To

The Board of Trustees
Dr Larry Sullivan
Texarkana Independent School District

An Appeal

To Save and Restore The Halsey District

From

The Citizens Committee to Save and Restore Old Texas High School Buildings
plus
The Committee to Restore the Halsey District

September 12, 2003

The committees wish to thank those who helped us prepare this document, particularly Michael Jordan who took the pictures, Mark Thacker for all the work he has done in support of this project, Bob Wright for his invaluable expertise, Larry Patterson for his special print processing, and Office Depot who printed this report, along with those who have donated to help our cause.
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September 12, 2003

Board of Trustees
Dr. Larry Sullivan
Texarkana Independent School District
4241 Summerhill Rd
Texarkana, TX 75503

Dear Members:

The Citizens Committee To Save and Restore Old Texas High School Buildings writes to request the Board not demolish the buildings, not accept bids for the property and authorize the buildings be “mothballed” so they will not deteriorate, while Texarkana plans how they can be restored and adaptively used.

We believe the minimally acceptable solution for these buildings can be achieved only while they are in reliable, public-oriented hands, now and into the future.

For purposes of clarity and re-visioning, we offer the following analysis.

**Background Issues**

As the growing call among parents for a new middle school facility became the consensus, the Pine Street campus came to be a place where expensive maintenance could be avoided. In the minds of many, the value of the old campus to the District began to diminish. The buildings began to take on a reputation as derelict, without purpose and something of a burden, to be dispensed with. Considerations for future use of the old campus took second place to other decisions regarding the planning and construction of a new campus.

After the failure of the most recent bond election and following good efforts and a lot worry, it is not surprising that the Board finally came to the conclusion that no one but the Board itself cared much about the property or how it should be
used — and that finding the money to fix it up was a luxury which the Board could not justify.

But now we all know the community does care. The community simply wasn’t organized in time to prevent the Board’s vote for demolition last spring. We are now, once again, complying with the Board’s request to voice our concerns. However weary the Board may be regarding this issue, we request your sincere attention and foresighted support.

The Committee’s Suggestions for Use of the Historic Buildings and Property

Overview

When our Committee first appealed to you at the end of last May, our primary goal was to stop the immediate destruction of the classic buildings on the old campus — and you graciously agreed.

On July 8 we requested you cancel all plans for demolition and give the community time to plan how to best use the old campus. We offered the option of mothballing rather than destroying.

Currently you are deciding the fate of these historic buildings, whether to sell them to commercial interests, preserve them as we have asked, or destroy them.

During the last three months our committee has had the time to consider more thoroughly what we are asking the District to do and how our proposals would benefit the School District while accomplishing our long-term goals. We, along with the community, acknowledge that the ultimate decision must be based on cultural and economic factors — not only on sentimentality.

Surely we all have experienced a growing realization that, quite by accident, we have been presented with an opportunity which is rare. A grand contiguous space, historic in nature, sturdy in construction and architecturally significant has become, for all intents and purposes, available — and we really have only to decide what is the best possible practical use to put it to.
Of course, this question of what to do comes at a time of economic stress. Many civic leaders who might otherwise be helping us solve problems are so involved with other civic responsibilities that they are too busy, if not too discouraged, to provide the leadership we have come to expect from them.

Nevertheless, after many conversations with the public and representative leadership elements within our community, we are confident we have a plan both the Board and the rest of the community can embrace and develop within a reasonable period of time and at a reasonable cost.

The Plan

If the Board eventually determines that the old campus cannot be successfully used by the school district for students, we believe it is imperative that the Board authorize the TISD Superintendent to work with our organization which will assist in coordinating other groups and entities to achieve a mixed adaptive use for the property which will be successful.

While everyone has their own ideas about how the old campus should best be utilized, we believe the most important adaptive use for it is as a great civic space — consisting of

a) facilities for TISD’s administrative needs and unique education;
b) a “Halsey District”, preserving our history and architecture;
c) workspace and galleries for expanding artistic training and exhibition;
d) an auditorium and supportive space for indoor entertainment;
   and eventually…
e) a gracious, revenue producing public events center;
f) an outdoor performance shell used as a public venue entertainment and ceremonial events;
g) a garden park of beauty and repose.

We believe this project would launch a residential and commercial renaissance in mid-town Texarkana, one which we expect could pay for itself by increasing tourism and the value of the city and school district tax base — all while raising the spirit of our community as we take pride in what we have done.
Clearly, not everything has to be accomplished at once. Our committee believes the first significant improvements toward the goals we have outlined can be completed within 24 months. The remaining structural improvements should be finished within the following 36 months. We are saying that within 5 years, governmental, civic and philanthropic funding can provide our town with a valuable space of culture and tranquility — a space which, in our hearts, we may have believed was beyond us. Furthermore, the grand space’s importance and value to our community can only increase in the future.

**More Specific Recommendations and Suggestions**

The Texas High School building on Pine, constructed in 1929, has stood for quality education for 75 years. What could be more fitting than for it to become the administrative center for the Texarkana, Texas, Independent School District, as you had planned? Our committee will do all that we can at the appropriate time to make sure a bond issue can be passed for the exclusive refurbishment of “Old Texas High” so it can be used to house system-wide administrative activity now and well into the future. Space which is not needed immediately can be used as a unique school facility for cultural education. Your administrative building on Summerhill Road could be sold for commercial use and the proceeds used to reduce the amount of the bond issue or other form of financing the restoration.

The original Texarkana College, constructed in 1927, has been successfully used for 77 years to educate much of our city’s and our country’s leadership. We anticipate that, after some work, the City of Texarkana will see the value in supporting a bond issue to restore the Texarkana College building for the City’s own use and for the expansion of existing and new historic and artistic organizations within the city. Please take note of the large gym attached to the building and imagine along with us the exhibitions space it could become.

The original Texas High School Auditorium, constructed in 1930, was used by both Texas High and Texarkana College. Despite what you may have heard, the Auditorium is still sound and is a candidate for philanthropic restoration as a less formal indoor entertainment and meeting facility. The band hall next door could become an annex to the Auditorium and used as a staging area for productions and offices for theatrical groups.
An important potential component of the grand space is the Ben and Jane Collins home, another Halsey building and currently owned by the Wadley Foundation. We believe it can be made into a very significant and profitable part of this historic district. Obviously, the Collins building could be used to house small civic groups; but we believe its best role is as a magnificent meeting and entertainment facility for public and private purposes. It could become a gracious facility for hosting medium-sized special meetings, including weddings and celebrations, with or without catering, particularly in connection with tourist activity.

If, sometime in the future, the school District finally determines for certain that it does not need all of the area from behind the classic buildings up to Texas Blvd (Area “A”), the land could be sold to the grand space trust and become a garden park, landscaped in a similar style as the Collins home (as had the classic buildings), with walking paths, trees, plants and flowers, perhaps a central fountain, and areas for young people to play under the supervision of their parents and grandparents. An outdoor performance shell, sponsored by commercial interests, could provide a venue for entertainment in temperate seasons.

We cannot predict exactly how the buildings will be used until the planning process is complete, but the ideas we’ve presented are representative of the kind of adaptive reuse we expect. These separate improvements are affordable and practical in their own right. With your leadership, we will have the time to properly plan and organize cooperation among the appropriate entities as funding is located and acquired. We expect that professional grant writers will be able to find and help us secure philanthropic funding to support these projects, particularly regarding the classic buildings.

We further believe specialized zoning will lead to a circle of fresh commercial development around the grand space; from small restaurants and ice cream shops to area specific businesses which can support the activities of the grand space and be particularly attractive to tourists.

While some might fear competition with existing businesses, we believe Texarkana needs and can support improved public use facilities as our community grows. Similarly, while some might think bond monies could be more appropriately spent elsewhere, we believe the expected increase in the value of the tax base in mid-town Texarkana will, as a result of these improvements, more than
justify any inaugural bond costs. Finally, while there are those who will ridicule any major redevelopment of this space as “wasting money on old buildings,” we can point to compelling evidence around the state and nation to the contrary. The restoration of older areas of towns also restores the economic life of those towns and, when done properly, provides significant additional revenues for the governmental entities where they are located.

As we have stated before, it will take a spirit of cooperation among all city leadership for this project to be successful. But we believe that cooperation is achievable and it’s certainly worth the effort.

As things go these days, this project can be done at a bargain basement cost. We have magnificent buildings waiting to be restored for adaptive reuse. We have the space. We have the concept and an overall plan. We have a realistic appreciation of how much it will cost and who the partners might be in bearing that cost. And the leadership to do it has come forth. All we need to do now is, get started.

In an effort to make sure our plan has the merit of success and is a prudent use in the best interest of the governmental and commercial parties who we expect to become involved, not to mention in the interest of the taxpayers, we have submitted our plan to Professor Robert Owen, Ph.D. and his MBA Marketing Management teams at Texas A&M University - Texarkana, for analysis and recommendations for the future use of the grand space. Dr. Owen says the study will be presented to the public December 10, 2003. As we all want to see the best and most appropriate solution for these buildings, we are sure you join with us in looking forward to learning what these teams will be recommending.

**Conclusion**

While it is certainly accurate that we would prefer the classic buildings were sold for commercial historic refurbishment rather than be destroyed, we do not believe a strictly commercial role for the property would be in the long-term best interest of the buildings, the community or the school District. If we sell our heritage on even a well intended promise, do we really know what will happen to it in 15 or 20 years? Do we really need or want another strip center? Surely cash is not our only concern here.
We hope the Board agrees that the income from the sale of Area “B” (the classic buildings) is not enough to justify abandoning the idea of using the restored Texas High School Building as an administrative complex — and that the proposed income from the sale of Area “A” is not sufficient to justify all the dislocation and relocation costs required as the result of such a sale, not to mention the loss of the potential use of that land by the District in the future. As there is no real need to sell those parcels now, there is certainly no need to rush to do so. If our plan develops as we expect, we know you will be quite proud not to have sold the property in haste. Otherwise, if the property is capable of attracting commercial interest now, it will be capable of attracting commercial interest in the future.

Therefore, we reiterate our recommendation that, to prevent deterioration, you mothball the buildings, at half the cost of their demolition, and continue to work with us toward planning a future for these historical structures, this grand space and our community.

When you choose the mothball path, you will be providing responsible leadership through a directed action that will undoubtedly result in a strong and secure anchor redevelopment by the school District. Your action will help others understand that serious people are making serious commitments and that it is time for them to start considering making commitments too.

We have heard you when you’ve told us you have a fiduciary responsibility to the District. Of course you do. And we believe we have shown you how you can uphold that fiduciary responsibility by making an investment that will not only save the buildings, and restore them for new use, but significantly increase the value of your tax base in the process.

But, as you also know, you have other responsibilities as well. You have a responsibility to your neighbors, to the community beyond your District’s boundaries and to the future health of the whole city.

You need not choose among these responsibilities when you can embrace them all.

The Committee to Save and Restore Old Texas High School Buildings
The Committee to Restore The Halsey District
Since May, we believe the whole of Texarkana has come to understand that destroying the old Texas High campus is an unacceptable choice. The public has certainly shown its support for our cause by the calls, faxes, emails and letters of support we have received. There have been many positive letters in the Texarkana Gazette requesting the buildings be restored and zero negative letters. In recognition of the common sense of the committee’s suggested solution, the Gazette has reversed its decision in support of the May vote for demolition and has now endorsed “mothballing” as the next step toward ultimate renewal. An online poll sponsored on the Gazette website, which we heard about only a few days ago, shows little support for tearing down the buildings. As we print this letter, a bit over 9% of those voting pick “Tear It Down”; just 12% want to sell them, and over 76% are in favor of maintaining the buildings for historical and adaptive use or donating them to charity (see chart). While the poll is not scientific, we believe it accurately reflects the opinion of the community.

The only acceptable question before the TISD Board is whether or not the campus will be given over to commercial development or to a greater civic use, including the TISD.

We realize the promise of income from selling the property is attractive. However, it would be extremely short sighted, not only culturally, but economically, and, in truth, despite all the promises, be a death blow to the people’s appeal to save and restore the campus.

So, we again appeal to you to pause and fully appreciate what you are doing. Have the courage to disagree with those within the community and even on the Board who do not have the vision needed to restore what can be restored and preserved for the future of Texarkana.

It is not just the leadership of our committee and our supporters and the people at large who ask this of you. Several Texas High alumni of national prominence have been in contact with our committee and are concerned about the future of the old campus. While we are not authorized to speak on their behalf, following our conversations, we believe it is a reflection of their views to say that they are waiting to see if Texarkana has matured enough to appreciate the importance of preserving its heritage — **if they are to help in preserving that heritage.**

The Committee to Save and Restore Old Texas High School Buildings
The Committee to Restore The Halsey District
Therefore, if you are seriously considering either destruction or commercial sale of the property, before you proceed, we implore you to have a public workshop including the entire Board, our committee and the general public where we can explore these alternatives in a less restrictive atmosphere than that of past Board meetings, just to make certain we all understand each other’s concerns and to be sure all avenues have been thoroughly examined regarding the grand space approach. It is little enough to ask considering the consequences.

This issue is not “just a matter of money”.

The Board must rise above the weary cynicism of those who do not understand the increasing need to promote respect for our cultural heritage by acts and deeds, even if it’s the difficult thing to do.

The Board must live up to the responsibility you have asked the people to give you to make Texarkana a better place.

The Board must support the best we can do with what we have.

♦ Mothball the buildings.

♦ Work with us to see to it they are restored and adapted for the cultural improvement of our community.

♦ Help us establish a new grand civic space which will inspire us all and contribute in many ways to the health and success of our entire city, now and into the future.

Sincerely,

Doris, Bob, Becky, Robert et al

The Citizen’s Committee to Save & Restore Old Texas High School Buildings

The Committee to Restore The Halsey District
Current Poll Results

What should be done with Pine Street?

- Tear it down: 9.43% (43)
- Sell, convert to Lofts/housing: 12.06% (55)
- Maintain the building as historical/future use: 73.68% (336)
- Donate to non-profit/charity organization: 2.63% (12)
- Don't care: 2.19% (10)

Total Votes: 456
MEMO:

TO: Committee to Save and Restore Old THS Buildings
FR: Bob Wright
DT: September 3, 2003
SJ: “Mothballing” the Old Texas High School Buildings

With the cooperation of the Superintendent Larry Sullivan, I have inspected the roofs of the three classic buildings on Pine Street several times since May. The roofs of the Texas High School and Texarkana College buildings have concrete decks. The Auditorium has a wood deck. The Auditorium and Texarkana College roofs have visible wind damage. The concrete decks do not deteriorate as fast as the wood deck. All three buildings have had water related problems from lack of roof maintenance and the Auditorium has suffered most. All buildings have asbestos in the roofs. The Texarkana College building gym floor was destroyed by termites.

With the coming change in seasons, we will probably be getting more rain. Repairs made on roofs with wet substrates do not last as long as repairs made on dry roof substrates. The longer the roofs remain un-repaired, the less time the repairs will hold.

The idea of “mothballing” is to keep the buildings from deteriorating due to weather while planning takes place regarding their ultimate restoration.

I have provided David DeFoy, TISD Purchasing Coordinator, pictures and drawings showing how the roof repair on each of the buildings could be advertised for bid. I believe the Administration can obtain bids with warranties for at least two years. Certainly my company would offer that warranty. Unless there were an out of the ordinary major storm, if the repairs are still holding up after the warranty period, as we would expect, in my opinion the service life would probably be at least a year or two longer.

I expect a properly specified bid spec would receive response proposals for an amount less than half of the school board’s current demolition budget.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Wright
President
Meta, Inc.
August 3, 2003

Committee to Restore and Save
Old THS Buildings

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of Sinclair & Wright Architects, I would again like to express my interest in preservation efforts underway in Texarkana regarding the historic THS buildings. The four prominent structures built between 1921 and 1930 exemplify a passion for architecture and construction detail centered on the purpose of durability and function. There have been hundreds of children who have walked the echoing halls, some have become leaders in the community today, or was just one of the nameless young redheaded students seated across the aisle later becoming one's spouse. There are countless impressions through interaction among the plaster-coated walls. Bricks are tangible substances, but of substance are the places we consider hallowed, irreplaceable and priceless.

These structures reflect a construction time period of the roaring 20's and the depressed 30's that has been unmatched since. For Texarkana to have weathered such economic storm and provide architecture of this quality lasting into this new century is a testimony to the character and foresight of those past leaders. The significance to the surrounding neighborhood remains evident today through the unique style of homes constructed subsequent to the old THS buildings. The classical style of architecture was produced by well-schooled prominent architects, one being Fred Halsey. Unfortunately, much of his work has succumbed to the wrecking ball, however Texarkana currently has an opportunity to not only preserve his work, but to rejuvenate it into an again functional cornerstone of the community.

In Tyler, we are blessed with an educational campus similar in many ways to the situation in Texarkana. For over 120 years the current Caldwell campus has been a center for education nestled within a residential neighborhood. It has seen usage as a military academy, elementary school, junior high, junior college, high school, pre-school and now back to an elementary school. It has a large auditorium, gymnasium and main building all constructed prior to 1940. The design work was by Tyler architect, Shirley Simons who was as prestigious as Fred Halsey during that time period. Many inspirational leaders who helped build Tyler were educated, taught values and learned life's lessons on this site. Hundreds have walked the echoing halls, saw the young redheaded student in the adjacent seat who would later become a spouse, experienced the countless impressions through interactions among the plaster coated walls.

Tyler is blessed in that the halls of the Caldwell campus still echo, little red heads are still in seats, impressions and interactions are continuing. In Texarkana the historic buildings are silent but not lost. They can economically again perform the vibrantly active function Mr. Halsey intended. It is with hope that current leaders can recognize the substance of this architecture and consider it hallowed, irreplaceable and priceless.

Sincerely,

SINCLAIR & WRIGHT ARCHITECTS

Mark A. Thacker, AIA
Partner
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from WebPage “home”

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