

HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD CITY OF PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

Large Conference Room, 3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, California 92262
www.palmspringsca.gov

MINUTES

October 10, 2017



9:00 AM
REGULAR MEETING

CALL TO ORDER: The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

ROLL CALL: Chair Gary Johns, Vice-Chair Dick Burkett, Members Todd Hays, Bill La Voie, Vincent Marsh, Dan Kiser, Linda Dixon.

ABSENT: (none)

ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA: The Board accepted the agenda as presented.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

DONNA CHABAN, spoke in support of Class 1 historic site designation for the Racquet Club.

JUDY DEERTRACK, spoke in support of Class 1 historic site designation for the Racquet Club. She noted she had become aware of a group of contractors who specialize in construction on historically significant properties. She opined that the City could potentially do outreach to find appropriate resources that may assist the owner or prospective buyer in redevelopment.

ROBERTA CONROY, opined that the Racquet Club has been "desecrated" and the board should take its current condition into consideration.

RON OLIVER, spoke in support of Class 1 historic site designation of the Racquet Club, noting Marilyn Monroe was discovered there and the Bloody Mary was alleged to have been invented there. He noted the key components are still extant and could be restored.

Seeing no further speakers, the chair closed the public comment period.

1. CONSENT CALENDAR:

1.A. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES: SEPTEMBER 12, 2017 MEETING.

M/S/C La Voie / Marsh to approve (7-0)

Member Dixon abstained from the vote on the minutes.

2. PUBLIC HEARINGS:

2.A. CONSIDERATION OF A RECOMMENDATION FOR CLASS 1 HISTORIC SITE DESIGNATION OF "THE RACQUET CLUB" LOCATED AT 2743 NORTH INDIAN CANYON DRIVE (APN#'s 504-040-038, 504-133-001 & 504-133-002), (CASE HSPB #83) (KL):

Member La Voie recused himself from this item stating his residence was within 500 feet of the subject property and left the room.

The chair read the item into the minutes.

Staff member Lyon summarized the staff report.

Member Dixon asked for clarification about a previous request from the owner of the property to not designate the site. (Staff member Lyon clarified that the owner in 2012 requested the board hold off until after completion of their redevelopment project.)

Member Hays opined that the Racquet Club also meets Criteria 4 in the City's definition of a historic site (type, period, method of construction) in that the cottages represent the classic "bungalow court" type of tourist accommodation, common in the 30's and 40's and perhaps the only one designed by Albert Frey. (Staff member Lyon stated the Board could make that one of their findings if it so chooses.)

Member Marsh inquired why the period of significance didn't extend to 1961 when one of the Frey Cottages was renovated and expanded for Schiff (Lyon clarified that the JAG report placed the Schiff house as 1960 but the Board could choose to adjust that date in its findings).

Chair Johns opened the public hearing.

Owners JUDY DLUGACZ and CLAIRE LUCAS noted they bought the Racquet Club because of their love of the Racquet Club and want to redevelop it in a way that pays homage to the significance of the place. Ms. Lucas noted that contrary to the staff report, the owner has not denied access to the site. She stated the property has changed significantly from the time the 2004 JAG report was written. She noted that contrary to the report, the owners have performed ongoing maintenance at the site.

Ms. Dlugacz noted it was very difficult to find a development partner who would invest in the project to the extent the owners desired. She opined that the Racquet Club has been seriously damaged over time. She noted there had been 10 to 15 efforts to put together a joint venture partner to redevelop the site, but none have worked out. She asked that the board not make it more difficult for the site to be redeveloped.

Member Dixon asked what the owners had done to keep the site maintained. (Ms. Lucas noted Ms. Suzie Kuzner, their property manager, meets monthly with the City's code enforcement officer, Nadine Feiger, to discuss repainting graffiti, keeping it secure, etc.)

TOM TANG of CRM-Tech, consultant to the property owner, summarized his report dated October 9, 2017 noting there had been significant changes to the site since the 2004 JAG report was written. He noted the last tennis court was permitted in 1969, outside the proposed period of significance. His conclusion was that the buildings on the site had been significantly compromised and have lost their historic integrity.

SUZIE KUZNER, property manager for the owner, clarified the maintenance activities that the current owners have undertaken (graffiti, overgrowth of weeds, break-ins, etc.).

Member Dixon asked about changes in the site since the 2004 survey (Ms. Lucas clarified that the demolition had occurred prior to their purchase in 2011).

Ms. Lucas noted it had been difficult to find an appropriate development partner.

Member Burkett asked the owners their opinion of how historic designation would hamper development or sale. (Ms. Lucas noted historic designation represents uncertainty to some developers.)

Member Burkett opined that historic designation could only apply to certain structures and not the entire site (staff member Lyon clarified that the site receives historic designation, but that delineating contributing and non-contributing elements clarifies what an owner/developer can modify). (Ms. Lucas opined that designation of the entire site would "handcuff" a developer, and that photos and plaques could be used to pay homage to the site.)

Member Marsh asked whether the owner had read Staff Lyon's email of May 17th on constraints and opportunities, and noted Class 1 designation is not a hindrance but creates incentives. (Ms. Lucas acknowledged the memo and said recreating the site to what it was in 2004 is financially unfeasible.)

Chair Johns asked that since there was no current historic designation since the owner purchased the site, why has there been a problem finding a viable developer? (Ms. Dlugacz said they have not found a developer who would partner with them to do the work; and opined that historic designation would make it harder to find a development partner.)

Member Marsh noted 17 years have passed and adjacent property owners have suffered with code enforcement issues on the site that have not been addressed.

SIDNEY WILLIAMS noted it is irrefutable that the site is historic and that better marketing would entice preservation-minded developers.

DONNA CHABAN stated the project should move forward whether the historic designation occurs or not.

JIM GAZAN, opined that tourists have great appreciation for the history of Palm Springs and the owners' marketing and financing of the proposed redevelopment may be inadequate given the complexity of the project.

PHILIP EDELSON, opined the Racquet Club is the most iconic property in Palm Springs and the condition of the site reflects "demolition by neglect" and supports the proposed historic designation.

JUDY DEERTRACK, compared the Taos Pueblo historic designation to the Racquet Club, noting the living cultural designation and association with the film industry is the significance of the site. She noted historic designation only scares off conventional or unqualified developers. She suggested the City's Economic Development Department could assist in the redevelopment of the site.

JADE NELSON, representing the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation expressed support for historic designation. He also spoke on behalf of himself in support of historic designation. The Racquet Club is significant because it put Palm Springs on the map and its sensitive redevelopment incorporating the remaining parts of the Racquet Club could contribute to the City's current renaissance.

DEBRA HOVEL, expressed support for historic designation and asked how the City could assist the owners to save and redevelop the site in a historically significant way.

FRANK TYSEN, spoke in support of historic designation and sensitive redevelopment and the City's Economic Development should play a supportive role.

Ms. Dluglacz asserted they have done extensive marketing from a historic perspective. She repeated her opinion that historic designation would be an impediment to redevelopment. Ms. Lucas invited the Board to visit the site and noted the report was seriously flawed.

Member Burkett suggested the owners visit La Serena Villas, which was in worse condition than the Racquet Club and with a Class 1 designation was masterfully restored.

Ms. Lucas suggested if a designation was to proceed that it be only on specific buildings and that HSPB review be waived.

Seeing no further speakers, the Chair closed public comment.

Member Hays noted the site has extensive historic significance to so many people in Palm Springs. He cited an example of a similar project that was in worse shape that was redeveloped and formed a catalyst for nearby redevelopment and feels the site is absolutely restorable.

Member Dixon noted the importance of the appeal of Palm Springs including its history to a younger demographic ("millenials") and saving the Racquet Club is essential.

Member Burkett noted he will be supporting the designation.

Member Dixon emphasized the City Council should create a program to support and redevelop some of the more difficult sites like this.

Chair Johns inquired of staff whether the HSPB had purview over the new buildings at La Serena Villas (staff member Lyon stated he believes the board did review the proposed new buildings). Mr. Johns asked staff for further clarification on site designation versus designation of individual buildings. (staff member Lyon explained historic designation applies to parcels associated with "the site", and that the identification of contributing versus non-contributing elements is the means for the HSPB to evaluate proposed alterations without encumbering the entire site.)

Member Hays mentioned historic easements that could be placed on parcels as an incentive similar to the Mills Act. He also pointed out that the board has been supportive of significant redevelopment on historic sites such as the Orchid Tree.

Member Dixon asked clarification on the review process on historic sites.

Chair Johns noted Orchid Tree and La Serena Villas are good examples of similar properties with historic designation that have or are in process of being substantially redeveloped.

The board discussed whether to include the tennis court as contributing. (Staff member Lyon explained the board could further define or condition it, or extend the period of significance to 1969.)

ACTION: M/S/C (Marsh / Dixon) to approve 7-0, based on the testimony at today's hearing and that of the May 9th 2017 hearing, to recommend that the City Council designate the Racquet Club as a Class 1 historic site based on the findings outlined in the staff report and draft resolution HSPB #83, with the addition of making the finding that it also meets the definition of a historic site as defined under Criterion 4 (type, period, method of construction) of Municipal Code Section 8.05.020 recognizing the Albert Frey cottages as a modified form of bungalow court and clarifying the period of significance from the 1930's through the 1960's, recognizing the Schiff Residence renovation and the tennis court.

3. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** (none.)

4. **NEW BUSINESS:**

4.A. **ROYAL HAWAIIAN ESTATES HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION REQUESTING APPROVAL OF LANDSCAPE REVISIONS AT THE ROYAL HAWAIIAN**

**ESTATES (RHE) HISTORIC DISTRICT (CASE 3.0182 MAA / HSPB 72 / HD-2)
(KL)**

Staff member Lyon summarized the staff report.

Chair Johns asked about reconfiguration of the planters around the swimming pools at RHE.

CINDRA STOLKS representing the RHE and PAUL ORTEGA, landscape designer for the project, further clarified the details of the project, noting the distinction between common areas and "common area exclusive use" areas that individual homeowners may augment with plant choices available from a proposed plant palette that would be approved by the HOA.

Member Dixon suggested the RHE consider butterfly weed that attracts butterflies. (Mr. Ortega noted it was not a plant that could be verified as part of the original plant palette.)

Member Hays asked for clarification on the drawings of what is existing and proposed, remaining and to be replaced. (Mr. Ortega clarified.)

Chair Johns noted 3 years ago the RHE received their historic district marker.

Member La Voie commended the applicant on an excellent plan, showing existing, proposed, and the design aesthetic

M/S/C (La Voie / Dixon) to approve (7-0).

5. DISCUSSION:

**5.A. WELLWOOD MURRAY MEMORIAL LIBRARY COURTYARD – PROGRESS UPDATE
/ APPOINT NEW SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS (Staff).**

Staff member Lyon summarized the project and the staff report and noted the item on today's agenda was for information only.

Mr. Lyon explained the concept for the courtyard was to be a quiet, contemplative place and the need for security when the courtyard is not open to the public.

Member Dixon volunteered to join the subcommittee of Johns and Burkett to review the material further.

Staff member Franco Gianfranco will notify the subcommittee of upcoming review meetings.

Mr. La Voie asked what was the genesis of the "bubble" design (holes) in the gates. (Staff member Lyon explained it's a design detail proposed by the designer.)

5.B. 2018 NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION MONTH SYMPOSIUM EVENT (Burkett, Marsh, Kiser).

Member Burkett summarized the subcommittee's activities to date.

5.C. ANNUAL HSPB WORK PLAN PRIORITIES (Staff / Board).

Staff member Lyon passed out an outline for the Board to bring priorities back for discussion at the November meeting.

5.D. STATUS UPDATE ON VARIOUS PROJECTS:

- 1. CORNELIA WHITE RESIDENCE (HSPB #4) (Staff/Councilmember Roberts).**

Rescheduled for next meeting.

- 2. CITYWIDE HISTORIC RESOURCE REPORT ADOPTION BY CITY COUNCIL (Staff).**

Director Fagg noted the City had been requested to expand the survey, copies of the addenda were provided to the board.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS:

Member La Voie discussed the criteria the board is required consider in making a Class 1 historic site recommendation, noting that economics, a future proposed building, City assistance, and other factors are not within the range of what the Board needs to consider in making a recommendation to City Council.

Member Hays noted the Frey exhibit at the Architecture & Design Center and that tickets for the One PS house tour were still available.

STAFF COMMENTS:

Director Fagg noted the Tahquitz Plaza signage was revised at Planning Commission to be two smaller signs rather than one larger size. Sign was also not directly affixed to the bldg. so was not relevant to bring back to HSPB, as it did not impact the historic resource of the building.

Demolition letter to City Council draft was passed out for comment by Director Fagg.

Downtown Park design will tentatively be scheduled for the October 18 City Council. Board members are encouraged to attend and participate. Chair Johns noted the board's recommendations on naming of the park and incorporation of the gates from the Desert Inn, formerly on the site.

ADJOURNMENT: The Historic Site Preservation Board adjourned at 12:16 to its regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, November 14, 2017, at 9:00 A.M, in the Large Conference Room at City Hall.

Flinn Fagg, AICP
Director of Planning Services

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