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Tahquitz Plaza gains new ally

Nexus Development says it will support office building's Class I Historic Site status

Skip Descart
The Desert Sun

After months of opposing historic preservation protections for Tahquitz Plaza in Palm Springs, the property's owner is now on board with designating the four 1970s-era office buildings as a Class I Historic Site.

Nexus Development, owner of the Hugh Kaptur designed office buildings on Tahquitz Canyon Way, has not only resisted the historic designation in the past, but filed applications with the city to tear the buildings down, a move that would have cleared the way for new development on the site near the

Palm Springs Convention Center.

However, on Monday, just two days before a new mayor and City Council would take up the preservation issue, Nexus announced it no longer opposes the historic preservation of the buildings.

"We believe that this is a win-win solution that demonstrates our continued commitment to work as partners with the city of Palm Springs and the preser-

vation community that will make viable our substantial investment in this important asset and in the city of Palm Springs," said Cory Adler, president of Nexus Development, in a statement. Adler did not immediately return a request for follow-up comment.

"We're fairly confident that on Wednesday the council will give the Class I Historic status to the buildings," said Erik Rosenow, president of the Palm

Springs Preservation Foundation. "And then now having the owners support, it's a win-win for everyone."

Members of the preservation community have always opposed any move to tear the buildings down. In mid-October the city's Historic Site Preservation Board declared the property historically significant and recommended the Class I pro-

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Tahquitz

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fective status to the Palm Springs City Council. That decision is set to be made Wednesday night, just after two new members of the council and a new mayor are sworn in. Geoff Kors and J.R. Roberts will replace Paul Lewin and Rick Hutchesson on the council, and Robert Moon will replace out-going Mayor Steve Pognet.

"It's a definite win," is the way Rosenow described the turn of events, which places both property-owner and the preservation community on the same side after months of opposition and at times, acrimony. "This was a struggle. It played out on multiple levels. And now finally having A) the developer wanting to

work with us; and B) having the opportunity to recognize the preservation efforts in town, it's all good stuff. And all a step in the right direction."

Preservationists and Nexus officials began meeting several weeks ago to discuss a path to saving the office buildings.

"It was basically a discussion on how we could preserve the buildings and how they could be reused," said Rosenow, who added that no clear use has yet been outlined for the buildings. "But they definitely said they want to lease it out, or potentially sell it."

Earlier this year, Nexus approached the city with plans to demolish the buildings to clear the way for Aberdeen, a 91-unit mixed-use development on the site. That plan never received approval by the city's planning commission, in part because the design held too many flaws, commissioners said at the time. At-

tempts to appeal the decision to the City Council were either stymied due to a lack of quorum on the council, or Nexus decided to simply drop the project from the city's public review process.

And then late on a Thursday afternoon near the end of May, Nexus filed an application with the city to have the buildings demolished. Preservationists quickly learned of this move, and swooped down to appeal the demo permit - which was ultimately put on hold while the property went through the preservation review process.

The stay on demolition runs out on Dec. 6. However, preservationists are confident the new mayor and council will grant the site Class I Historic status, protecting Tahquitz Plaza from demolition.

"In my opinion, we're moving in the right direction, when it gets to the new

City Council, when it comes to preservation," Rosenow said.

Preservation and development were central themes during Palm Springs' local elections - Tahquitz Plaza preservation yard signs even popped up amid campaign signs - as candidates debated topics like ethics and transparency after Pognet became the target of a government corruption investigation following news reports of his business relationship with local real estate developer Richard Meaney who has had ties to Nexus Development. Pognet announced in May he would not seek re-election.

Pognet 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 Pognet have offered details about what the company does.