

## VALLEY VOICE

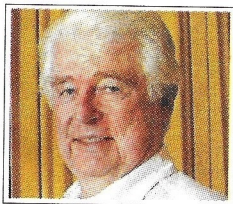
# Architect sees flaws in Aberdeen Project

As a former city of Palm Springs planning commissioner, past member of the city's Architectural Advisory Committee and the architect that designed and built Tahquitz Plaza, I feel I am both qualified and obligated to comment on the proposed Aberdeen Project that calls for the demolition of these buildings.

Over the years I have watched many of my professional contemporaries see buildings they were proud of demolished: architect Bill Cody's Huddle Springs comes to mind, as does Stewart Williams' Potter Clinic. Most recently I've seen Don Wexler's high school Administration Building and Spa Hotel colonnade tragically lost.

Now two of my buildings are slated for demolition and a similar unhappy fate. I am particularly proud of the design of Tahquitz Plaza; I had great artistic latitude, as it was to become my offices and I had the opportunity to make an architectural statement. With this creative freedom I designed the architecture to "grow" from the desert floor. I feel these buildings are some of my best work from that period. The "plaza" won architectural awards in 1979 and 1980.

Aberdeen is a high-density project that overcrowds 74 residential units, 17 live-work units and a cafe space into an eight-acre site. The project is before the city as a Planned



## Hugh M Kaptur

good planning and goes against our forefather's vision for the street. This is not just my opinion but also a concern stated by both the city's Architectural Advisory Committee and the Planning Commission, both groups denying the project for these and other failings of the project.

The developer recently presented a revised design that is proposing to retain a quarter of the buildings. I designed the complex as four integrated buildings relating to each other as a single project. Demolishing 75% of the buildings will end that unity and mute the architecture. The developer should be more respectful of Palm Springs's mid-century architecture and build a project where the two can coexist.

The Aberdeen project will soon be reviewed by the city council and I plan to attend. I am humbled that many people have told me they will be at that council meeting too, raising their voice to preserve Tahquitz Plaza. The city council will hear these

Development (PDs), which allows the developer to skirt zoning, parking, setbacks, height and use requirements. PDs were originally intended to create a safety valve that would allow creative projects to be considered by the city and not be overly constrained by the zoning requirements of the area. Unfortunately, developers and the city are using PDs, which should be encouraging architectural excellence, as a way to over develop sites that are out of scale with their surroundings. The Aberdeen Project doesn't fit zoning or the village character of the city and it demolishes four more mid-century buildings.

But demolishing more of our city's architecture is just one of the major shortcomings of the Aberdeen project. Fundamentally, it is the wrong project in the wrong place and creates a dangerous mix of vehicular and pedestrian traffic on Tahquitz Canyon Way. And a row of garage doors along our city's most important thoroughfare just isn't good architecture or

voices and I hope they will also hear the voices of previous city councils and previous planning commissions and visionaries like Pearl McManus and other forefathers who together had an idea for a city like few others in the world. Their vision for Tahquitz (McCallum) Way is widely known and their intention was to not allow any residential along Tahquitz. The Aberdeen Project now endangers that vision, which is more suitable for a dense urban environment not in a resort town like ours.

The developer has an obligation to provide public benefit to the citizens of Palm Springs. It is impossible to see the public benefit from demolishing more of our iconic architecture. Instead, Nexxus Development should restore and re-purpose Tahquitz Plaza, incorporating it into The Aberdeen, that would be public benefit no one could argue.

*Hugh Kaptur is an architect of many midcentury buildings in Palm Springs. He can be reached at [hughmkaptur@yahoo.com](mailto:hughmkaptur@yahoo.com).*