

Artists get island haven as school saved

By SHANNON BLACK

An old school on Toronto Island slated for demolition will be reborn as an arts facility later this year.

The former site of the Island Public and Natural Science School, a sprawling 30,000-square-foot building bordered by an inspiring stretch of beach, will be

remodelled to serve professional artists in search of affordable studio space.

"It is a place that is meant to embrace individual artists," said Tim Jones, executive director of Artscape, a city-sponsored non-profit arts organization.

"But it is also meant to welcome other sectors of the not-for-profit community in Toronto."

The school, located at Gibraltar Point, on

the southwestern edge of the island, will be split into different types of space, available for rent by the square foot. Artists wishing to secure a long-term lease (up to three years) will pay \$8 per square foot — half the average rate in downtown Toronto, according to Mr. Jones. Small bedrooms previously used by school staff, will be rented to out-of-town and international artists for shorter periods. And the largest rooms in the school, including a common room and a dining hall, will be remade as a retreat centre and studio space for non-profit organizations and arts programs.

Artscape hopes to raise \$250,000 to refurbish the facility and naturalize a third of the asphalt-covered school ground over the next three years.

National Post

Old Island school saved, artfully

By MOIRA MacDONALD
Toronto Sun

For Toronto Island's historic old public and natural science school, it looks like art is about to triumph over the wrecking ball.

It's expected the school will be turned into an arts centre by a non-profit, taxpayer-funded group called Artscape. Toronto Islanders who wanted to save the school, parts of which were built in 1901, approached the group.

On Tuesday, Toronto city staff will recommend the city's economic development committee amend an August 1997 contract that gave the go-ahead for a new \$8.4-million Island Public/Natural Science School, condi-

tional on the demolition of the old school.

"We're not asking the city for any money. We're asking for a 20-year lease on the building at \$1 a year," said Susan Serran, coordinator of Artscape's project. "Here's a building that has many good years in it. Why not reduce, reuse and recycle?"

'A new idea'

Artscape has managed to overcome environmental, financial and contractual arguments against saving the school.

The city's parks department had originally opposed the idea when islanders started working on it last fall. But Frank Kershaw, the de-

partment's policy and development director, said Artscape is "a new idea not present at other times. They are prepared to refurbish the school."

The project is also planned to be financially self-sustaining after three years, Serran added.

Artscape plans to renovate the 26,000-square-foot school over three years, creating up to 25 artist studios for lease as well as a "mini-conference" centre that could be used for meetings of up to 250 people. The economic development commission is supporting the idea partly because of its potential for contributing to the city's cultural life.

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Arts centre for Island

By SUSAN WALKER
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

The Toronto Island Public and Natural Science School, once slated for demolition this month, is to remain standing.

It will be the site of the new Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts.

Last week City Council voted to save the buildings that house the school and lease them to Toronto Artscape at \$1 a year.

The arts complex is designed to be a small version of the Banff Centre for the Arts, with rental space for artists' studios, conference facilities, classrooms, performance and rehearsal space and accommodations for visiting artists.

Artscape will oversee operation of the not-for-profit

centre.

Facing a beach on Hanlon's Point, the facilities occupy 30,000 square feet and include a large kitchen, boys' and girls' dormitories, a common room with a stage and classrooms.

Artscape, a non-profit organization that acquires and runs buildings where artists live and work, determined that the centre could be self-sufficient and could even generate \$150,000 in property taxes and ferry revenues for the city.

The cost of improvements to the buildings is estimated at \$200,000.

The studios will be the first phase of the centre to open, at an expected rental rate of \$8 per square foot.

They could be available as early as this summer.

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