

Aberdeen project remains in play

Palm Springs dodges developer's maneuver

By Skip Descant

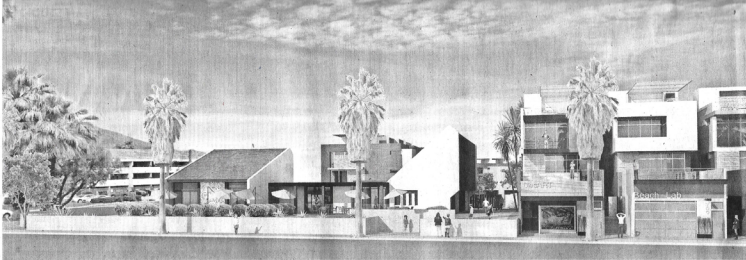
The Desert Sun

Late in the day on Thursday, just before the Palm Springs planning department began packing up for the day, a rapid development of unexpected events seemed to place a group of four office buildings known as Tahquitz Plaza perilously close to the wrecking ball.

Nexus Companies — the developer behind the proposed Aberdeen, a condo and mixed-use development — filed a letter with the city asking that the project be withdrawn from consideration.

Nexus offered no explanation for the move. But if city leaders had agreed, it could have opened the door for a separate permit to knock down the existing buildings — permission that

Please see ABERDEEN, 11A



CHRIS PARDO DESIGN: ELEMENTAL ARCHITECTURE

An architect's sketch showing the Aberdeen development on Tahquitz Canyon Way in Palm Springs being integrated with an existing 1970s-era office building designed by architect Hugh Kaptur.

Aberdeen

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can't be granted while a project is still under consideration.

"By this letter, O & M MR, LLC and Nexus Development Corporation hereby withdraw and abandon all pending land use applications associated with the Aberdeen Project," reads a letter sent to Flinn Fagg, the city's director of planning services.

About 3 p.m. Thursday, Peter Moruzzi, a member of the preservation group Palm Springs Modern Committee, said he learned the developers planned to follow this withdrawal with an application to demolish at least some of the existing office buildings on the site.

The buildings, built in the early 1970s, are the work of local architect Hugh Kaptur.

"It sounded outrageous, and ridiculous; but we had to take it seriously," Moruzzi said Friday.

Moruzzi and others from Palm Springs Mod Com and the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation rallied to halt

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DAVID READY
Palm Springs City Manager

any moves toward demolition — a road that would seem to be more easily paved if the Aberdeen project were rescinded entirely.

"Despite any attempts by the developer of the Aberdeen project to game the system by filing a withdrawal of the application for the planned development district," wrote Amy Minter, an attorney with the firm Chatten-Brown & Carstens, representing the Palm Springs Modern Committee.

"The demolition remains part of a larger discretionary project and demolition permits cannot be issued until environmental review for the greater project has been completed."

Palm Springs City Manager David Ready said no demolition permit was issued.

"We never got that far," Ready said on Friday.

In fact, soon after the request to withdraw the Aberdeen project was filed, Nexus filed another request to keep Aberdeen alive as an active project.

"There was a discussion to move forward toward that (demo permit,) but we never got that far because they rescinded their letter to take the application out," Ready said. "So we never kinda got there."

Rob Eres, vice-president of development for Nexus Companies, could not be reached for comment on Friday.

The Aberdeen condo development proposed for Palm Springs remains an active project. It is expected to be considered by the council on May 6.

The project has been at the center of community attention and controversy practically since the day it was proposed — largely because of the developer's desire to demolish three of the four office

buildings.

Aberdeen's public approval process has been anything but easy, with both the city's architectural advisory committee and planning commission rejecting the design on numerous grounds.

Since then, Nexus appealed the planning commission denial to the Palm Springs City Council. But a public hearing was put on hold Wednesday due to a lack of quorum on the council.

Two council members were absent, while Mayor Steve Pougnet is required to recuse himself from discussion and voting on the project because of his ongoing business relationship with Richard Meaney, a principal with Nexus Companies, the development firm behind Aberdeen.

"It certainly was odd," Ready said of the events on Thursday afternoon. "There were several things occurring at once. But in the end, it maintains the status quo. So the project maintains as it was, and there's no demolition permit."

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