

Across the valley

palm springs

Commission overturns City Hall parking revamp

Panel hears residents' complaint that plan would impact site view

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The Desert Sun

A planned revamp of the Palm Springs City Hall parking lot was overturned after a group of residents appealed what they believed was a "flawed" design that would destroy an important historical element of the public facility.

The Palm Springs Planning Commission on Wednesday voted 5-0 in favor of an appeal of Planning Director Craig Ewing's approval of a remodel to the deteriorating parking lot.

Among the changes proposed in the rejected plan was the removal of turf in front of City Council chambers, which would be replaced with additional parking spaces.

Commissioner Leslie Munger was absent and commissioner Philip Klatchko abstained due to owning property within 500 feet of City Hall.

"It's an awfully big win for the community that our architectural resources are being respected," said Gary Johns, one of six appellants who opposed the director's decision and a board member at-large for the Palm Springs Preservation

Foundation.

"I give credit to the Planning Commission because they saw in the appeal that the site is as important as the building," he said.

According to the appellants, the parking lot redesign would block the public's view of the mid-century modern building with a line of vehicles and destroy the original landscaping created by landscape architect Garrett Eckbo.

In addition, they claimed the redesign proposal did not go through the proper approval process.

While the parking lot and landscaping proposal was reviewed three times by the Architectural Advisory Committee, it never reached the Historic Site Preservation Board before being solely approved by Ewing.

That decision was a misstep, residents argued, because the parking lot and surrounding landscape should be considered part of the historic designation of City Hall.

"To make a narrow interpretation of only the City Hall building as protected by historic



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY DANIEL CHAVKIN

Palm Springs preservationists expressed dismay this week at a City Council-approved plan to place parking spots in front of Palm Springs' City Hall. The parking reconfiguration "replaces a view of great architecture with a view of unsightly car grills," Palm Springs Preservation Foundation President Ron Marshall wrote in an Aug. 23 letter to Mayor Steve Pougnet.

status and not consider the site reflects a lack of understanding of the historic architectural integrity of the design," said resident Sidney Williams.

Had the commission upheld Ewing's decision, Palm Springs Preservation Foundation President Ron Marshall said it would not only "significantly

diminish the protections afforded to City Hall, but (also) the other five sites designated under the resolution" — Frey II House, Valley Tramway Station,

Loewy House, Carey-Pirozzi House and the Tramway gas station.

Before voting, Commissioner Doug Hudson, who also serves as the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation secretary, said while he certainly supports repaving the pothole-ridden parking lot, he criticized how city staff handled the issue.

"This process has been such a poor example of the way things should be done and the fact that the city was the applicant on this speaks quite loudly and I'm very disappointed," Hudson said.

In defense of the redesign, commissioner Doug Donenfeld, who served on the Tahquitz Median Landscape Design Subcommittee, which assisted in drafting the remodel of the parking lot and landscaping, said the subcommittee was a "very well-intentioned group of people who did not want to do a disservice" but sought to create a "user-citizen friendly" site.

The parking lot reconfiguration proposal may be further discussed by the City Council upon request or another party may appeal the Planning Commission's decision, Ewing said. Otherwise, the project remains denied and will not move forward.