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Art Jury Holds Up Approval of 2 Schools 'Like Prisons'

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Members of the city's Art Commission will meet this week with school board president Richardson Dilworth to discuss the design of two new schools.

One Art Commission member said they look like prisons.

In an attempt to prevent vandalism and facilitate maintenance, the school administration is cutting down the amount of window space in new schools.

Lip-Service Charged

"We are distressed that the school system gives lip-service to light but does not give light to its students," said architect Louis I. Kahn, a commission member.

"Our schools are becoming windowless areas that look like prisons."

At its regular meeting last week, the commission held up approval of the final designs for the two schools on the basis that there would not be sufficient natural light in the classrooms.

The schools are the \$9.5 million University City High School, planned for 36th st. and Lancaster av., and the \$5.2 million John P. Turner Middle School, planned for 59th st. and Baltimore av.

Action Deferred

Jack L. Wolgin, commission chairman, said the board will take no action on the two schools until the situation is discussed with school board officials.

Bids were to go out for the construction of Turner school on Monday, but will be postponed pending approval by the commission.

The commission has jurisdiction over the design of all public buildings, as well as fixtures which are on or over public property.

“If we have to redesign any parts of either of these schools, the cost could be devastating,” one school official commented last week.

The official noted that the preliminary designs for both schools had been approved by the Art Commission, but membership on the commission has changed since.

For the Birds

The commission last week seemed particularly concerned with what they considered a lack of light in the art, choral, and band rooms of the Turner school.

“You sing to the birds as well as to people, don’t you?” asked Kahn, indicating that students would not be able to see birds from the choral room.

“To be one with nature you have to have natural light,” observed Robert M. Engman, a sculptor, also a commission member.

School officials said there were a “few” windows in the choral and band rooms and 136 feet of windows six feet high in the art rooms.

“We require that there be natural light and windows in every classroom, but we’re flexible about how much,” Harry M. Perks, deputy school superintendent for administration, told the commission.

Tough Philosophy

“For instance, where a child would be there for only a short time every week, such as a band or choral room, we don’t require as much natural light as in other areas where he would spend more time.”

“This philosophy about seeing birds is hard to understand when you’re talking about bands and noise,” Perks added.

He said the school system spent \$300,000 last year in repair to windows broken by vandals.

A spokesman for the school board said later that fluorescent lighting used in the classroom often is superior to natural lighting.

“You can regulate it and reduce glare, which you can’t do with the sun,” the spokesman said.

“We have provided what we consider a liberal amount of light in both schools,” he added.

Of 2 Schools Like Prisons

By CONSTANCE FAULK
Of The Bulletin Staff

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