

Tahquitz Plaza appeal heads to PS City Council

The road to historic preservation status for a collection of 1970s-era office buildings in Palm Springs is proving to not be an easy one.

Nexus Development, the owner of Tahquitz Plaza — a collection of four office buildings on Tahquitz Canyon Way — has filed an appeal with the city to stop the process of granting Class I Historic Site protections on the buildings, designed Hugh Kaptur and built between 1974 and 1977.

The process to add Tahquitz Plaza to the list of numerous other Class I Historic Sites in Palm Springs is being led by the Palm Springs Historic Site Preservation Board after an application filed by the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation.

"O&M (the official name for Nexus Development) appeals the HSPB (Historic Site Preservation Board) Actions on the grounds that the studies and investigations purportedly initiated by the HSPB are unwarranted, unnecessary, and an inappropriate use of taxpayer money," reads a June 24 letter written to Jay Thompson, Palm Springs City Clerk, by Matthew B. Kaufman, senior vice-president for operations and chief financial officer for Nexus.

The letter went on to appeal the Historic Site Preservation Board's action to the Palm Springs City Council, which is now set to hear the matter at its July 15 meeting, said Doug Holland, a private attorney contracted to serve as city attorney for Palm Springs.

Nexus also contends that the buildings are not historic or significant.

Preservationists say designating a 1970s-era building as a Class I Historic site is not out of the question. For example, the Palm Springs Art Museum, built in 1976, is a Class I Historic Site.

When the Historic Site Preservation Board initiated the study and review process for Tahquitz Plaza, it placed a 120-day stay on the issuance of a demolition permit sought by Nexus to tear down the buildings to make way for Aberdeen, a mixed-use residential and commercial development.

The project met opposition from the Palm Springs Planning Commission, and was also ultimately opposed by the Palm Springs International Film Festival. The site is across the street from the Regal Cinema and functions as a large parking area during the film festival.

The recent chatter surrounding Aberdeen has also focused on business ties between Palm Springs Mayor Steve Pougnet and Richard Meaney, who has served as a principal with Nexus.

Pougnet reported in required 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 Pougnet have offered details about what the company does.

Pougnet has said he would not participate in votes related to Aberdeen.

Pougnet has acknowledged he mistakenly voted for a Meaney-backed project in December when the City Council approved the sale of the Casa del Camino property on North Palm Canyon Drive. The city has since rescinded that offer.