

Council grants historic status to aging Town & Country

BARRETT NEWKIRK THE DESERT SUN

Palm Springs city leaders have bestowed official historic status on the downtown Town & Country Center, a move preservationists believe paves the way for its eventual revitalization.

The cluster of seven buildings between North Palm Canyon Drive and

North Indian Canyon Drive is largely empty and showing signs of neglect. Its owner, Wessman Development, had eyed the buildings for demolition as part of the firm's larger downtown redesign plans before suggesting earlier this year that most of them be saved and possibly turned into a hotel.

The Palm Springs City Council on

Wednesday voted 4-1 to name the center a Class 1 historic site, the city's top level of historical protection.

Mayor Pro Tem Chris Mills voted no after pushing for one of the buildings to be excluded from the plan. His suggestion, while backed by Wessman, was not supported by members of the public who spoke Wednesday. It was also rejected

by other council members.

The center went up between 1946 and 1955 and was primarily designed by the prominent Los Angeles architects A. Quincy Jones and Paul R. Williams.

The designation does not include the building at 181 N. Indian Canyon Drive.

Please see CENTER, 8A



RICHARD LUI/THE DESERT SUN

Developer John Wessman, left, on the roof of the Town & Country Center in January. The Palm Springs City Council on Wednesday voted to name the center a Class 1 historic site.

Center

Continued from 1A

Wessman had also asked that it not include the nearby building at 171 N. Indian Canyon Drive, but the city's Historic Site Preservation Board opted to keep the building as part of the historic designation.

Mills, an architect, said that if 181 is being allowed to go away then he didn't see why 171 should be saved. He suggested that 171 not be granted historic status but that the city require clear plans for the site before allowing it to be torn down.

But other council members were reluctant to go against the wishes of the city's historic preservation body. Councilwoman Ginny Foat called Town & Country a "gem of the city." Mayor Rob Moon said it signifies a point in the

city's history when Palm Springs was moving from a quaint village to a destination city known around the world.

This was the second time Town & Country had been up for historic designation. The previous attempt, in 2009, failed after making its way to the City Council.

"This project, you have to admit, has been given a miraculous second chance," said Steven Price, a board member with the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, which advocated for saving Town & Country.

Also Wednesday, the City Council held a joint meeting with the city's Planning Commission and Architectural Advisory Committee to discuss and hear reaction to the latest plans for for the Wessman-led downtown revamp.

Barrett Newkirk can be reached at (760)778-4767, barrett.newkirk@desertsun.com or on Twitter @barrettnewkirk.