

Aberdeen narrowly loses PS approval

Developers plan to appeal decision to City Council

By Skip Descant
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It will take more than saving the corner of the Hugh Kaptur-designed Tahquitz Plaza to get the approval of the Palm Springs Planning Commission.

The commission voted 4-3 Wednesday to deny a development that aimed to demolish 75 percent of the 1970s-era office buildings in order to build a 73-unit mixed-use residential development known as Aberdeen and planned for Tahquitz Canyon Way across the street from the Regal Cinema.

Nexus Development, the firm proposing the project, intends to appeal the decision to the Palm Springs City Council, said Rob Eres, a representative for the firm.

Earlier proposals of the project by Nexus would have demolished all of the office space fronting Tahquitz, designed by Kaptur in the mid-1970s, a move strongly opposed by the preservation community, and some members of both the Planning Commission and the city's Architectural Advisory Committee. As a concession — and indeed, an attempt to get the project through the city's public approval process — Nexus offered to save the corner building, which comes out to 25 percent of Tahquitz Plaza.

"We really went back to the drawing board, and we took all



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.

the comments that we heard from this commission to hear," Eres told the Planning Commission on Wednesday, his second appearance in front of the planning body.

Tahquitz Plaza was built as two, two-unit buildings. Each of the buildings are divided by a breezeway. And to keep only one unit — which comes out to one-half of the building — would destroy the overall balance of the architecture, preservation advocates said.

"To remove one-half of the structure would destroy its balance and its integrity," Chris Menrad, president of the Palm Springs Modern Committee, told the commission.

"When is good compromise ever tearing down 25 percent of great architecture, or 50 percent of great architecture, or as this developer proposes, 75 percent of great architecture," wondered Ron Marshall, a

member of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, in his comments to the commission. "I don't see that as a compromise. And I hope you don't either."

J.R. Roberts, a Planning Commissioner, and one of the voices in favor of the development, said Nexus had done its part to compromise.

"I would love to have seen all four buildings saved," Roberts said. "But given the applicant's arguments for financial viability and making it work with the existing buildings, I have to understand that there are sacrifices that are going to be made on all sides. But I think the applicant has come a long way in agreeing to pay to keep one of the existing buildings and eliminate the number of houses that he had, in order to keep that building."

The proposed demolition of the buildings that make up Tahquitz Plaza may be the "ele-

phant in the room," as Doug Hudson, who chairs the Planning Commission, described the situation. But they were not the commission's only concern.

Hudson, for one, questioned aspects of the project's design, such as the viability of the 13 live-work units fronting Tahquitz Canyon Way. He also would like to see developers offer more variety in the types of housing brought to downtown, particularly offering housing at more affordable price-points.

"This project is, in my mind, very problematic, and it's not just because of the Kaptur buildings and the percentage of retention versus demolition," said Hudson, who went on to take issue with what he described as "gated communities that are very high-end townhomes that are basically, 'gated camps.'"

"I would personally encourage council to demand some

more diversity in terms of housing types other than just the supposed insistence by developers that everybody wants this housing type," Hudson went on. "I think our downtown truly needs a variety of units that are really affordable by people that can't afford \$600,000-plus for one of these units."

Nexus Development has not said how expensive the condo units will be.

"My feeling on it is that it's a good effort and I would love to see residential in this area, but there's not enough here," said Kathy Weremliu, a Planning Commissioner voting to deny approval of the project.

"I think they've come a long way on this, but I don't think they've come far enough," she added.

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