

palm springs

# Royal Hawaiian clears hurdle to historicity

## Bid for Class I historic district headed for council

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The Desert Sun

The Royal Hawaiian Estates condo complex in south Palm Springs is poised to become the city's first residential historic district, following months of debate and a recommendation Tuesday by the Historic Site Preservation Board.

The vote was 5-2, with board members Sheila Grattan and Brian Strahl dissenting.

The Palm Springs City Council likely will consider in January whether to uphold the preservation board's decision and establish the district, city Director of Planning Services Craig Ewing said.

In Palm Springs, a historic district protects many or all buildings within its boundaries from demolition, and it subjects any design changes to Historic Site Preservation Board review — just like the city's Class 1 historic sites.

Palm Springs has only one such district: uptown's recently rediscovered Las Palmas Business Historic district, formed in 1986.

Local preservationists say they want to see more, because districts can protect multiple buildings at once. Palm Springs Preservation Foundation president Ron Marshall last month said a Royal Hawaiian Estates district could give momentum for more districts in the city.

The push for a district, initiated by Royal Hawaiian Estates residents, "shows people that districts are possible from a ground-up effort," Ewing said after Tuesday's vote.

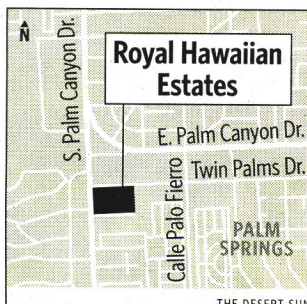
Ed Paquette, the complex's homeowners association president, called Royal Hawaiian Estates a "gem in south Palm Springs." Some 90 percent of its owners supported the historic district designation, he said.

The 12-building, 40-unit



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The whimsical Polynesian "tiki" design at the Royal Hawaiian Estates in Palm Springs, built in 1961-62, is seen at the end of each of the exterior facing walls. The city's Historic Site Preservation Board has recommended it be part of a historic district.



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Find more pictures of the Royal Hawaiian Estates online at [mydesert.com/photos](http://mydesert.com/photos)

complex features the popular Polynesian architecture that took off in the mid-century, post-war United States, according to the Royal Hawaiian Estates' official Web site. Wooden tiki-style adornments, and unique "flying-sevens" design buttresses dot the complex.

The preservation board debated at its past three meetings whether a condo complex should be its own historic district, or simply a Class 1 site. Either choice would subject the Royal Hawaiian Estates to preservation board review, Ewing said.

## Why it's significant to Palm Springs

Architects Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison designed the five-acre, 12-building, 40-unit Royal Hawaiian Estates in the popular modern Polynesian-style that sprouted in the United States following World War II and the Korean War, according to the complex's official Web site. The complex features exaggerated gables over the ends of buildings, "flying-seven" designed buttresses and wooden tiki-styled elements.

"When American soldiers returned home ... they brought with them stories and souvenirs of the South Pacific," according to the application residents filed with the city for historic designation. "Dozens of novels and films that portrayed the romance of grass shacks and exotic, tropical settings captured America's emerging fascination with Polynesian culture that featured sunning at poolside and nights of love under the stars."

Grattan argued an individual condo complex is too small to be its own historic district, and that it should be a Class 1 site instead. "I think we're setting precedents here without thinking through the possibilities," Grattan said Tuesday.

Ewing said any future proposed districts wouldn't have to use Royal Hawaiian Estates as a precedent. It wasn't immediately clear Tuesday if other California cities have designated condo complexes historic districts.

However, most in Royal Hawaiian Estates wanted a district. It's "something we've all

rallied around together. We all believe in it," part-time resident Tony Morris said.

The condo complex's legally binding covenants, conditions and restrictions already place tight limits on the changes owners can make to their property, even before any proposals would come before the preservation board, Paquette added.

Board members and residents discussed Tuesday the possibility of nearby hotels Royal Sun Inn and Caliente Tropics Resort eventually joining the proposed Royal Hawaiian Estates district.