



CRYSTAL CHATHAM THE DESERT SUN

The Colony Palms Hotel is seen Aug. 25 in downtown Palm Springs. The hotel was built in the 1930s in a style characteristic of the Monterey Revival. The site was formerly The Palms at Palm Springs, as well as the Howard Manor.

City 'rediscovers' historic district enacted in 1986

Palm Springs to discuss impact in meeting today

BY MARCEL HONORÉ

The Desert Sun

Craig Ewing, Palm Springs' director of planning services, was sifting through old city files last month when, unexpectedly, he unearthed something big: an entire historic district — buried in the heart of the city.

In Palm Springs, where architecture attracts tourists from across the globe, it turns out that the City Council 23 years ago approved a Las Palmas Business Historic District, comprising about six square blocks and at least 40 buildings.

Every building there, historic or otherwise, has been subject to review by the city's Historic Site Preservation Board for exterior changes since 1986 — but nobody realized it, Ewing said.

The district is nestled in Palm Springs' uptown corridor and features a blend of Spanish Revival and mid-century modern commercial ar-

chitecture. "The district appears largely intact" to how it looked in 1986, Ewing said.

City staff and preservationists alike apparently lost track of the district, the only one of its kind in Palm Springs, amid more than two decades of turnover at City Hall.

"This had long been forgotten," Ewing said.

The Historic Site Preservation Board will discuss Ewing's discovery — and what it means for the city — during its 8:15 a.m. meeting today at City Hall.

Local preservationists called the discovery huge — "sort of like discovering plutonium," said Ron Marshall, president of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation.

It could set a precedent for more districts that would protect dozens of historic Palm Springs properties at a

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time, and prevent them from being demolished, he said.

"That way, they can't pick us off one-by-one," Marshall said. "It's really a change in tactics, and it's something the preservationists are getting smarter about."

On Aug. 25, by coincidence, representatives of

Royal Hawaiian Estates condominium complex met with Ewing to discuss forming a historic district. The five-acre, Polynesian-style complex was designed in the 1960s by famed architects Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison, according to its Web site.

Other enclaves, such as the Historic Tennis Club Neigh-

borhood, also are working to form historic districts, Marshall said.

"Most people will tell you our architectural tourism is a huge draw" for Palm Springs, said Gary Johns, a local Realtor and preservation foundation board member. "That's why the (Las Palmas) district is so important. It shows the variety of the architecture" the city has to offer.