

Library to blossom into a branch

Historic building to be remodeled

By Xochitl Peña

The Desert Sun

After several years of sitting empty in the heart of downtown, interior renovations are planned for the Welwood Murray Memorial Library so the 70-year-old building can become a Palm Springs branch library.

City officials envision tourists and residents alike visiting with a cup of a coffee from a nearby shop and relaxing in the library reading room or perusing magazines and newspapers.

An archive room with a viewing area would be provided by the Palm Springs Historical Society, and tourism information kiosks would be set up in the lobby.

"It's just a complete mess inside," City Manager David Ready said of its current condition. "It needs a lot of tender loving care."

The Palm Springs City Council meets today and is being asked to approve, among several requests, the interior space plan and architectural design contract so the project can be advertised for construction bids.

The current proposal is different from the original plans, which called for knocking down interior walls and an addition.

Members of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation are "very pleased" with



The facade of the Welwood Murray Memorial Library in Palm Springs.

DESERT SUN PHOTO

the new plan because it keeps the integrity of the historic building intact, said Gary Johns, vice president of the foundation.

"It was a two-year battle and we're very pleased that the city is now going to do the sensitive restoration that they have planned," he said.

"It's a win for preservation and it's a win for the city, and it's the community that's going to benefit from this the most."

The cost of the renovations has yet to be determined, as does the timeline. The city has budgeted \$650,000 for the project. The outside of the building will not be touched.

Finding a use for the empty

building has been seen as critical to helping complete the transformation of the Desert Fashion Plaza and surrounding blocks, a massive project under way across the street.

The project, a partnership between Wessman Development and the city, is expected to bring a high-end hotel, retail shops, restaurants and an events center to the downtown core.

"We've put together what we believe is a remodel plan and a partnership model that will serve our community and all of our visitors with a revitalized downtown library," said Ready.

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IF YOU GO

The Palm Springs City Council meets at 6 p.m. today at City Hall, 3200 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way, (760) 323-8299

signed library was built in 1941 and is named after George Welwood Murray, a pioneer and the first hotel owner in Palm Springs.

Murray died in 1914. His son gave the city the land on which the library sits in the late 1930s with the requirement that the building remain in use as a library.

The building was eventually designated as a historic site by the city in 1984.

Jeri Vogelsang, director/curator with the Palm Springs Historical Society, which operates the McCallum Adobe and Cornelia White's "Little House" museums, looks forward to the partnership with the city and use of the building.

"We would love to have more space for the archives and that way we can actually function more as a research library," she said.

Having an official archive room and viewing room at the library would allow the cramped museum to display more artifacts.

Currently, if someone wants to view the archives they have to make an appointment and use the staff office.

"It's crowded. It's not dangerous but there's not a whole lot of room for much else," said Vogelsang.