

Modernists: Don't pave art to put in parking lot

City Hall redesign causes stir among preservationists

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At last weekend's annual Modernism Show, which drew an estimated 5,000 architecture fans, local preservationists took the opportunity to advocate against changes in the works around the iconic Palm Springs City Hall.

Palm Springs Preservation Foundation and Palm Springs Modern Committee members distributed fliers criticizing a recently approved redesign to park cars in front of the Albert Frey-designed building, a Class One-designated historic site.

The parking redesign, they say, will block sight lines of the mid-century modern public facility — one of the first sites many valley visitors encounter as they leave the Palm Springs airport — with car grills.

"We want our city hall protected, not abused," the flier reads. "Do not trade great architecture for a used car lot."

City officials have said City



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Plans to reconfigure parking in front of the Albert Frey-designed Palm Springs City Hall, a Class One historic site, have drawn the ire of local preservationists.

Hall's cracked, crumbling parking lot is in desperate need of repairs. Councilman Chris Mills, a member of a subcommittee charged with overseeing the project, said the original architectural plans included parallel parking along the

Please see **CITY HALL, B6**

CITY HALL: Change controversial

Continued from B1

front of the building.

The Palm Springs Architectural Advisory Committee has reviewed the plans to change landscaping around City Hall three times. It's part of a renovation of Tahquitz Canyon Way's medians, replacing turf with drought-tolerant desert landscaping.

Each time, the advisory board voted to send the project back to the drawing board.

However, after its third review on Jan. 25, Palm Springs Director of Planning Services Craig Ewing opted to approve

the redesign. Last week, the Modernism Committee joined a group of valley residents to appeal Ewing's decision.

The redesign should have gone before the Historic Site Preservation Board and should have been treated as more than just a "minor architectural addition," the group contended in a Feb. 8 letter.

The Historic Site Preservation Board agreed. It voted unanimously last Tuesday to investigate whether to historically designate the entire City Hall site, including parking and landscaping — not just the building.

In a Feb. 5 letter included with the ModCom appeal, architect Patrick McGrew, a member of the Architectural Advisory Committee, asserted that the surrounding site is protected by the resolution designating City Hall a historic site.

The Historic Site Preservation Board also unanimously voted for a stay of demolition, which could last up to six months. Ewing said city officials would have to check whether such a stay would apply to minor architectural additions.

The ModCom appeal likely will go before the Planning Commission at a later date.