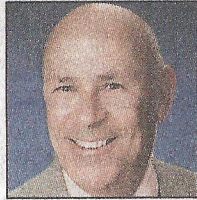


Save neighborhood with historic designation

As a tourist town, Palm Springs needs to appeal to tourists. Theoretically, the more attractive our town is to tourists, the more they will vacation here. We want them to return time and again and tell their friends to visit here, too.

Today, vacationers take images of the defunct Desert Fashion Plaza and a mostly deserted downtown home with them. That's not exactly the experience we want them to share with their friends. Fortunately, Palm Springs does have other areas of town to balance the forlorn Fashion Plaza images.

The Historic Tennis Club Neighborhood is one of our most attractive neighborhoods. Anchored by Spencer's restaurant and The Tennis Club, the area is home to many historic small inns. Nestled against the mountains, it offers tourists a rural neighborhood experience while still



gary johns

close to downtown.

During the Christmas holiday season, the area is host to the Walk of the Inns. This annual open house is popular and draws large crowds of tourists and locals for hot cider, cookies and carols.

Now, this neighborhood is in danger of falling under the same pall that the Fashion Plaza has cast on downtown.

Two small inns and a church, like the Fashion Plaza, have been boarded-up eyesores for several years. Within close proximity to each other,

the properties have a significant, negative impact on the neighborhood.

The deteriorating condition of La Serena Villas, The Orchid Tree Inn and The Community Church of Palm Springs is due to their current ownership. It should be noted that, at the time these properties were purchased, they were in excellent condition and still vibrant. Big plans for them went sour long before the current economic malaise.

Plans for the church included a spa and health club, and La Serena Villas was intended to become a part of the Viceroy Hotel. But plans changed, and in the case of La Serena Villas and The Orchid Tree Inn, the developers left town, leaving the neighborhood with the results of their aborted plans. The church is owned by the local development company that also owns the Fashion Plaza. One can see a pattern with this owner.

This week, the Palm Springs City Council will decide if La Serena Villas should be designated a Class One Historic Site. This designation is the city's highest level of preservation protection. It will protect the property from demolition.

The owners of La Serena Villas do not want the Class One designation. In fact, they recently asked for the council's permission to demolish the property, declaring "it has no value in its present state."

Class One designation of La Serena Villas is important for the neighborhood and community. This designation will keep the historic in The Historic Tennis Club Neighborhood. If the council denies the designation, it will only be a matter of time before the owners are back asking to demolish it again.

And as goes La Serena, so will go Orchid Tree. Losing either of these

two properties, let alone both, will devastate the neighborhood. The attractive appeal of the neighborhood is in serious jeopardy.

As recently as Easter Sunday, The New York Times featured Palm Springs on the cover of its Travel section. It seems clear to everyone except developers that Palm Springs' small scale and ease of getting around — coupled with charm, weather and palm trees — bring tourists here.

Our community has been taken advantage of by developers and their failed promises long enough.

Class One designation of La Serena Villas will not force the owners to do anything with the property, but it will prevent them from tearing it down.

With that option not available, the owners may just fulfill their promises and restore the property.

Gary Johns lives in Palm Springs. Reach him at garyjohns@aol.com.