

# Tahquitz Plaza decision delayed

## Board extends hold on demolition

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The Desert Sun

Tahquitz Plaza keeps getting one life-line after another.

The Palm Springs Historic Site Preservation Board extended a stay on demolition for the 1970s-era office buildings another 60 days to Dec. 6.

The board also continued the discussion of the elevating site, designed by local architect Hugh Kaptur, to Class I Historic Site status until next month, when Kaptur can attend the HSPB meeting.

Extending the discussion to next month will also offer enough time for the board's chair—Gary Johns—to be given a more formal site visit.

"I feel that I am at a disservice, as the chair of this board, to not have been granted a site visit, as everyone else has. I feel Mr. Kaptur's input to this board, as he intended today, would be very important to the decision-making process," Johns told the historic preservation board at Tuesday's meeting. (Kaptur was unable to attend due to a medical appointment that could not be rescheduled.)

Some board members said they visited the site, located on Tahquitz Canyon Way, across the street from the Regal Cinema, on their own, without a city staff member leading the tour, a deviation from a more formal and structured process when the board is considering a project for the city's highest historic preser-



Gary Johns, chair of the Historic Site Preservation Board, takes notes during a meeting at the Palm Springs City Hall on Tuesday.

However, Johns also found it odd that the city's staff report analyzing the Class I application—filed by the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation—did not include an up or down recommendation from the city. A recommendation advising approval—or not—has been included in the reports for past sites the city has considered for the preservation designation, Johns said.

"I understand that planning has taken a new direction on our staff reports. That there is no recommendation," Johns said. "Gee, this is awfully important, for this to be the first staff report that we get without a recommendation."

The lack of a recommendation to the HSPB represents a more "streamlined" approach to staff reports the planning office is now taking, said Plan Page, director of Palm Springs Planning Services.

"Over the last year or so, we've had some modifications to our staff reports, relative to recommendations," Page explained. "What we're trying to do is to streamline our reports, to focus on the nomination as it's presented to you, and evaluate against the criteria that you have in the code."

Tahquitz Plaza, a collection of four single-story office buildings built between 1974 and 1977, has been at the center of controversy for months. The site has placed preservationists who say the architecture is unique for its modernist-Pueblo aesthetic against the buildings' owner who would like to see the site razed as part of a move to redevelop the area.

"I think this is an important decision that we're going to look back on, we're going to hope we made the right one," said Danny Halder, a local artist, speaking during the public hearing.

"These buildings are integral to the character of the city, and please consider this decision wisely," he added.

Rob Eren, vice-president of developer for Nexus Companies, which has proposed redevelopment for the site, opposes the Class I Historic Site status for the buildings, and has said they offer little historical value.

"We have owned these buildings for eight years. This year marks the first time that anyone has notified us indicating that they believe that they are historic," Eren told the HSPB.

"We vehemently oppose the application of these four buildings for consideration of the Class I Historic Site status. We do not support the decision of demolition imposed in the June 9 HSPB meeting."

ing be removed," he added.

In 2006 the city approved a hotel development for the site which would have demolished the buildings. An environmental review in 2007, certified by the city at that time, approved the demolition, said Eren, wondering why the hold-up was unfolding today.

"History isn't static," Mark Davis, a local preservationist, told the HSPB. "And as we learn more about our culture and our history, we now begin to understand the value of certain structures and certain buildings."

"As we age, we don't learn less. We can't learn less. We can only learn more," echoed Johns, continuing the litany that newer attitudes and events have come to shape the community's view around architectural preservation and development in Palm Springs.

Several months ago Nexus proposed a 90-unit mixed-use residential and commercial development for the site. The project, known as Aberdeen, never received planning commission or City Council approval. (Nexus pulled the project before the council could weigh in.) A demolition permit had been applied for, but has not been issued.

The charter surrounding Aberdeen also focused on business ties between Palm Springs Mayor Steve Poaguet and Richard Mooney, who has worked with Nexus on projects throughout Palm Springs.

Poaguet reported in financial disclosure documents that he worked for a company called Union Abbey in 2013 and 2014, earning more than \$100,000 a year. Mooney formed Union Abbey in 2004 but neither he nor Poaguet have offered details about what the company does.

Last week, records from the FBI and other agencies ruled Palm Springs City Hall as part of a public corruption investigation. Some Nexus wires also collected have directly from Poaguet. No charges have been filed, and the investigation is ongoing.

Meanwhile, the future of Tahquitz Plaza remains in limbo, at least until the HSPB meeting on Oct. 8. Johns said he believes the HSPB, a City Council subcommittee and Nexus officials could move to work out a plan to somehow give Tahquitz Plaza a new life through re-use.

"So that the developer wins, and the community wins, and the city has to have to look at saving these buildings, and allowing the developer to benefit from its ownership of the buildings also."