The 74-year-old two-story building that has served as the Breaux Bridge City Hall since 1959 is due for demolition in the near future following a decision last week by the city council not to attempt to renovate the structure, which was gutted by fire on New Year’s Day. The building served as a school house from 1907 to 1954, when it was acquired by the city. A special council meeting is scheduled for Thursday evening to act on the demolition of the building and appoint an architectural firm to begin planning for a new facility. (Staff Photo).

By Kirk Barilleaux
Breaux Bridge - The city council here voted last week to begin planning for the construction of a new city hall facility, deciding that the old fire-damaged building would be abandoned and demolished.

The 74-year-old two-story brick building, used as the community’s school for almost 50 years, was extensively damaged when a fire broke out on the second floor early New Year’s Day. Two Breaux Bridge youths have been indicted on charges of simple arson in connection with the fire.

Still Sound
Although engineers who inspected the old building after the fire say it is still structurally sound, the council has received estimates indicating it would cost as much as $450,000 to repair and renovate the building. They estimate that a new facility of approximately the same size (9,000 sq. ft.) could be constructed for $550,000.

In supporting the decision to abandon the building, Councilman Joe Jones voiced mixed emotions over the issue. “I share the feelings of those who would like to remodel the old building,” he said. But he pointed out that even after spending a lot of money on repairs the city would still be left with an old building.

The council accepted an insurance settlement of $218,525 recommended by the General Adjustment Bureau, which investigated the claim and declared the city hall a total loss. The actual cash value of the structure was estimated at $314,693.

Jones also told the council that he had “reliable verbal information” that the state would match local funds “dollar for dollar” for the construction of a new city hall. With state help, the insurance settlement, plus federal revenue sharing money and some sales tax funds, Jones indicated that the city could probably generate as much as $700,000 for use on a new building.

A special meeting has been called Thursday at 6:30 p.m. to select an architect to begin design work on a new facility and to take action on the demolition of the present building.

City Manager Raymond Guidry indicated that the general feeling among city officials is that the new city hall will be built on the same Bridge-Berard Street site, although a final decision has not yet been made.

In a somewhat related matter, city insurance adviser Patrick Huval recommended an increase in insured city property values from $1.48 million to $2,463,590 effective Jan. 14, 1981.

Huval and Guidry were in the process of re-evaluating the city property at the time of the city hall fire.

The council also agreed to place its liability insurance coverage under a plan offered by the Louisiana Municipal Association. The new policy will provide liability coverage of up to $1.1 million at an annual premium of $29,102.

The city has been paying $34,469 for less coverage.

The new policy will cover claims relating to general liability, the gas system, and all city vehicles.

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