

# Don't demolish former church, police station

I am writing in response to the article in the weekend paper titled City to Demolish Old Police Station. I am disappointed with the City Council's decision for several reasons.

Jane Jacob's 1961 book titled "The Death and Life Of Great American Cities," which an architectural critic at the New York Times recently described as "perhaps the most influential single work in the history of town planning" talked a great deal about the important role old structures play in a modern city. She explains, "Cities need old buildings so badly it is almost impossible for vigorous streets, neighborhoods and districts to exist successfully without them."

**CATHERINE WINES**

Before this building housed the Elko Police Department it was built as an LDS church in 1952. This would be the eighth historic church demolished in Elko (there may be more I'm not aware of). All of them had historic significance to our town and people. Old photographs of these churches show wonderful buildings with character and charm that isn't possible in today's structures.

Some were similar in style and design to the Little Church at the Crossroads in Lamoille. One can imagine in the 112 year history of the Lamoille Church there have been conversations about it being too small, too old, too moldy, too run down, too expensive, maybe it should just be torn down ... imagine the loss!

I understand the old police station is not the same age as some that have been torn down but we have no idea how future generations will view today's structures and we have no right to deprive them of that opportunity by getting rid of any building just because it's inconvenient.

There is a difference between historic and just old. The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a privately funded, non-profit group created to save America's historic structures. They categorize historic as generally 50 plus years old and of historic or cultural significance to a community, state or the nation. This building is far beyond the age limit and I would argue a significant part of Elko's religious and civic history.

Successful, thriving communities are diverse, in age, ethnic origin, economic class and others. Business diversity is also crucial for vibrant cities and is always built over time. I'm not talking about time in months or years, but in decades. Time makes the high cost buildings of one generation a bargain for those following. A great deal of our successful businesses and cultural entities are housed in buildings that other people outgrew. Today's brand new construction costs are simply too high for a lot of our community's treasures. Stop and think, without

re-purposed buildings, would Elko have The Igloo, The Chamber of Commerce, The Charter School, The Western Folklife Center? The list goes on. Those entities simply would not have been able to afford the buildings they occupy, if they had to build from the ground up.

Another reason I don't believe demolition is a good idea is the building has a gymnasium. The police department divided that area into various separate spaces but none of those walls are structurally bearing or permanent. A recent feasibility study for a Recreation Center stated that Elko is greatly underserved with indoor gymnasiums for youth and adult recreation.

So why tear one down?

I understand there are issues with both mold and asbestos in the old police station. Neither of those things are a death sentence for a building. If that was the case there wouldn't be any buildings more than 40 years old, east of the Mississippi River or along the entire Pacific Coast. Mold and asbestos are serious issues and need to be taken care of but they are very common and have even more common remedies. Buildings with mold and asbestos are remediated and put to good use every single day.

Here's a side story about that ... the portion of the building that has the gymnasium is not the part that has the mold.

I have toured the old police station, including a climb to the attic. It's a well built, masonry building on a good foundation with some internal, non-structural issues. With a solid structure, all other building issues can be overcome for less than the expense of building new.

To build a new gymnasium would cost approximately \$150 per square foot in today's private sector, construction prices. A brand new gymnasium would be more than \$1 million. That would likely be a pre-manufactured, metal building with no character, no history, and no story to tell.

So why again are we going to tear down an asset, like a gymnasium, that is already paid for? There doesn't seem to be a reason. The article in the paper said, "there is no plan for that property at the moment."

Save the money, save a gymnasium and save our history.

Careful consideration would need to be given to what might occupy that building in the future, being so close to the park and other important civic areas. We are a smart, intuitive people, let's forget about the Las Vegas style destruction and let the third act of the old police station unfold.

I will end with another thought from Jacobs: "designing a dream city is easy, rebuilding a living one takes a lot of imagination." We have many assets but the greatest of these is our imagination, let's use it.

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