

✓CF Earthquake - 1989 - Watsonville - Rebuilding RP 7/27/90

Demolition of high school building seems certain

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A committee set up to help decide the future of the earthquake-damaged Watsonville High School main building met last night for the first time and decided to pursue options that include demolishing the two-story building and erecting a new one in its place.

The 16-member committee, which met in the high school's library, looked at two possibilities

for replacing the building. The committee, which was formed by WHS principal Tony Calvo, will be focusing on either demolishing the building and erecting a new one or keeping its facade and building behind it.

In either case, the cost the would be about \$5 million, which the state would pay for. Another option discussed included rehabilitating the building at a cost of over \$6 million. In that case, the state would not cover the cost

and the Pajaro Valley school district would have to pay for the construction.

For some of the committee members, it was difficult to think of razing the building, which they consider a Watsonville landmark to which they have strong emotional ties.

In the end, they decided it was best to lay sentiment aside and look at the practical side of the issue. One committee member recognized the building's

historical significance and the emotional connection the community has with it, but said she had to consider the future, not the past.

"We have to be concerned about the kids that are coming, not the ones that are gone," said Betty Lewis, a Watsonville historian.

Watsonville High senior Pat Work agreed.

"The community is more at-

tached to the building than the kids at the school," said Work, who is also a committee member. He agreed with some members that the building is a symbol to the community, but thought a new building would better serve the school.

The main building, which is also called the 1917 Building because it was built in that year, has been closed since mid-April after structural engineers discovered extensive earthquake

damage that greatly weaken the entire building and suggested it be closed as soon as possible.

School officials moved students into portable classrooms after the inspection report was released, but let the staff remain in the building. After the swarm of early morning earthquakes hit the area on April 19, school board trustees decided that day to close the building to everyone.

Since then staff has been
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moved a few doors from the school to a large building on Beach Street owned by Salud Para La Gente. The state Office of Emergency Services paid for the move and continues to pay the rent.

The committee will meet again next Thursday at the school's library to discuss the financial and construction considerations. School district business office director Bob Peterson and architect Thang Do will report to the

committee. Do, who works for a San Jose architectural firm hired by the district, is expected to present to the group a sketch of what the exterior of a new building could look like.

Final recommendations to the board of trustees could be ready by Aug. 15, which is the date set by Superintendent Merrill Grant, according to committee chairwoman Jeanne Clark. After final plans are approved, it will take up to two years to finish construction of the building.