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Wessman Development, which owns the Town & Country Center, plans to save the building from demolition.

# Town & Country up for preservation

City council could protect aging downtown center

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THE DESERT SUN

The mostly empty and perennially troubled Town & Country Center in downtown Palm Springs is headed to the City Council for historic architecture protections that are expected to pave the way for its restoration and reuse.

The complex of seven buildings built between 1946 to 1955, and designed primarily by Los Angeles architects A. Quincy Jones and Paul R. Williams, is being considered for Class I Historic Site designation, the city's highest level of architectural protection. The nomination will be heard Wednesday by a joint meeting of the Palm Springs Planning Commission and City Council at

the Palm Springs Convention Center.

Wessman Development, which owns the Center, is in support of the designation and plans to restore it as part of an adaptive reuse, possibly as a hotel.

"We intend to bring together the preservation of historically significant structures with new structures to create an economically viable commercial development," Michael Braun, vice-

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The Town & Country Center in Palm Springs was designed and built in 1948 by A. Quincy Jones and Paul R. Williams in the late modern style, which contributes to the mid-century character.

## Town & Country

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president for Wessman Development, wrote in a letter to the city in support of the Class I designation.

However, Braun noted Wessman Development is asking that one of the buildings – 171 N. Indian Canyon Drive – be left out of the Class I protections.

The two-story structure has “no known architect,” and “possesses no particular style or significance,” according to a 137-page city staff report devoted to the Town & Country’s nomination for Class I Historic Site status.

When the city’s Historic Site Preservation Board considered the Town & Country’s Class I nomination, the board did not opt to remove this building from the protections.

“The nomination stands as written and submitted,” said Gary Johns who chairs the HSPB.

Preservationists in Palm Springs also side with the HSPB’s findings, and say the building at 171 N. Indian Canyon should be included in the protections.

“Taking Building 171 out of the nomination is like lopping the head off the historic resource, and directly impacts the courtyard experience,” wrote Ron Marshall a board member with the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation.

PSPF had no problem with leaving the building next door at 181 N. Indian Canyon Drive – which has a Well in the Desert sign across it – off the nomination.

This will not be the Town & Country’s first appearance in front of the City Council. In 2009 the Historic Site Preservation Board nominated it to Class I Historic Site status, a move the City Council voted down. More recently, in 2015, the Town & Country Center was listed as “eligible” for listing on National Register of Historic Places.

Perhaps the biggest change today is Wessman Development’s support. In the past, Wessman officials were clear in their objection to the Class I designation. And in fact, the city’s previous plan for the downtown redevelopment would have paved a road through the area. However, the plan has been modified to make Andreas Road an east-west street connecting the new development with Indian Canyon Drive and what will become the Spa Resort Casino district beyond.

The development of the casino district, the construction of hotels like the Kimpton, Virgin and Andaz, all within downtown are part of Wessman’s decision to protect and restore the Town & Country, Braun said.

“All these factors are changing the perception of Palm Springs and its future and contributed to our decision to support the designation,” Braun wrote in an email last week.