



August 23, 2009

The Honorable Steven Pougnet
Mayor of Palm Springs
3200 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Subject: CITY HALL PARKING LOT RECONFIGURATION

Dear Mr. Mayor,

The city's current proposal to reconfigure the parking lot of the Palm Springs City Hall (designed by Clark, Frey & Chambers (1952)) replaces a view of great architecture with a view of unsightly car grills. The proposed reconfiguration blocks sight lines that have been in place for more than fifty years and does not reflect well on the city's stewardship of this world-renowned modernist icon. Attachments (1) and (2) provide visual aids that amply illustrate our concerns.

To summarize, the proposal to reconfigure the parking lot was included as a "consent" item entitled "City Hall and Dog Park Parking Lot Repairs" in the January 7, 2009 city council meeting agenda. As you know, consent items are typically routine items of minor importance that do not receive a public hearing. However, far from being a mere repaving of the parking lot, the consent item included a wholesale reconfiguration of the City Hall parking lot.

Far more alarming has been an inexplicable decision by the planning department to not let the Historic Site Preservation Board (HSPB) review the parking lot reconfiguration despite the fact that the City Hall (along with a host of other Albert Frey-designed buildings) was designated a Class 1 historic site in 1996. City Council Resolution No. 18907 of October 2, 1996 unequivocally states that the "Palm Springs City Hall...shall be designated as a Class 1 Historic Site pursuant to Chapter 8.05 of the Palm Springs Municipal Code." Further, an October 2, 1996 planning department memorandum to the city council on the designation clearly states that:

"The recommended Class 1 designation protects the architectural and historic integrity of the sites in that the structures *and their sites may not be modified*, nor objects removed, without the approval of the city council; usage may also be limited to the extent that it may impair the integrity of the site....The city Council's approval of modifications *is delegated to the HSPB* by Chapter 8.05 except that appeals of an HSPB decision are heard by the Council" (*emphasis added*).

Regardless of any perceived ambiguity in the "building versus site" distinction, such ambiguity should argue that the HSPB review the matter. I'm sure you agree that ambiguities in city

policies and precedent decisions should never be used as an excuse to circumvent review by a city board or commission.

On August 10, 2009 the city's Architectural Advisory Committee (AAC) reviewed that portion of the Tahquitz Canyon Way Median Design Concept that featured the proposed City Hall parking lot reconfiguration. During that review AAC members were pointedly and repeatedly told by the contractor representing the city that a discussion of the reconfiguration was not within their purview. Nevertheless, some AAC members voiced serious concerns about the reconfiguration.

Because the parking lot reconfiguration has now been lumped into the Tahquitz Canyon Way Median Design Concept, at this date it is difficult for members of the public to register their concerns. Nevertheless, we will soon encourage our membership to state their objections to the reconfiguration (as provided for on the city's Sustainability web page).

Recognizing that "slip and fall" legal concerns may be driving the parking lot repaving project, we encourage the city to repave the parking lot in its current configuration. Not only will this save money, it should have no impact on the city's Tahquitz Canyon Way sustainability efforts.

While the city has a generally good track record of encouraging public input, the handling of this matter has served as a textbook example of what can happen when public input is not aggressively solicited. The obvious solution is to ensure that the review of such matters, by the city's duly appointed boards and commissions, be liberal in scope. A liberal review process not only brings specialized expertise to bear but provides the public with an opportunity to express their views.

I hope you will make a personal effort to rectify this matter and review the opaque (versus transparent) city processes that have allowed such a proposal to progress this far. The foundation can be contacted at (760) 837-7117 or via email at info@pspreservationfoundation.org.

Sincerely,

Ron Marshall

Ron Marshall

President

Attachments: (1) Photographs of cars in proposed reconfiguration blocking sight lines
(2) Overhead graphic of proposed reconfiguration impacting sight lines

Copy to (with attachments):

City council members G. Foat, C. Mills, L. Weigel and R. Hutcheson

City Manager (Mr. D. Ready)

Chair, Planning Commission

Chair, Historic Site Preservation Board (J. Gilmer)

Chair, Sustainability Commission

Chair, Architectural Advisory Committee

PSModCom (Mr. P. Moruzzi)

Desert Sun (Mr. M. Honore)

Today



Tomorrow?



Cars in proposed reconfiguration blocking sight lines

Today



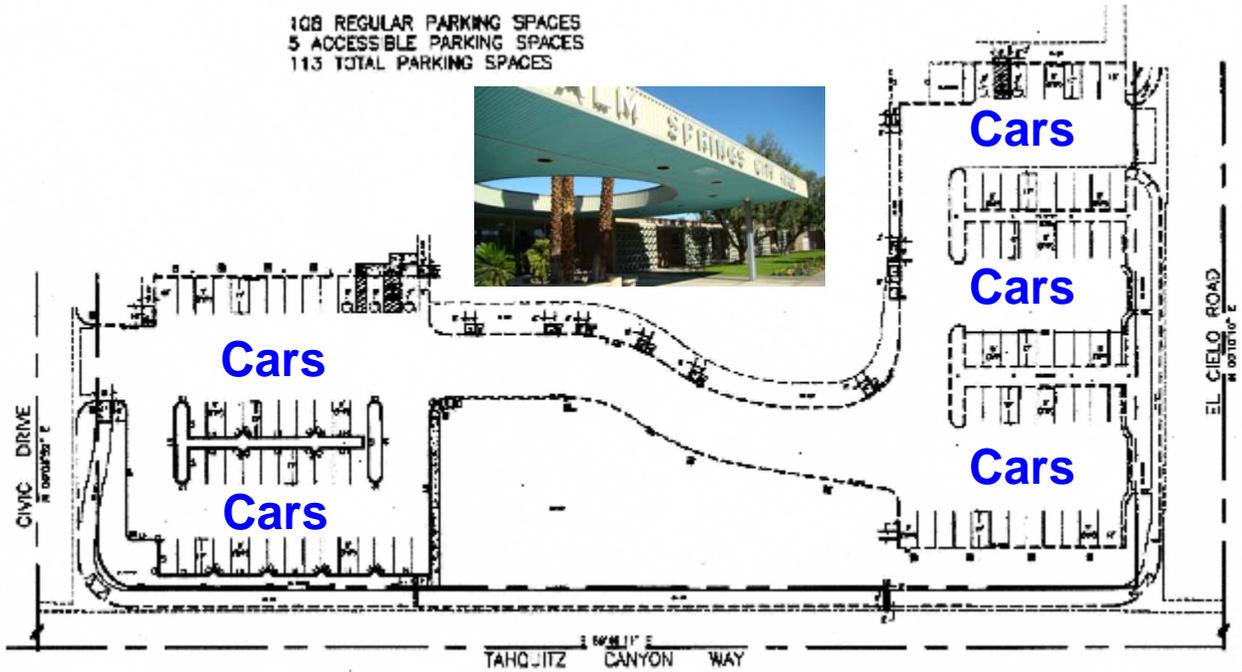
Tomorrow?



Cars in proposed reconfiguration blocking sight lines

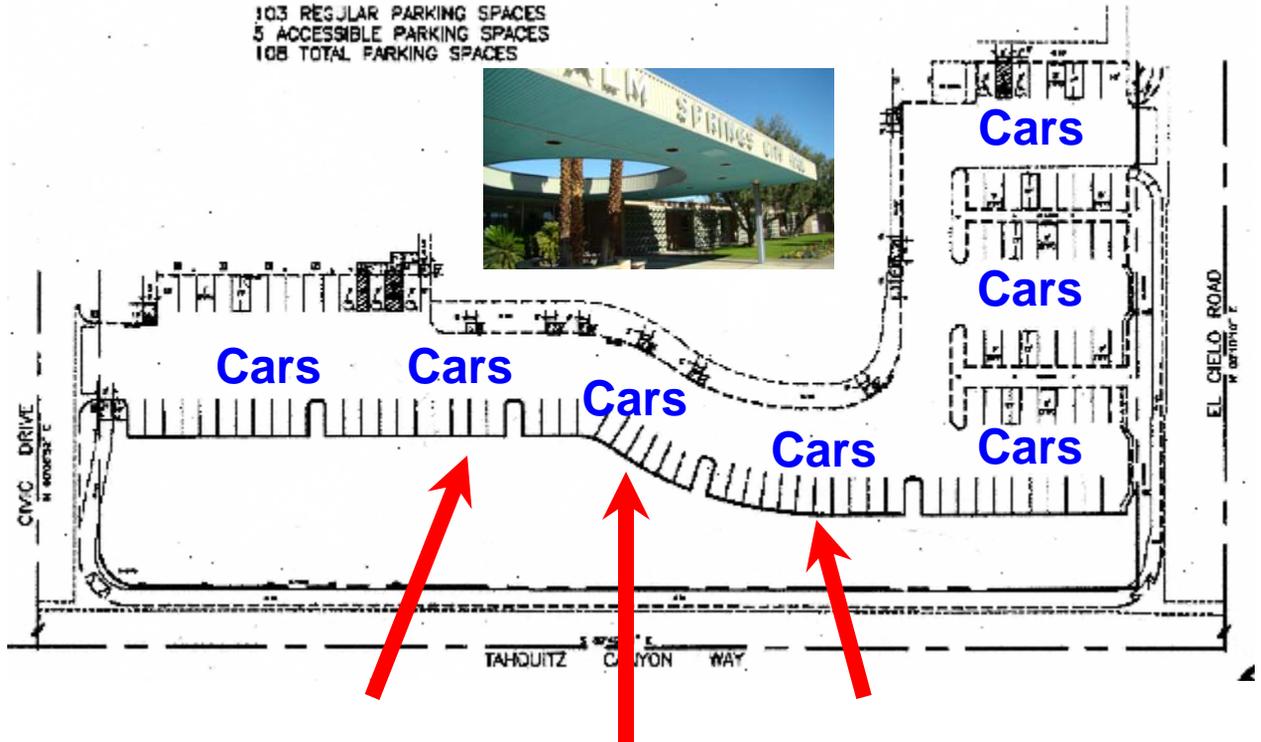
Current

108 REGULAR PARKING SPACES
5 ACCESSIBLE PARKING SPACES
113 TOTAL PARKING SPACES



Proposed

103 REGULAR PARKING SPACES
5 ACCESSIBLE PARKING SPACES
108 TOTAL PARKING SPACES



Blocked sight lines

(Note that 5 parking spaces are actually lost in the proposed plan)