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COACHELLA VALLEY

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The gas station at Palm Canyon Drive and Yorba Road was designated as a historical structure by the Palm Springs City Council on Wednesday.

Gas station added to ranks of historic properties

Palm Springs City Council designates 1960s structure near Tramway base

CORINNE S KENNEDY THE DESERT SUN

A Palm Springs gas station near the base of the tram has been added to the ranks of the city's notable, historic properties after the Palm Springs City Council voted to designate it a class one historic site.

The council voted 5-0 Wednesday to bestow the designation on the service station at North Palm Canyon Drive and Yorba Road. The station is known as the Tram Way Shell Gas Station by local historical boards even though it is now

called North Palm Canyon Fuel.

Yousef Sobhy, the owner of the historical fuel station and other stations in the valley, said he wasn't necessarily opposed to the historic designation, but he didn't want it to prevent him from renovating and modernizing the station in the future.

"I don't mind designation, but let me do what I need to do to build up the business," he said. He said he wanted to remodel the station to make it more aesthetically appealing to customers. "I'm embarrassed to say that's my station."

Planning Services Director Flinn Fagg said he'd have to look at updated plans, but he believed the modifications Sobhy wanted to make would be permissible even under the enhanced requirements that historically designated properties had to live up to.

He also explained that there were benefits to the designation, including that owners of historic properties can apply for a special contract to receive property tax relief.

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Gas station

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Last year, the Historic Site Preservation Board recommended the site receive a class 1 historic site designation. A city staff report identified three features which the preservation board said set the site apart as a historic structure:

- » The station exemplifies the work of notable architect William F. Cody;
- » It represents the "post-World War II period of commercial development" in the city;
- » It has many of the design characteristics associated with classic, mid-century modern architecture which

Palm Springs is famous for.

The report identified the service station as a particularly good example of thin-shell reinforced concrete construction and added it was notable for the structure and spacing of the columns supporting the roof, which resemble a Frank Lloyd Wright building in Racine, Wisconsin.

Barbara Marshall, from the Palm Springs preservation foundation, said the group enthusiastically supported the designation.

"It is the last of the mid-century modern architect designed gas stations still functioning as a gas station," Marshall said.

She said the station was a architectural and design "marvel."

Resident Jay Nelson said it was an "innovatively designed" station which announces the city's commitment to modern architecture at its entrance and added that notable architectural critics have praised the design.

A conditional use permit was originally approved for the station in June of 1963. The structure was renovated in 1984 and again in 2000. The mini-mart was added in 1996.

Fagg said the station was one of only two remaining gas stations which were designed and constructed during this period.

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