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Readers React to SHS Plan

by Harold Bubil

I am just wondering aloud here, but... If you were going to hire an architect to remodel your home after you had already drawn up plans yourself, would you hire one who approved of your ideas, or one who thought you were making big mistakes?

The Sarasota County School Board has a "short list" of architectural firms, one of which will be chosen to oversee the remodeling of Sarasota High School's "Building 4," designed in 1958 by Paul Rudolph, and other campus renovations.

The school district already has presented "draft" plans for public review; they include enclosing Building 4's grand entry plaza with glass so it can be used as a media center, as well of the enclosing of a smaller breezeway. The plan also calls for tearing down the old Rudolph-designed gymnasium and a 1970s classroom building by the late Jack West called Building 5.

Now what if you were on the short list of candidates? Would you tell the school district that enclosing the plaza is a good idea or a bad one?

Just asking.

Reader responses to last week's column on this issue:

From Scott Robinson, at HeraldTribune.com: "Tear it down! Looks old and outdated!"

In response: "Tearing it down" is not on the table; the school district is not even considering that. The only point of contention is the scope of the renovation of "Building 4."

You know, Mount Vernon looked old and outdated a century ago. So did the building stock of Williamsburg, Va., St. Augustine, Tampa's Hyde Park and many other places that have been restored rather than razed - greatly enhancing our cultural inventory in the process. Drive through Sarasota's Laurel Park, Punta Gorda's historic district or downtown Orlando and you will see beautiful, functional houses that a few years ago were simply "old and outdated," if not derelict. By comparison, SHS's Building 4 looks almost brand new.

From Jane Tuccillo, of the Historical Society of Sarasota County, in an open letter to the Sarasota County School Board: "To think that you would alter the plans of one of Sarasota's finest, most intelligent architects in the century (Paul Rudolph) is beyond my comprehension! Have you even considered:

- *The additional costs of air-conditioning these glassy ovens?*
- *The fact that you're 'messaging with a master of design'?*
- *There are no architects on your board?*
- *The historic significance of retaining the original Rudolph structures?*

"We've already lost one of our schools; let's not ruin Sarasota High School's historic identity with this thoughtless plan. Please, hire a good, Sarasota architect to consult with your board and make the right decisions regarding our old school!"

And finally, from Ken Marsh, Director of Long Range Planning for the School Board of Sarasota County: "Please ensure that your readers know the site remains in development. The plan is a "draft."

