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News of the valley

Staff

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Developer says six stories isn't tall at all

Developer John Wessman says his biggest challenge in developing the Desert Fashion Plaza are those who want to limit downtown buildings to three stories.

Wessman said if a proposed height initiative is approved by voters, his plans to tear down the Fashion Plaza and build a three- to six-story lifestyle center with retail and residential units won't work. Currently a petition is being circulated to place the initiative on possibly the November ballot.

At that point, he said he would be forced to possibly tear down only a small portion of the Desert Fashion Plaza and lease up the stores, something that will not help revitalize a downtown that has struggled for years as the monolithic Fashion Plaza sits virtually empty.

Besides the proposed height, another controversial part of the plan includes tearing down the Town & Country Center, where Zeldaz is located. Preservationists say the building, designed in 1946, should be saved instead of being razed for a new street connecting Indian Canyon Drive to the Palm Springs Art Museum.

Wessman said the museum has struggled for a few years and if the Desert Fashion Plaza isn't redeveloped with a new road, the museum might have to be moved down valley.

Conceptual plans by Wessman Development Co. include:

Mixed-use development with retail on the bottom and residential units on top.

Razing the mall and the Town & Country Center across the street, where dance club Zeldaz is.

A new street, connecting with the Palm Springs Art Museum.

Four or five buildings up to six stories high.

2,000 parking spaces.

Between 940 and 1,100 residential units costing \$300,000 to \$2.5 million.

About 250,000 square feet of retail. Some shops might include Williams-Sonoma, Pottery Barn, Barnes and Noble or Borders, Bristol Farms or Whole Foods Market and Tommy Bahama.

Are John Wessman's plans to build 6-story buildings in downtown Palm Springs a tall order?

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