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## Old Bisbee High School to be sold, community use suggestions taken

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Cochise County Community Development Director Dan Coxworth talks with Bisbee Planning and Zoning Commission member Ginger Ryan at the open house Saturday at the old Bisbee high school. The county invited residents to tour the building and offer their suggestions as to how the historic building might be used once all the county offices have moved out.

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**BISBEE –** What should the former Bisbee High School in Old Bisbee be used for now that the county plans to move the last department, the county library, to new quarters?

A few dozen Bisbee residents turned out to a public touring of the historic, four-story building built in 1914 on Saturday to hear about the county's request to change the zoning from a single family residence R-1 zoning to commercial mixed use CM-2 which will more accurately reflect the building's use.

Residents were urged to tour the 4,500 square feet art deco building and offer their suggestions to what opportunity would be appropriate as the county seeks to sell it.

Many neighbors of the building were appreciative of the county's outreach and inquiry into the wants and needs of those who live around it.

Ginger Ryan, who serves on the city planning and zoning commission, said "How it got to be zoned R-1, we just don't know. The rezoning request will come to us before it's passed to the city council."

She expected the rezoning to pass with little opposition.

Dan Coxworth, Community Development Director, greeted people as they came in and talked about the desire to get the community's opinion on how the building might be promoted in a sale. The county wants to ensure the physical preservation and continued viability of use in a manner compatible with its surroundings. The county will soon be seeking bids on the building once it is cleared by the end of the year.

"We wanted to get some feedback from the community about their hopes and expectations for this project," said Coxworth.

The county purchased the school 60 years ago and a number of county departments were moved there. In an effort to consolidate departments, the county decided to move those departments to the county complex on Melody Lane and to Sierra Vista.

The old building was built on a mountain and was designed to give each floor ground-level access, which earned it recognition by Ripley's Believe It or Not.

An original fresco, Triumphal Entry of Alexander the Great into Babylon, survived a fire in 1919 and recently moved from a former study hall to a former classroom, noted Amadee Ricketts, Cochise County Library Director.

A survey of those who stopped by reflects the acceptable options offered with a dance, art and music studio conglomerate coming out as the number 1 selection, with an assisted living quarters as number 2 and retail space as the third. Opening it as a vocational school was a fourth choice.

None wanted to see it converted to a bed-and-breakfast accommodation as people voiced concerns of the lack of affordable housing in the city, but some were amenable to establishing market rate condominiums or subsidized apartments.

Stephan Green and Nancy Lamb toured the facility and were impressed the most with the third floor gymnasium, which they thought would be a great music venue or auditorium.

Doug Reiniger and Larry Stritchfield both thought the city should make it city hall. A boutique hotel would also be a good fit, they thought.

Bisbee Mayor Ken Budge said he really did not have a preference and would see what came out of the surveys.

The county's request to rezone will come before the city's planning and zoning commission Thursday, Oct. 21, and before the mayor and city council for final approval Tuesday, Nov. 2. Both meetings will hold public hearings on the rezoning.

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