

Letters, Part II

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Can't teach old dogs new tricks

Dear ER:

I want to commend Chris Miller for her letter discussing the option of returning the Hermosa Beach Community Center to its former use (Letters, ER Dec. 1, 2005). It is true that the City purchased the former Pier Avenue Junior High School. It was over 25 years ago and I remember it well since I was on the City Council at the time, serving as mayor during much of those negotiations.

The District sold this facility to the City because student enrollment had fallen well below 700 students in the entire District. Prospect and South school sites were closed and sold, North and View school sites were shuttered. The District needed money to thoroughly upgrade and modernize the remaining campus, Valley School. The City was able to purchase the playground areas at Prospect and South for parks, as well as Pier Avenue to convert an extremely valuable Hermosa asset into our Community Center, with virtually no property taxes used for the purchase of Pier Avenue. It was a "win/win."

Over the past three years 30 to 40 workshops and community meetings have been held to discuss various new construction options at Valley Middle School. This was made possible by the passage of Measure J in 2002. Restoring the Community Center to its former status as a Junior High/Middle School was one of the dozen or more options considered. However, the option was never included in the list of proposed Measure J projects and therefore could not be done with bond moneys. The major problem is that while Hermosa has its Community Center, it is owned by the City, not the School District. The City bought Pier Avenue for around \$650,000 over 25 years ago. How much do you think it would cost the District to buy it back, assuming the City even wanted to sell it -- \$4 million, \$6 million or more? And what about the cost of the renovation work necessary to bring a 60-plus year old facility up to current safety standards?

After very careful evaluation by the District's architect and construction consultant, the assessment was that current bond proceeds would not come close to covering the costs of purchase and renovation.

It is indeed a charming notion that the Community Center could again be used as a junior high school. That possibility was carefully considered more than once. Unfortunately, wishing very hard and very long does not change the District's current new construction realities.

Lance Widman
Hermosa School Board