

Fence around Wexler building erected for safety

Skip Descant, The Desert Sun 10:03 a.m. PDT August 10, 2015

The construction fencing recently erected around a mid-century commercial building in Palm Springs is presumably to keep the building safe.

“It is my understanding the Indian land-owners have installed a temporary security fence to further secure the building and prevent illegal trespass,” wrote Marcus L. Fuller, Palm Springs city engineer, in an email Thursday.

The building is a 1965 modernist retail structure designed by the well-known Palm Springs firm of Wexler and Harrison. The late Donald Wexler, who is known for key buildings in town such as the Palm Springs International Airport main terminal, died in June. He was 89.

The commercial building, located near the corner of South Indian Canyon Drive and Ramon Road, was the center of attention in April when shopkeepers received word from owners — all 22 of them, who are also members of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians — that they must vacate the space by the end of May.

It’s not yet clear what the owners have planned for the building, however, shopkeepers and others in the preservation community have speculated that demolition may be in the building’s future. Though, city officials say demo permit applications have not been filed with city hall.

“The city has not issued any permits relative to the building,” said Fuller, who added that “any work on their property is subject to permitting by the city.”

Owners of the building, or others with knowledge of the dealings could not be reached for comment.

Preservationists in Palm Springs lament that the building has no current historic designation protections.

“It is a real shame that the building would be torn down. It is a great example of mid-century commercial architecture,” said Erik Rosenow, chair of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation. “What is great is that it had never needed to be re-purposed. Decades later, it was still being used as a successful retail space including many shops and an art gallery.”

About a block away, another Wexler building — a Merrill Lynch Bank built about 1971 — was recently re-opened as an Eisenhower Health Center after an extensive interior renovation.

“While we have so many homeowners taking so much pride in their mid-century homes, mid-century commercial structures become more and more endangered,” said Rosenow, calling to mind the Town & Country Center, Tahquitz Plaza, and now the Wexler building. “With so many potential demolitions, Palm Springs is in danger of losing much of its architectural heritage.”