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Fight to Save Parkside School

Society Wants to Restore Original Building by John Reid, Jr.

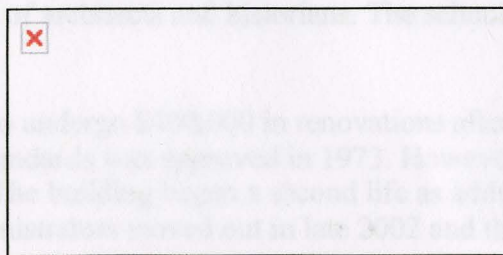


photo: Philip Liborio Gangi

A group has been formed to save the former Parkside School, located at 25th Avenue and Vicente Street.

By Peter Sciacca

A group of Outer Sunset District neighbors, called the Parkside School Preservation Society, is attempting to halt the demolition of the Parkside School, located at 25th Avenue and Vicente Street.

The group considers the structure, built in 1922, to be a historic landmark. It is slated to be demolished and replaced by a new elementary school, which would be named after Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

"This project seeks to destroy a historic school that was one of the largest structures in San Francisco for a long time," said Roy Jarl, a member of the Parkside School Preservation Society.

Aside from wanting to save the current building, Jarl said his group does not like the design of its proposed replacement.

"The new school would look nothing like the old one," he said. "It looks like a box. It does not look like any of the homes that surround it."

Jarl said SF school district officials have compared the design to the new science wing that was recently added to Lowell High School.

"That may work there because the addition is hidden from public view, but this would be out in the open," he said. "It's also better to put children in a well-designed building, like we have now, than a box."

Jarl, a retired teacher and former Parkside School student, contends the architecture of the current building "inspires learning."

"Good architecture in a learning environment can create a more comfortable learning environment, even if children aren't consciously aware of it," he said. "To attend classes in a historic building teaches children that we should be aware of our past. It is a direct learning experience."

Parkside Elementary School was designed by architect John Reid, Jr. He also designed the Commodore Sloat Elementary School, bordering the Sunset, and 19 other San Francisco schools. He also contributed to the development of the Civic Center, Laguna Honda Hospital and Mark Hopkins Hotel.

"There are many members of the city's Landmark Preservation Board that want Parkside saved," Jarl said. "We also have the support of architects and historians. The school district has dismissed the significance of this building."

Parkside School was expected to undergo \$400,000 in renovations after a proposition to bring SF schools up to current seismic standards was approved in 1973. However, no upgrades were ever made and the school closed in 1978. The building began a second life as administrative offices for the school district shortly afterward. Administrators moved out in late 2002 and the building has been vacant ever since.

Despite more than 30 years of deterioration, Jarl claims the building can be fully restored.

"Architects have said it can be done at a minimal cost," he said. "All of Reid's designs are well built. None of his buildings have fallen during earthquakes that have hit this city since the '20s."

The estimate to renovate Parkside School is about \$10 million and the project would take about a year. The combined demolition of Parkside School and the construction of the Feinstein School could cost about \$21 million and take about two years to finish.

Jarl and some of his neighbors formed the Parkside School Preservation Society after discovering at a public meeting that renovating the current structure would not be considered.

"Since then, we've been speaking up at meetings about the project," he said. "Some of us have also been writing letters to city officials or calling them. There's been a lot of direct contact in the neighborhood."

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While there was no money to renovate the current building, Jarl said his group drew out the design of its proposed replacement.

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Jarl, a retired teacher and former Parkside School student, contends the architecture of the current building "inspires learning."

"Good architecture is a learning environment that creates a more comfortable learning environment, even if children aren't immediately aware of it," he said. "To attend classes in a historic building teaches children that we have a history and that it is a good learning experience."