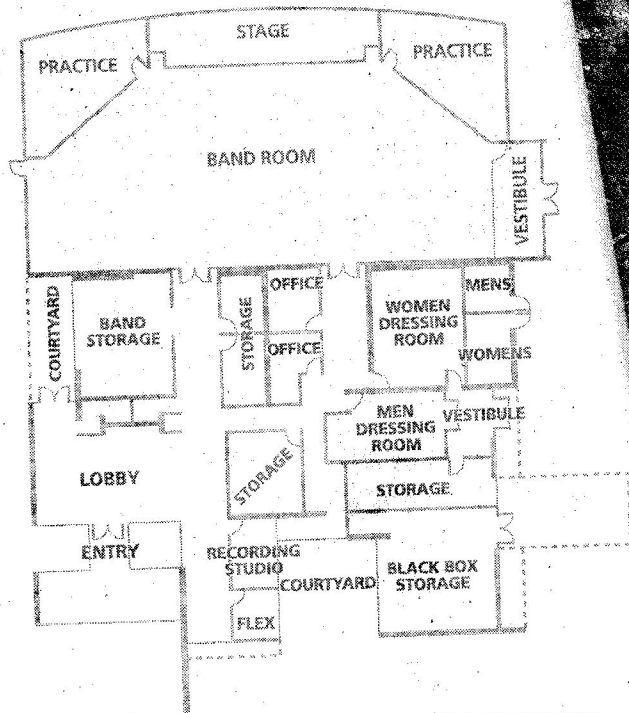
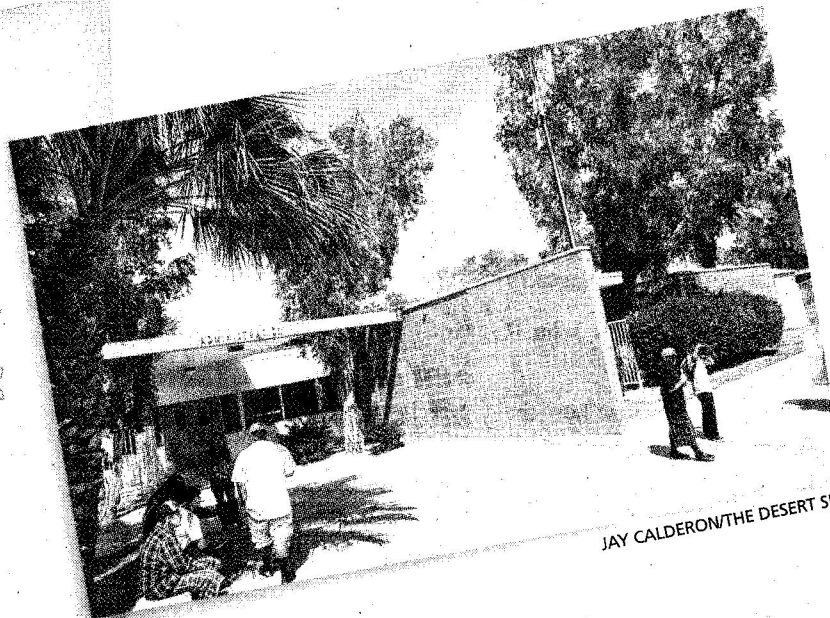


Adaptive reuse proposal



GRAPHIC BY FRED W. FIGUEROA/THE DESERT SUN SOURCE: O2 ARCHITECTURE



JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN

Building controversy

Fate of Wexler-designed school structure topic of much debate

By Maricar Mendoza
The Desert Sun

PALM SPRINGS — A 55-year-old building on the Palm Springs High School campus, designed by two of the city's renowned architects, is slated to be demolished this year to make way for a new one expected to serve more than 400 students.

The Palm Springs Unified School District Board of
Please see **WEXLER, B4**

The Palm Springs High School administration building designed by Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison, seen in 1957 (left) and earlier this year (above), may be demolished to make way for a performing arts building.

COURTESY PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WEXLER

Continued from B1

Education on Tuesday listened for nearly two hours to passionate pleas from local preservationists, as well as PSHS performing arts students and booster club parents urging the district to either save the structure or tear it down.

Though the board did not cast an official vote, every member agreed that its too late to stop an already-approved project.

Designed by modernist architects Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison and built in 1957, the building now serves as the administration building for the alternative school Ramon Academy.

It is scheduled to be replaced with a new 9,000-square-foot Performing Arts Building designed to match the post-modern, Spanish-style arches seen off Ramon Road.

Construction is expected to begin in the fall with completion set for December 2013.

"I understand, and I've listened, but we are just too far down the road now," said board member Gary Jeandron.

"To do otherwise is just not being a good steward of taxpayer money, and I don't think it's in the interest of the students."

Nevertheless, Palm Springs Preservation Foundation officials presented a design drafted by architect Lance O'Donnell of Palm Springs-based o2 Architecture and Wexler,

now 86.

This design proposes an adaptive reuse of the existing 5,800-square-foot building with a two-story addition that would provide the space officials say is needed to accommodate the high school's growing performing arts program.

The group believes this option "preserves an important historic resource; is architecturally superior; is potentially less expensive; is far greener; and is possibly larger in terms of square footage."

The project, which is estimated to cost \$4 million, is being funded by Measure E bond money that will be made available June 27.

After that date, the district has 90 days to award the construction contract or lose \$1.2 million.

So far, the district has spent \$385,000 for the drafted design of the new Performing Arts Building and would stand to lose more than \$800,000 of bond funding, officials said.

"I am overjoyed," said Susan Nelson, parent of a band student and Spirit of the Sands Band Boosters, of the board's initial sentiments.

"What it comes down to is what's right for the students and any building that's on school grounds is for the kids, not to be a landmark for an architect."

The proposed Performing Arts Building has been in the works for the past five years in response to the school's growing pro-

gram, which is currently busting at its seams with nearly 200 students, school officials said.

Assistant Superintendent Lisa Howell said if the district decides to go with the preservationist's proposal, it would be at least another two years before the district could move forward with the project.

"By changing the plans, we would not only lose money and the potential chance to ever build a band room for which the Palm Springs High School students desperately need, we would also lose the hope of over 400 present band members enrolled in any one of these music programs," said sophomore Nick Noble, a Spirit of the Sands trombone player and percussionist for the school's jazz band.

"We may be high school students, but we know what's at stake."

The board is not expected to vote on the issue until August when it is slated to consider the contractor for the project.

At that point, the board can choose to scrap the building design currently on the table or move forward as planned, said district spokeswoman Joan Boiko.

"I honestly don't think it's over. I think there's a lot more than can be done legally," said Palm Springs resident and preservationist Tricia Porter.

"We're going to keep our fingers crossed that they'll still be able to reuse the building and not just send it to a landfill."