

Stage is Peace Auditorium's heart

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We as Americans should not forget any soldier from any war, including the American Revolution, War of 1812, Civil War, Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam and today's wars in the Middle East. We must remember, we must honor and we must save Peace Memorial Auditorium as was intended by the voters of 1946. It is a living memorial to the 101 Gold Star soldiers who gave their lives and to the 2,610 who returned to Riley County.

The stage and its elements are the heart of Peace Memorial Auditorium. The raised-back chairs add a bit of luxury. If the concept of ripping out the stage and permanent seating for air-conditioned Parks and Recreation offices and adding more basketball courts is allowed to stand, then all memorials for any war are at risk of being destroyed 50 or 100 years or more later.

In my investigation of saving the auditorium, I came to wonder whether City Manager Ron Fehr and his assistant, Jason Hilgers, gave all the facts to the City Commission. The Historic Resources Board was not contacted before the architect Bruce McMillan, was paid for preliminary drawings. The Historic Resources Board could have been consulted in October 2012, February 2013 or on June 4, 2013.

The City Commission, with the exception of Karen McCulloh, voted to pay Mr. McMillan's firm over \$123,000 for final construction documents. Yet after the vote, it was suggested to go to the

Historic Resources Board. It was nine weeks before that board met to discuss the proposed renovations. I had assumed that all architectural work by Mr. McMillan would stop, but Mr. Hilgers said it did not stop. To me, this suggested that city management would do what it wants and that the Historic Resources Board's recommendation is of no importance. If advice is not considered, why even have volunteer boards?

On June 22, the Historic Resources Board discussed and voted to recommend refurbish-

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ing the stage and the permanent seating, putting in air-conditioning, and putting the Parks and Recreation offices west of City Hall or elsewhere in the building. The board also encouraged the City Commission to reconsider its June 4 vote.

Another concern is the maintenance of the full sized basketball court, the stage and the permanent chairs. Every three years, the staff refinishes the court floor. This year, a professional company was hired at extra cost to strip off the old finish and put a new, more durable finish on the court floor. It appears to be a non-slip surface. The floor looks beautiful.

In contrast, the stage floor has been neglected for years. In 2006, several performers fell because the stage floor had been waxed, which is not a good idea

for a stage floor. Most of the time, the stage is swept clean, but no further maintenance to the stage floor has been done. The stage floor should have a dark stain with a non-slip surface so performers won't fall.

Also, broken seats in the permanent seating area are not repaired, which is another disgrace. In the last 20 years or more, the professional stage lights have either been removed or have been replaced with residential-type floodlights that are not designed for stage use. Between 2012 and 2013, new

lights were installed in the ceiling over the court, but the stage lighting was not improved. The stage could continue to be rented if the electrical system is upgraded and brought up to code.

Mr. Hilgers said there are 16 stages to rent in the area. No, many so they are not true stages because they

have no curtains, no stage lights and poor acoustics. During the school year, the high school's stage is usually booked for school activities, as most school stages would be. To replace the memorial stage in today's prices would cost \$1million to \$3 million. The Peace Memorial Auditorium stage is a valuable piece of history that should be saved, and it will be rentable if it is refurbished.

A committee of citizens with knowledge of stage restoration should be formed to make Peace Memorial Auditorium the best place for the arts and for sports so our World War II veterans will continue to be honored.

Randi Dale, 2416 Rogers Blvd., is one of the driving forces in the effort to restore Peace Memorial Auditorium.