



February 22, 2015

Mr. Doug Hudson
Chair, Planning Commission
City of Palm Springs
3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Re: Aberdeen Project and the Proposed Demolition of Tahquitz Plaza (1971, Kaptur & Lapham) (Case Nos. 5.1361 PD-375, 3.3820 and TTM 36876)

Dear Chairman Hudson,

We understand that the Planning Commission will meet on February 25, 2015 to evaluate the merits of “Aberdeen,” a mixed-use project consisting of 74 attached and detached residential dwellings, 17 live-work units and approximately 1,568-square feet of retail on 8.05 acres located at the northeast corner of Tahquitz Canyon Way and Calle El Segundo.

Our primary issue with the project is the unnecessary demolition of the architecturally-significant Tahquitz Plaza complex. Further, it is our view that you should not approve this project because it is flawed on many levels and fails to comport with the values and priorities of the city’s general plan, historic resources program and sustainability program. The proposed demolition of Tahquitz Plaza directly contradicts many of the city’s general plan values and priorities including: “unique architecture” (page 1-12); “Promot[ing] the...use of...existing construction to minimize resource depletion and conserve resources for future generations” (page 1-12); “Creat[ing] unique places that strengthen community identity, offer visual interest, and support lively activity” (page 1-13); “Preserv[ing] and uphold[ing] the high quality of architecture and the unique visual and aesthetic form in buildings...that distinguish Palm Springs from other cities.” (page 1-13); and perhaps most to the point, to “Recogniz[ing] the importance of adaptive reuse for architecturally and historically significant resources.” (page 1-13).

The importance of the work of architect Hugh Kaptur has only recently become appreciated. He received a star on the Palm Springs Walk of Stars during Modernism Week 2014 and he was the subject of a recent documentary film (*Quiet Elegance: The Architecture of Hugh M. Kaptur*). Additionally, his Tahquitz Plaza complex has been recommended to the contractor currently conducting the city’s historic resources survey.

Possible future activities like the historic preservation of the Tahquitz Plaza are cost-effective tools that can be used to leverage private capital, create jobs, revitalize business districts, and stimulate a wide range of other economic activities. Palm Springs property owners, like Nexus Development, can take advantage of federal and state tax credit programs to help rehabilitate historic buildings. Preserving historic character helps support tourism by providing interesting and unique opportunities for visitors.

While the staff report recommends the approval of this project, that approval is highly “conditioned” and raises a host of issues with the project. Many of these concerns are driven by the unseemly density of the project and the developer’s attempt to wring the maximum value out of the site. In perhaps one of the most audacious and surreal examples of developer logic, on page 11 of the staff report Nexus Development claims as a public benefit “The project itself as it enhances an ‘underutilized site’ in Section 14.” Apparently, the elegant and brilliant siting of the architecturally-significant Tahquitz Plaza complex on a main city thoroughfare is viewed by this developer as a waste of land and therefore a detriment to the community.

Finally, we applaud the city’s Architectural Advisory Committee’s recent decision to unanimously deny this project. In that decision, only the merits of the project were considered by the AAC, not the architectural significance of Tahquitz Plaza. That issue falls more properly under your purview (as stated repeatedly by the city attorney during the AAC’s January 26, 2015 meeting). In that regard, we suggest you recommend to the city council consideration of Tahquitz Plaza as a Class 1 historic site. The Tahquitz Plaza complex should easily qualify as an historic site under criterion 8.05.020(a)(3) (as the Tahquitz Plaza exemplifies a particular period in local history, to wit, the rise of modernist architecture in Palm Springs) and criterion 8.05.020(a)(5) (the work of a “master... architect”).

If you have any questions please don’t hesitate to contact the foundation at 760-837-7117 or info@pspreservationfoundation.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Erik Rosenow". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Erik Rosenow
President

Attachments:

1. Advocacy postcard for Tahquitz Plaza produced by the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation

Copy to:

Palm Springs Modern Committee (Chris Menrad)
Desert Sun (Skip Descant)