



October 10, 2013

The Honorable Steve Pougnet, Mayor of Palm Springs
City of Palm Springs
3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Dear Mayor Pougnet,

The recent fire at the Community Church of Palm Springs was devastating news to the City of Palm Springs when one of the most cherished buildings of the Historic Tennis Club District suffered significant damage. The building's vacant state and general neglect has contributed to the risk of such a tragedy for several years.

The Board of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation (PSPF) was pleased to hear your comments at the September 18th City Council Meeting charging the City Manager to review the enforcement of the City's Vacant Building Ordinance. As I wrote in my Valley Voice in the *Desert Sun* ("Don't Let The Old Town & Country Be A Victim Of Fire, Oct 2, 2013), enforcement is a must in order to save our architectural treasures. The Town & Country Center, like the Community Church, stands vacant and faces a potentially similar fate. Thus, PSPF is happy to work with the City of Palm Springs to find solutions in order to prevent future tragedies.

However, we are sensitive to oversimplifying this important issue with a "Top 5 Historic Vacant Building" approach as you have suggested. Many vacant buildings are adjacent to historic buildings and some reside in the middle of historic districts: this argues for a strategic, rather than reactive, plan to deal with the issue of vacant buildings in the city. To that end it might interest you to know that in October of 2012, as a result of the Carnell Building fire and ongoing issues with transients occupying the Town & Country Center, we asked the City Manager to arrange a meeting with us to discuss the Vacant Building Ordinance and its apparent lack of enforcement. During that meeting, with senior city staff, fire and police, we were alarmed to discover that the Vacant Building Ordinance was not being implemented but that the city was relying entirely on code enforcement measures to "encourage" vacant building owners to maintain and secure their properties. After our meeting with city staff, PSPF sent a lengthy letter to the City Manager wherein we used the Town & Country Center as an example of how the Vacant Building Ordinance could (and should) be applied. That letter, which included photographs, cited no less than 22 specific violations of the city's Vacant Building ordinance. It remains our firm conviction that aggressive enforcement of the Vacant Building Ordinance is imperative to preventing

future disasters such as the Community Church fire.

Nevertheless, to answer your specific request we provide the following listing of the city's most endangered historic buildings:

- **The Town & Country Center** – In addition to the A. Quincy Jones and Paul R. Williams designed portion complex, there is also the E.F. Hutton Building designed by Donald Wexler and the original Bank of America Building on fronting Palm Canyon. Furthermore, the T&CC is next to the much beloved Lykken General Store Building.
- **The Racquet Club** – This complex of Hollywood lore has sat derelict for years. Structures threatened due to vacancy include the Bamboo Room, one of Charlie Farrell's homes, and the Shiff House.
- **Oasis Hotel Tower** – Designed by Lloyd Wright, son of Frank Lloyd Wright, this has been called "one of the greatest neglected buildings of California Architecture".
- **Orchid Tree Inn** – This complex lies adjacent to the Community Church, is owned by the same individual and faces a similar fate.
- **La Plaza** – As the first outdoor-oriented shopping center in the country, there are several vacant storefronts that pose threats. With the closure of the Follies at the end of this season, the Plaza Theatre could become vacant and threatened as well.
- **760 N. Palm Canyon** – This is an empty "non-historic" building that sits within the Las Palmas Historic District which includes Class One Historic Sites such as the Kocher-Samson Building and the Casa Palmaras. A fire to one potentially affects them all.

PSPF looks forward to working with you and the City of Palm Springs to ensure that these buildings remain a vital part of our architectural heritage. We thank you for this opportunity. Please feel free to contact the foundation at 760-837-7117 or info@pspreservationfoundation.org.

Sincerely,



Erik Rosenow
President