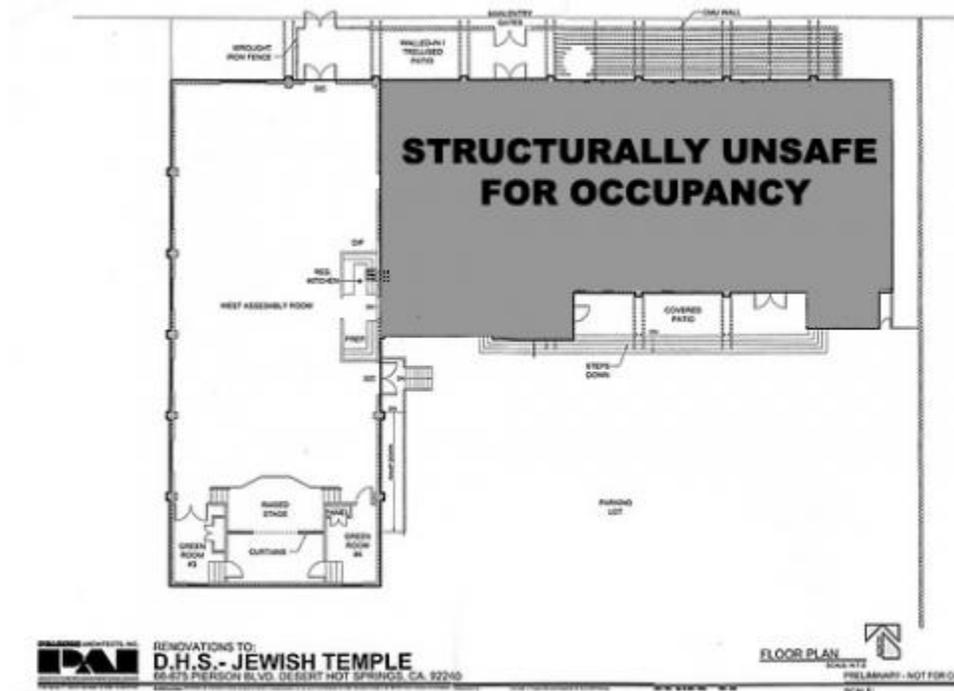


May 12, 2009

Temple Demolition Proposed

Another Multi-Million Dollar Mistake?

Desert Hot Springs, CA – A building the city purchased for \$1.4 million hoping it would be home to a new center for theater groups and other community organizations cannot be occupied, says a new city report. Structural engineers determined the building to be “unsafe for occupancy.” Proposals to demolish most of the building were submitted at last Tuesday’s city council study session.



At least an additional \$1.5 million will be needed to make the building safe, according to construction cost estimates, said Rudy Acosta, redevelopment agency director. The building in question is the Jewish Temple located at Pierson Boulevard and Ocotillo Road hosts an east and west wing. The west wing is the original building constructed over 40 years ago. The east wing is an addition built later and is the portion of the building with the most serious structural problems.

Councilman Scott Matas said at he is in favor of continuing with the project, a view that ran into sharp disagreement from Councilman Russell Betts who voted against the original purchase in a 4-to-1 vote.

“There are multiple organizations that can use this facility,” said Matas. He cited the lack of meeting rooms for anniversary and birthday parties. “It is not a dead facility.”

Betts called the decision to purchase the building a big mistake before a structural inspection was done. Going forward with renovations costing more than a million dollars is throwing good money after bad.

“Before we look at putting another \$1.4 million into an old building, we need to look at what options are available to meet the goals of the community,” said Betts. “We can not get the original \$1.4 million back. The question is what to do now? Proper planning dictates we look at this very carefully.”

Mayor Pro Tem Karl Baker announced that the parks and recreation committee, chaired by Matas, along with the community and cultural affairs commission will determine the fate of the project. Matas lobbied hard for the Temple purchase without disclosing his long-term relationship with the seller.

Two options were presented to the city council Tuesday – one calls for demolishing all sections of the building that are structurally unsafe and then bringing the remaining 3,000 square foot west wing up to code. This type of “surgical demolition” is far more expensive than a general or complete demolition, industry experts say.

A second plan would be to add on to that building with new construction where a portion of the east wing is to be torn down. That plan will recreate and an area to be used as a foyer, restrooms and a kitchen under the original purchase.

Engineers estimate costs cost for the second option is over \$1.4 million. Added to the original purchase cost of \$1.4 million, the city would be left with a 3,000 square foot building with a total project cost of about \$2.8 million or \$913 per square foot. One authority quotes estimated cost of new construction for public facilities at \$300 per square foot.