

Palm Springs voters: Judge your officials based on their actions

I could not agree more with Amanda Erlinger's excellent examination of the characteristics that together determine a given area's identity or sense of place (Valley Voice, April 19). A geographic space that is able in some way or for some reason to clearly define itself becomes more than mere lines on a map — it can become a human experience unique to itself.

The reality is that few places are distinct enough from their surroundings to be able to command a strong sense of place. As Erlinger notes, a geographic area with a strong identity can be akin to seeing a Lichtenstein or hearing Mozart — it is something immediately recognizable by almost everyone.

Today Palm Springs boasts perhaps the largest concentration of authentic mid-century modern architecture in the world, making the city unique even among its desert neighbors. It is not difficult to link the city's architecture to its position as a premier global tourist destination as well as an increasingly popular place for permanent full-time residents. Look no further than the popularity of Modernism Week, the surging vacation rental market, and steadily rising home prices as evidence.

Many others have already commented on the economic benefits the city now enjoys as a result of being a treasure-trove of original architecture.

Erlinger is spot on in her characterization of sense of place and how this is important to Palm Springs, but her article does not go far enough in its intended audience. Of course, she is right that the Palm Springs City Council directly determines whether many of the city's treasures survive or not. Yet ultimately it is — or at least it should be — the city's citizens that hold this power. In other words, its time we start naming names.

Consider as an example



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the much-publicized proposed demolition of Hugh Kaptur's Tahquitz Plaza (aka the Aberdeen project). Potential City Council candidate J.R. Roberts, as a member of the Palm Springs Planning Committee, has voted in favor of demolition. Palm Springs Mayor Steve Pognet, who is considering reelection in November, is apparently unable to take a stand on this important issue because of his business history with the proposed project's developer. These are specific actions by specific people for which they should be held accountable.

After several delays the Council is likely to vote on fate of Tahquitz Plaza in early summer. Let us see who votes which way, and why.

In theory, politicians are elected to represent the will of the people. In reality, they often only do so when they know they are being watched. Media outlets such as the Desert Sun and non-profit organizations such as the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation and Palm Springs Modern Committee are doing a commendable job of keeping the future of Palm Springs and its sense of place in the spotlight. This makes it much easier to understand which policymakers are responsible for what.

The front of Palm Springs City Council chamber is adorned with a large disk that reads "The People are the City." It is now up to voters to make sure this holds true.

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