



Figure 1 Historic postcard of the T&CC, circa 1948.

TEN MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE TOWN & COUNTRY CENTER (T&CC) AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Myth 1: “The T&CC is not historically significant.”

False: *The Center has been evaluated for its historic significance no fewer than five times starting in 1983; each review has determined that the T&CC is a bona fide historic structure that is eligible for listing on the National Register. With full knowledge of its historic significance, the T&CC was purchased by the current owner at a below market price in 1997.*

Myth 2: “The T&CC is standing in the way of Palm Springs’ economic survival.”

False: *The T&CC was financially viable until the Desert Fashion Plaza was built across the street. Today, shoppers have rejected retail superblocks like the Desert Fashion Plaza in favor of smaller, more pedestrian-friendly shopping opportunities. The T&CC contains approximately 60,000 square feet of rental space. Comparable space in historic downtown buildings generates an income in the range of a dollar per square foot per month. Had the T&CC been properly restored and marketed it could conceivably have grossed as much as \$700,000 a year in income - roughly \$7 million over the time it has been in the current owner’s control. Instead the building has been allowed to deteriorate, presumably in the hopes that it could be demolished as a development opportunity. This is a classic case of what is known as “demolition by neglect.” By contrast, the rehabilitation of the T&CC, when combined with sympathetic new development could, in time, provide a major expansion of downtown’s retail core – something another street could never do. It is ironic that the owner wishes to demolish a remarkable and important mid-century building while completely changing the current façade of the Desert Fashion Plaza to a “mid-century modern” look, i.e., tear down the midcentury T&CC only to build a fake across the street!*

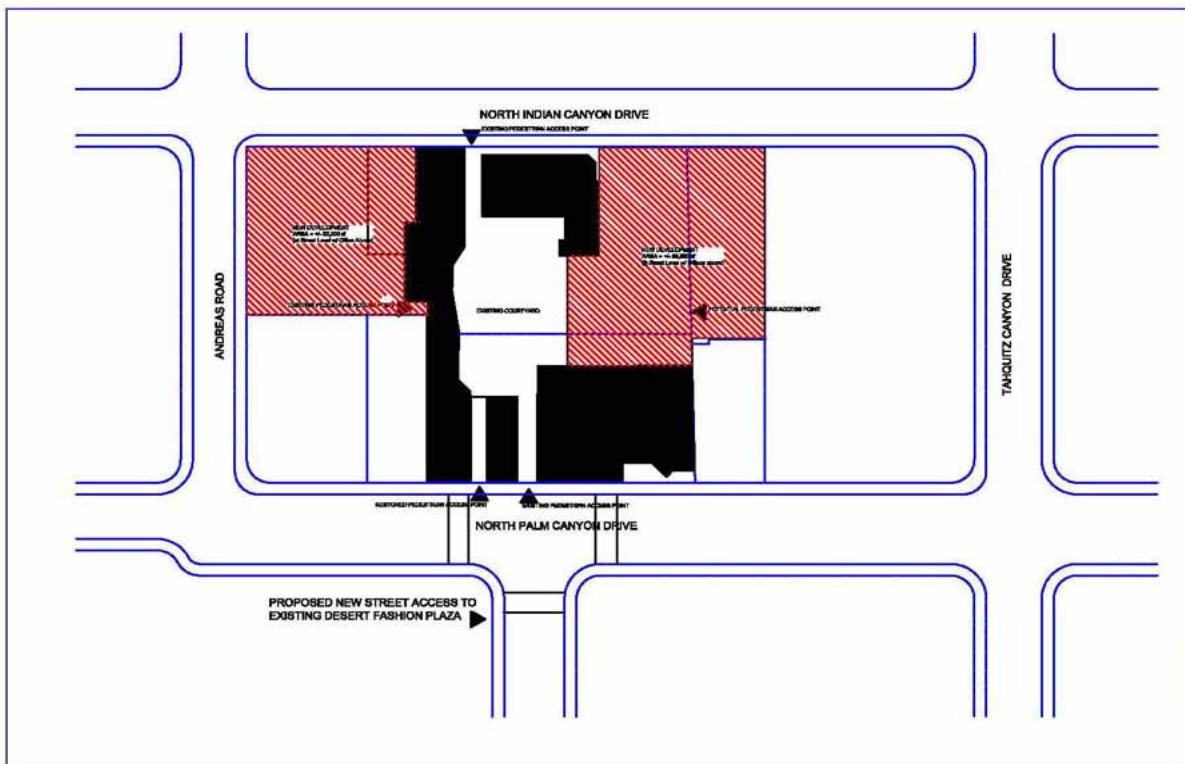


Figure 2 Shown above is the retention of the T&CC (in black) with a development (in red) of two new retail structures that could benefit from the T&CC Courtyard and help subsidize the rehabilitation costs.

Myth 3: “Restoration, including Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, asbestos and lead-paint removal, will cost \$5-10 million dollars”

False: *Using the owner’s undocumented and unsupported \$5-10 million budget estimate suggests a rehabilitation cost of approximately \$70-140 per square foot, an exceptionally high price for a minimal refurbishment. An accurate and professional feasibility study that includes realistic rehabilitation/restoration costs (factoring in the benefits available through the State Historic Building Code) could provide important solutions regarding the potential for this building’s future. This Code makes provisions for reasonable levels of equivalency for accessibility, structural updates and the sensitive resolution of genuine safety considerations. Additionally, qualified historic buildings are also exempt from California energy standards.*

Myth 4: “Retaining the building is inconsistent with the City’s goal of sustainability.”

False: *Rehabilitation of buildings is an environmentally responsible practice. By reusing existing buildings historic preservation is essentially a recycling program. Older buildings were often designed to be energy efficient through their use of good ventilation, durable materials, and siting. A huge advantage of older buildings is that a building already exists; therefore energy is not necessary to create new building materials and the infrastructure is already in place. Minor modifications can be made to adapt existing buildings to compatible new use and systems can be upgraded to meet modern building requirements and codes. This not only makes good economic sense, but also preserves our legacy and is an inherently sustainable practice. To quote National Trust President Richard Moe “The greenest building is the one that’s already built.”*

Myth 5: “The T&CC prevents access to the convention center.”

False: *This seems to be a local myth that defies explanation. As illustrated in this street layout from the city’s 2005 Downtown Plan, access to downtown from the convention center is not impacted in any way by the T&CC. Easy direct access is already available via Andreas Road.*

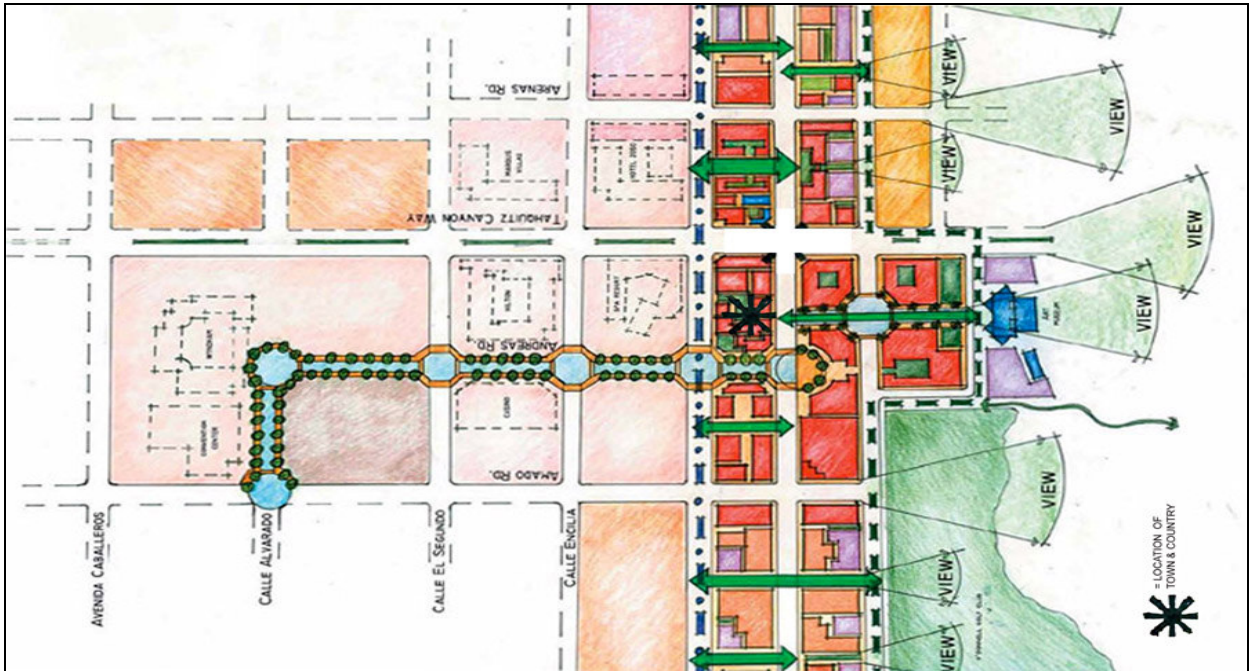


Figure 3 In this excerpt from the Downtown Plan, a Promenade from the Convention Center to the downtown is created along Andreas Road; there is no conflict between the Promenade and the Town & Country Center which is located about 200 feet south of Andreas.

Myth 6: “The designation of the T&CC results in a ‘taking’ of the owner’s property.”

False: *This assertion represents a basic misunderstanding of the legal basis of preservation in the U.S. After the passage of the National Preservation Act of 1966, the U.S Supreme Court held that the “landmarking” of property is not considered a “taking” since the landmarks law does not transfer control of the property to a city, but only restricts the owner’s exploitation of the property. The court also determined that there is no denial of due process because the same use of the property is permitted as before, and owners must show they can’t earn a reasonable return on investment.*

Myth 7: “The designation of the T&CC serves no public benefit.”

False: *The preservation of historic buildings is essential to understanding our city’s heritage. Historic preservation also has a significant economic component. Historic preservation activities are cost-effective tools that may be used to leverage private capital, create jobs, revitalize business districts, and stimulate a wide range of other economic activities. Palm Springs property owners can take advantage of federal and state tax credit programs to help rehabilitate historic buildings. Preserving historic character helps support tourism by providing interesting and unique opportunities for visitors, and tourism supports preservation by providing resources for ongoing preservation efforts.*

Myth 8: “Historic designation devalues properties.”

False: *Just the opposite! Many studies throughout the U.S. have shown that historic district designation almost always enhances local property values and never diminishes them.*

Myth 9: “The T&CC is a bad design for retailers.”

False: *For a downtown to be viable it must possess a range of building types and functions; not all properties in any town are first-class properties. Mixed-use properties such as T&CC provide small retail office and residential spaces for start-up retail business and offices. Over the years, the list of tenants in the T&CC has included drug stores, furniture stores, publishing offices, restaurants, architect’s offices and more...all of which would still be welcome in the downtown. An examination of the preservation and restoration-based revival of the Uptown Design District, which includes several comparable properties, provides a model for preserving the downtown’s historic resources.*

Myth 10: “Historic preservation is a highly partisan issue.”

False: *Both Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, have supported historic preservation. Beginning with Abraham Lincoln’s dedication of the Gettysburg battlefield to First Lady Laura Bush’s commitment to the Preserve America program, Republicans can be proud of their commitment to the cause of historic preservation. Likewise Democrats can proudly point to the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), signed into law in 1966 by President Lyndon Johnson. The NHPA remains the most far-reaching preservation legislation ever enacted. Historic preservation is one issue that should always be a non-partisan issue.*



Figure 4 In this February 2000 photograph the T&CC appears to be occupied and well maintained; the landscape is manicured and paved areas are freshly washed. Under the present ownership it has been allowed to deteriorate.