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Norma Merrick Sklarek Archive, Series 6: Letter from Jozelle Smith, Mayor of Culver City with newspaper clipping...

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Culver City won't save hall

Reprieve ends for municipal building

By Rick Cziment
STAFF WRITER

The on again, off again demolition of Culver City's aging City Hall is on again. The City Council on Monday canceled a reprieve it had granted earlier this year in hopes of preserving the building. Deciding the fate of the 60-year-old City Hall at 9770 Culver Blvd. has been a torturous process. About five different votes have been taken in recent years. However, on Monday night the apparent last chance of saving the building passed.

The council two years ago voted to build a new City Hall next door to the old one, which is structurally unsafe and too small to accommodate the city staff. The plan was to design a new, L-shaped City Hall, which would leave enough room on the lot to keep the old building standing for city employees while construction took place.

However, the council last year decided to house the city staff temporarily in trailers at another location. So the council unanimously voted to demolish the old City Hall.

But earlier this year, Mayor Jozelle Smith, attending a conference of the National Endowment for the Arts, was urged by preservation-minded architects to save the building. The group promised to send a design team to Culver City to find a way of integrating the old with the new. The council agreed to wait and see what could be devised by the architects.

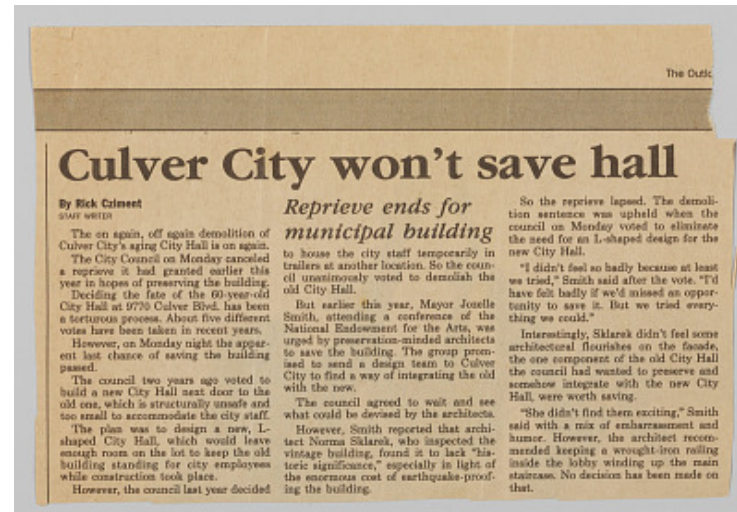
However, Smith reported that architect Norma Sklarek, who inspected the vintage building, found it to lack "historic significance" especially in light of the enormous cost of earthquake-proofing in the building.

So the reprieve lapsed. The demolition sentence was upheld when the council on Monday voted to eliminate the need for an L-shaped design for the new City Hall.

"I didn't feel so badly because at least we tried," Smith said after the vote. "I'd have felt badly if we'd missed an opportunity to save it. But we tried everything we could."

Interestingly, Sklarek didn't feel some architectural flourishes on the facade, the one component of the old City Hall the council had wanted to preserve and somehow integrate with the new City Hall, were worth saving.

"She didn't find them exciting," Smith said with a mix of embarrassment and humor. However, the architect recommended keeping a wrought-iron railing inside the lobby winding up the main staircase. No decision has been made on that.



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