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Preservationists appeal Tahquitz Plaza demo permit

By Skip Descant

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A permit to demolish a set of Palm Springs office buildings dating to the early 1970s has been processed and issued, however local preservation groups have appealed it.

The permit to demolish the office complex, designed by local architect Hugh Kaptur, was appealed by the Palm Springs Modern Committee, a move that could delay demolition for possibly a week or more.

"The demolition permit was issued and then immediately stayed by operation of an appeal filed by Amy Minter on behalf of Palm Springs Modern," wrote Doug Holland, who serves as Palm Springs city attorney, in an email Monday. "The appeal will be subject to hearing by the Building Code Appeals Board at a date to be determined."

The appeal "bides its time until the administrative appeals board meets," said Ron Marshall, a member of the board of directors for the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation.

The buildings, which currently hold no official preservation protections, sit on a site owned by Nexus Development, which has proposed a 91-unit mixed-use development known as Aberdeen, on Tahquitz Canyon Way, across the street from the Regal Cinema.

Approval of Aberdeen has been an uphill road for Nexus, which failed to gain the green light from both the Palm Springs Architectural Advisory Committee and the Palm Springs Planning

Please see **TAHQUITZ PLAZA, 7A**

Tahquitz Plaza

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Commission. The company appealed that decision to the City Council, which has not yet ruled on the project.

On Thursday, Nexus formally pulled the Aberdeen project from consideration for city approval.

The appeal of the demolition permit will be heard by the city's Administrative Appeals Board, made up of David Williams, Steve Rosenberg, William Johnson, Glen Perry and Ted Grofer. The appeals board has no regular meeting schedule, but meets when an appeal of an administrative action is filed.

The move by Nexus to pull the Aberdeen project follows a previous attempt to end the project on April 16, when the company filed a letter with the city's planning office asking that the project be withdrawn from consideration.

Local preservationists rallied, out of fear that a next step would be the issuance of a demolition permit. Ultimately — after much huddling by city development and other officials — the permit was never issued and the project was returned to active status.

One fear often expressed by preservationists has to do with Nexus tearing



RICHARD LUTHE/DESERT SUN

Tahquitz Plaza is a collection of Palm Springs office buildings designed in the early 1970s by Palm Springs architect Hugh Kaptur. The buildings, at 700 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way, have been approved for demolition by Nexus Development. However, the demolition has been appealed by local preservationists.

down the buildings regardless of an appeal that is, for now, halting the demolition.

"We have no evidence one way or the other, other than just the fact that he has been so adamant about wanting to demolish it, and he continues to apply for these permits, which now he finally has," Peter Moruzzi, a member of the executive board of the Palm Springs Modern Committee, a local preservation group.

Officials with Nexus could not be

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CITY MANAGER DAVID READY

reached for comment Monday.

"Any unauthorized demo activity will be immediately 'red-tagged' for a more comprehensive discussion of penalties," said City Manager David Ready.

Demolishing a building without a permit is a violation of the Palm Springs building codes, making the offender subject to a variety of penalties ranging from an administrative citation, criminal prosecution and even reconstruction, said Holland.

"If demolition work commences before the stay is lifted, the job would likely be red tagged and any work in violation of what constitutes a stop-work notice is an additional violation," he added.

The recent chatter surrounding Aberdeen also focused on business ties between Palm Springs Mayor Steve Pougnet and Richard Meaney, who serves as a principal with Nexus, and threats from the Palm Springs International Film Festival

to sue the city if the project is approved.

Organizers of the film festival are concerned about losing parking by the convention center in an area with more than 400 parking spaces known as the Prairie Schooner lot.

Pougnet 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. Meaney formed Union Abbey in 2004 but neither he nor Pougnet have offered details about what the company does.

Pougnet has said he would not participate in the Aberdeen vote.

Pougnet has acknowledged he mistakenly voted for a Meaney-backed project in December when the City Council approved the sale of the Casa del Camino property on North Palm Canyon Drive. The city last week rescinded that sale offer.

On May 1, after The Desert Sun asked Meaney about more than \$47,000 Union Abbey owed the state for late income tax payments, Pougnet announced he had ended his job with the firm.

Mayor Pro Tem Paul Lewin in May called for an investigation into the city's economic development and land sale policies.

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