
- 4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.*
- 5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.*
- 6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.*
- 7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.*
- 8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.*

9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Any proposed project at for altering the PSHS Administration Building should strive to meet the Standards for Rehabilitation, with special attention paid to Standards 2, 5, and 9.

As designed, the proposed project at the PSHS Administration Building which requires the demolition of the building does not comply with the Standards for Rehabilitation.

Conclusion

The PSHS Administration Building was constructed for Palm Springs High School in 1957 by architects Wexler & Harrison. Based upon the data contained in this preliminary assessment, the building appears to be eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 1 (Events) and Criterion 3 (Architecture) as a significant example of the emergence of Desert Modernism, and as the work of the prominent Palm Springs, California architecture firm Wexler & Harrison. As such, the PSHS Administration Building would likely be considered a historic resource for the purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). As designed, the proposed project at the PSHS Administration Building which requires the demolition of the building does not comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and would result in a substantial and unmitigated negative environmental impact.

Historic Preservation Evaluation Qualifications

Professional Qualifications Standards: The Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 61 defines the minimum education and experience required to perform historic preservation identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment activities. The minimum professional qualifications in architecture are a professional degree in architecture plus at least two years full-time experience in architecture; or a State license to practice architecture.

Patrick McGrew received his Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Oklahoma in 1965. He has been actively engaged in the architectural profession, specializing in historic preservation, since then. McGrew has been a licensed architect in the State of California since 1970, as well as a holder of the NCARB (national licensing) certificate. He possesses an in-depth knowledge of all procedures and standards utilized in the identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment of historic properties as evidenced by his lengthy career known for the depth and breadth of accumulated architectural / historical knowledge. He places a high value on the objectivity and completeness of his written works. He has twenty-five years' experience in research, writing, practicing and teaching architecture with academic and historical agencies and institutions. He has made a substantial contribution through research and publication of a body of scholarly knowledge in the field of California architectural history. His experience has included the preparation of numerous historic research reports, National Register nominations, and San Francisco and Palm Springs Landmark nominations, as well as the preparation of plans and specifications for architectural preservation projects.

Patrick McGrew's knowledge and reputation in the field of historic preservation provided the basis his public service as the long-time President of San Francisco's Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board. His impressive list of publications on California's historic architecture is a testament to his proficiency as a leading expert in California architectural history. He is a member of the Society of Architectural Historians, and has received many awards for his work during a distinguished career. In 1995, his book *The Historic Houses of Presidio Terrace*, received an award of honor from the California Heritage Council. Former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown declared November 30, 2003 as 'Patrick McGrew Day' in San Francisco, and a Commendation from the United States Senate was presented in recognition of McGrew's 'distinguished career and outstanding contributions to the City of San Francisco.' Patrick McGrew now lives and works in Palm Springs, California

Historic Palm Springs school building should be restored — not demolished

Last week, one of the city's midcentury residential gems, Steel Development House No. 2, was placed on the prestigious National Register of Historic Places.

Designed by architects Don Wexler and Rick Harrison, the 1962 home has been beautifully restored and is lovingly cared for by its current owner. Placement on the national register is no small feat: applications are rigorously reviewed and preparing a credible nomination package can be time-consuming and expensive for the homeowner.



James R. Harlan

On the very day of that important recognition, I, along with fellow board members of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, met with the superintendent and senior staff of the Palm Springs Unified School District to discuss our objections to the scheduled demolition of the one-story modernist Palm Springs

High School Administration Building built in 1957.

The demolition is intended to make space for a new two-story "pseudo-Spanish" performing arts building. Ironically, the administration building slated to become victim to the wrecking ball was designed by none other than architects Don Wexler and Rick Harrison.

In the course of our discussions with the school district, it came to light that the rationale for constructing a new performing arts building was based on a 2008 analysis that showed that the campus' music building was too expensive to renovate. Amazingly, in the process of searching for an alternative solution, the conclusions of that specific analysis were applied to the nearby administration building to keep the ball rolling on the project.

In fact, no analysis has been done of the efficacy of converting or sympathetically adding to the administration building to meet the needs of the performing arts programs.

The school district has yet to catalogue the wealth of historic resources on the high school campus. Such an inventory could serve as a development road map for this and future projects. Additionally, and specific to the impending demolition, the district has not conducted a sustainability or "green" analysis to determine:

- How much embodied energy is tied up in the 1957 building.
- The amount of energy required to demolish it.
- And the energy that will be spent to build a new building.

Today, using calculators available online, rough estimates of once-esoteric things like "embodied energy" and "demolition energy" can be made by anyone capable of balancing a checkbook.

In the school district's defense, for major projects it relies heavily on outside "professional" advice and in this case engaged a San Diego-based architectural firm. However, this does not relieve the district staff of taking notice of what is hap-



The Palm Springs High School Administration Building, designed by architects Don Wexler and Rick Harrison in 1957, is now used as the Ramon Alternative Center. JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN

pening in the community. Surely the huge impact of Modernism Week on the local economy, the burgeoning year-round architectural tourism industry and the city's highly publicized sustainability initiative should have elicited some common-sense questions.

For example, this building sure resembles the sort of buildings — like City Hall and the Tramway gas station — that folks are making all the fuss about. Is ours also architecturally significant?

Or maybe, is it green and is it practical to demolish a perfectly serviceable and sturdy building?

The answers to those questions should have led the staff to then ask the obvious: How can we adapt the Palm Springs High School Administration Building to our programmatic needs?

A fraction of the money spent on the demolition and construction of a new — and far less remarkable — performing arts building could be used to properly rehabilitate and add to the modernist administration building. This may delay creation of additional performing arts spaces by as much as two years but may result in a solution that is accepted by all parties and that will last 100 years.

Fortunately, it is a golden opportunity for us to teach our kids and some adults some valuable lessons such as: "Recycling buildings saves money and is just as important as recycling paper and aluminum cans," or "Our history is important and once you destroy something it is gone forever," and perhaps even "Sometimes you have to wait a little longer and work a little harder to get things right."

There is a wonderful vintage photo of the members of the 1957 board of education standing in front of the Palm Springs High School Administration Building. They are beaming with pride because the architect-designed building they helped bring to life was modern, bright and clean — in short, everything that is good for kids. Making it bright and clean again would likewise be good for the kids.

James R. Harlan is an architect living in the Historic Tennis Club Neighborhood in Palm Springs. Email him at jimharlan@aol.com

ARCHITECTS' OPEN LETTER

to the
PALM SPRINGS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

MARCH 2012



We, the undersigned architects, support the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation's efforts to ensure the preservation of the Palm Springs High School Administration Building (1957).

Accordingly, we request that the Palm Springs Unified School District abandon its plans for the summer 2012 demolition of the building.

Designed by the architectural firm of Wexler & Harrison, the Administration Building is an excellent example of the modernist architecture for which the city of Palm Springs is known throughout the world.

We strongly encourage the Palm Springs Unified School District leadership to find alternate siting for the new campus development and to pursue the adaptive reuse of the still highly-intact Administration Building.

Preserving the Palm Springs High School Administration Building will be a tangible symbol of the Palm Springs Unified School District's commitment to the community to protect the city's important historical resources and follow the principles of sustainability.

As of April 16, 2012

James R. Harlan
Architect

Patrick McGrew
Architect

Susan Secoy Jensen, AIA
Secoy Architects, Inc.

Doug Hudson
Doug Hudson Design

Lance C. O'Donnell, AIA
o2 Architecture

Craig M. Hammond, Assoc. AIA
o2 Architecture

Eric Corey Freed
organicArchitect

William Krisel, AIA
Architect

James Cioffi
James Cioffi Architect

James Schmidt, AIA
Schmidt Architecture

Ana Escalante, AIA
Escalante Architects

Rick Phillippe
Callison Architecture

Christopher L. Sahlín, AIA
Chris Sahlín Architects

William Fauber
Architect (retired)

Stephen Michael Rose
Architect (retired)

Hugh Kaptur
Architect

Michael Darner
Architect (retired)

Anna Marie Howell
Architect

John Gilmer, AIA
John Gilmer Architect

Philip de Cancio
Architect

Eric Shamp, AIA
Ecotype Consulting

Mark Rios, FAIA
Rios Clementi Hale Studios



Palm Springs High School - Administration Building

The problem presented was to design an Administration Building as a separate structure, that would fulfill the administrative needs for an expanding high school plant. The building is zoned into five (5) areas, consisting of:

A.—Gen. & Administrative Offices. B.—Nurses Wing. C.—Teachers Lounge & Work Area. D.—Counsellor and Conference Areas. E.—Night School Administration Area.

All these zones, except the nurses wing, were to function around the lobby and general office. By means of a rolling aluminum screen the general and administrative offices can have complete security from night school activities.

The general and administrative office was designed to accommodate the following functions:

- 1.—Principal's office with separate entrance.
- 2.—Vice-Principal office, separate entrance and direct control of the general office.
- 3.—General office for clerical work and contact with students.
- 4.—General storage and workroom, with direct relation to the general office. mailroom and the general office.
- 5.—Faculty mail room, with a writing area, and mail boxes accessible from both mail room and the general office.

The Nurses Wing incorporates the following areas, and functions:

1.) Nurses Office. 2.) Examination room with two dressing rooms. 3.) Separate boys and girls isolation rooms with private toilet rooms. 4.) Waiting area in hallway and storage. The Nurses Wing was designed to have complete isolation from the administration function although windows were set in the court wall allowing visual control of the isolation rooms from the Administration Wing.

The Teachers' Lounge area contains a work room, Men's and Women's toilet rooms. Privacy is gained in the lounge by means of a court, where faculty members may relax outdoors.

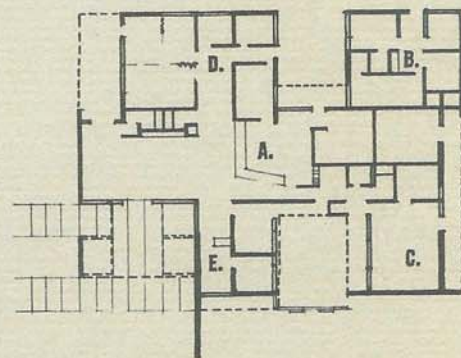
The Counsellor Offices were designed off a large hallway that functions as an extra waiting area. Connecting to the waiting area is a conference room that can be divided into three smaller areas.

The Night School Offices were located directly off the main lobby. The Principal has a private office, and the clerical help works as a receptionist in a counter enclosed alcove. The main lobby functions as a waiting area and handles the flow of traffic between related areas. Public toilets and the school trophy case are situated within this area.

The Basic Construction is sand blasted concrete block for exterior walls, exposed, also on the interior side. Stucco panels over and below windows. Steel beams and a wood frame roof structure. Wood frame interior partitions, except division between nurses wing and administration which is concrete block. Terrazzo floors were used in the lobby area and connecting hallways for durability. The complete building is air conditioned for summer use.

Construction Time: July 1956 to December 1956.

Owner: Palm Springs Unified School District
 Architect: Wexler and Harrison, A.I.A.
 Structural Engineer: Parker, Zehnder & Associates
 Mechanical Engineer: Bruce E. Echols
 Electrical Engineer: Wm. A. Mason
 Contractor: Cal Construction Company

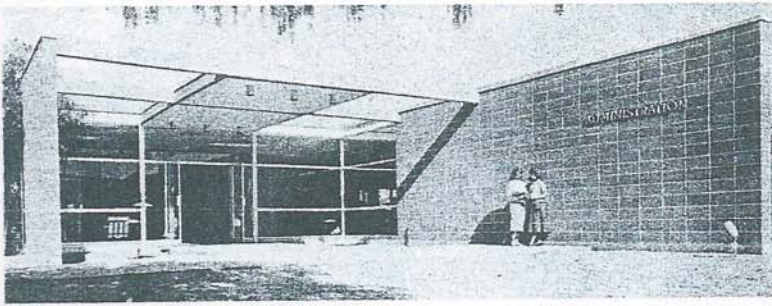


Scale: 1/50" = 1' 0' 20' 40' 60'

Sq. Ft. 5237 + (1237) ½ 5856

Cost \$97,000.00

\$16.60 per sq. ft. (within State Aid Level)



This is the first unit in Palm Springs High School's necessary expansion program. Free-standing walls of concrete block ornament the building.

Photography by Richard Fish

administration building palm springs

Architect — Wexler & Harrison, Palm Springs

Structural Engineers — Parker, Zehnder & Associates, Los Angeles

General Contractors — Cal Construction Company, San Bernardino

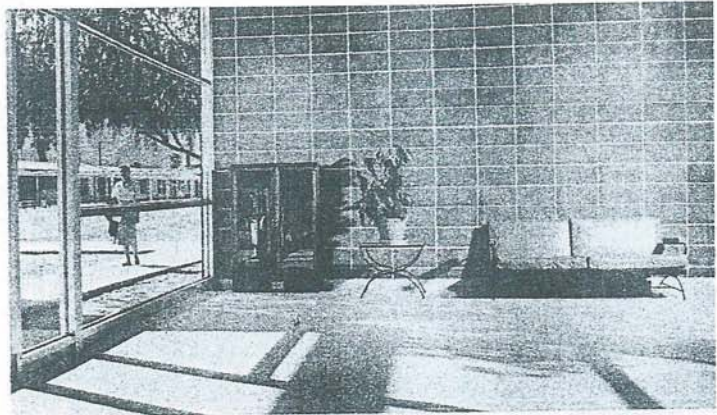
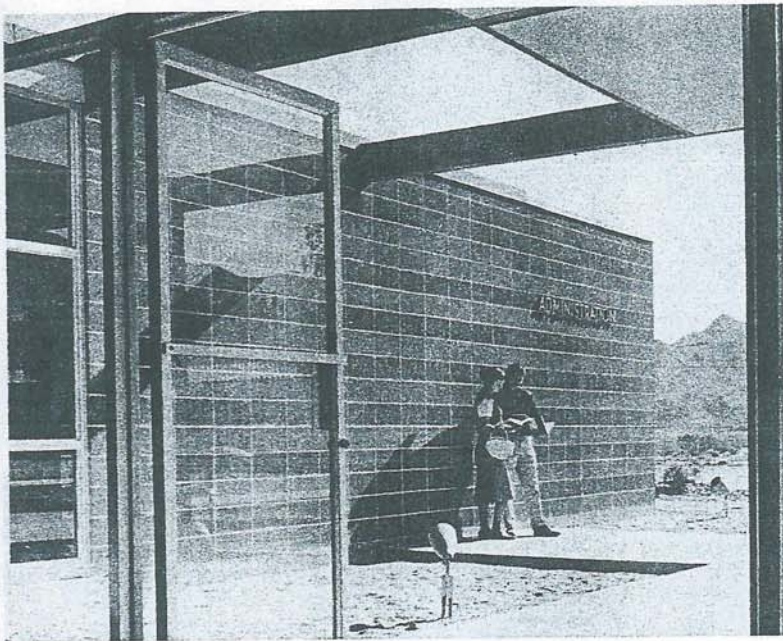
Masonry Contractor — E. A. Wicholm, Inglewood

Concrete Block Supplier — Chamco Concrete Block Co.

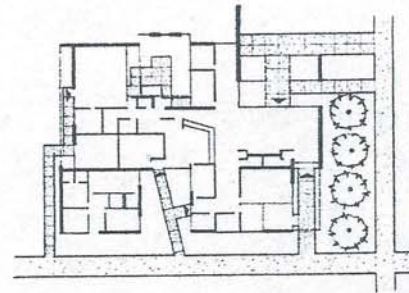
The problem as presented to the architectural firm of Wexler & Harrison was to design an administration building for a school plant in which the existing facilities were very inadequate. Due to the rapid growth of the local community the required building was designed to handle a school plant that would possibly double existing facilities.

The building is zoned into five (5) areas, consisting of: 1) General and administrative offices, 2) Nurses wing, 3) Teachers lounge and work area, 4) Counsellor and conference areas, 5) Night school administration area. All these zones were to function around the lobby and general office.

Nothing could be more appropriate for the sand of the desert and the towering hills visible through the window at right than the unpainted, exposed aggregate of the concrete block wall.



Chamco's sandblasted blocks make this simple but very satisfactory wall a pleasant room for students and administrative staff in the Palm Springs High School administration building.



In selecting materials for this job, and taking into consideration climatic conditions as well as performance and easy maintenance, and after a thorough research of materials, it was decided to use a concrete block which would be sand blasted, both exterior and interior, and exposed as such. The Chamco block proved to be most satisfactory because of the aggregate and the color which was obtained through sand-blasting. These walls were sealed with two coats of silicone; it was felt that there would be very little maintenance required.

For both structural and aesthetic reasons all concrete block areas are used in a rectangular shape within the block module with filler panels of glass and wood stud and plaster.

The stack bond pattern was decided upon because of its clean and neat appearance, and by using open end block the construction was simplified by eliminating the necessity of lifting block over vertical reinforcing rods. As all walls act to resist horizontal forces they are reinforced with steel as well as being grouted solid.

Richard A. Harrison, A.I.A., Southern California Chapter, is a graduate of University of Southern California, is a Navy Veteran, World War II, is married, and has two sons.

Donald A. Wexler, A.I.A., Southern California Chapter, is a graduate of University of Minnesota, is also a Navy Veteran, World War II. He too is married, and has two sons.

They established partnership in Palm Springs, January, 1954, and have built a general practice there.