

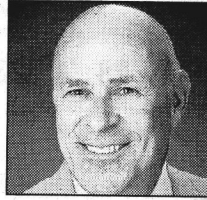
City moved too quickly on City Hall parking lot

Earlier this year, in a much publicized and highly debated 3-2 vote, the Palm Springs City Council designated Santa Fe Federal Savings & Loan a class one site. Class one status is the city's highest level of preservation protection. The council members voting in favor of the designation individually opined on the importance of preserving the site from encroachment; with the "open space" being recognized as an important element of the designation. Why then is the council allowing for the open space at the city's most recognized class one site, City Hall, to be violated?

City Hall, designated class one in 1996, is in the cross hairs of proposed changes to the site. A plan is working its way through the city that reconfigures the site. The plan will eliminate half of the existing parking lot to create landscape area, then, adds a parking lot where landscape already exists. As a part of the city's "20 First Steps on Sustainability" the intention is to reduce the amount of sod and create more area for drought tolerant, native, desert plants. Designed by Clark, Frey & Chambers (1952), City Hall, the open space and the parking areas are an intentional part of the overall design of the site. The proposed plan significantly changes this design. The city can still accomplish its sustainability goals by working with the existing site. There is no good reason to reconfigure it.

The plan was approved by the council as a consent calendar item titled "City Hall and Dog Park parking lot repairs, Phase 1." Consent calendar items, unlike public hearing items, are usually of a routine nature and are moved through the system quickly without public comment. A public hearing on the item would have benefited the council; hearing the public's views on the issue would have been important early in the process and more than likely the council would have been reminded of the class one status of the site.

Without a public hearing, residents were excluded from the process. Council members often rely on city staff reports for advisement. The class



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one status of City Hall is not mentioned in the staff report for this item.

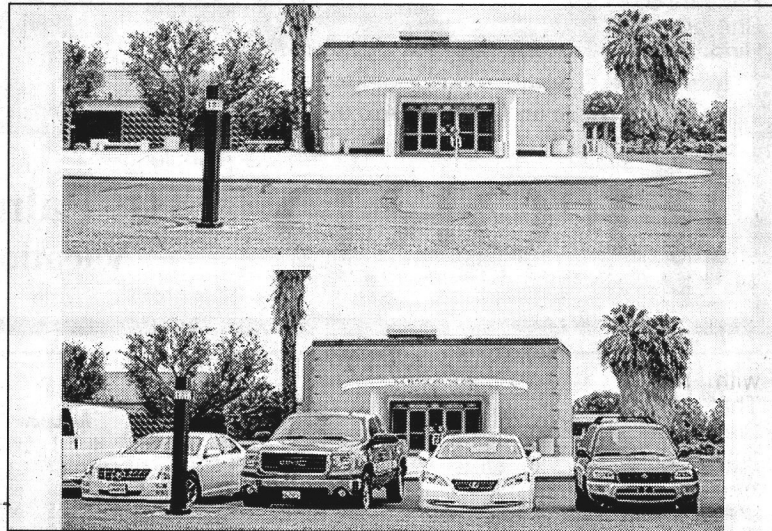
A city Tahquitz Canyon Median/City Hall subcommittee met several times over the summer and has approximately 12 members. The meetings are open to the public but there is no public representation. City Councilman Chris Mills is a member and at the July 22 meeting, notes on the city's Web site attributed to Mills state, "Obtain public comments on medians only. (City needs to move forward with parking lot work)." Mr. Mills' views on limiting public comment on the issue are interesting.

Many in the community feel the planned changes to the City Hall site should have been more transparent. The heading on the consent calendar item was misleading to the public. The use of the word "repair" implied routine work when in fact it is much more than that. Viewable on the city's Web site, the artist renderings of the new parking/landscape areas are romanticized, pretty pictures with lots of plants but no cars.

The council maintains the right to approve changes to class one properties and there is a procedure in place to aid them. Owners of class one properties requesting changes to their site must go before the city's Historic Site Preservation Board first.

City Hall, owned by the people, should go through the process too. As reported recently by The Desert Sun, City Manager David Ready feels there is no harm in having the board review the proposed changes. Already nine months into the planning, Ready might have considered the review process before the plan got this far along.

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PHOTOS COURTESY IF DANIEL CHAVKIN

Preservationists are upset over a new design of the Palm Springs City Hall parking lot that, according to Preservation Foundation President Ron Marshall, "replaces a view of great architecture with a view of unsightly car grills."