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T-REX’S BIG ADVENTURE



Following the death this week of Paul Reubens, the actor known for playing Pee-wee Herman, Mr. Rex of the Cabazon Dinosaurs features a fresh coat of paint Wednesday in tribute to the actor. The 1985 film "Pee-wee's Big Adventure" features the character seeing the dinosaurs. **Story, Page 3B.** TAYA GRAY/THE DESERT SUN

Suspects plead not guilty in 2018 killing of jiu-jitsu instructor in Cathedral City

CITY NEWS SERVICE

Two men suspected in the 2018 fatal shooting of a jiu-jitsu instructor in Cathedral City pleaded not guilty to murder Wednesday.

Troy Walter Edmund, 44, and Kipko Griffin, 48, also denied prosecutors' contention that they lay in wait for the victim, a "special circumstance" allegation that could make the men eligible for the death penalty.

Edmund also pleaded not guilty to two gun charges.

Detectives worked numerous leads in the March 28, 2018, killing of Ramon Diaz. But it wasn't until the



Diaz

department's detective bureau got a lead in June 2023 that they were able to identify Edmund and Griffin as the suspects, according to Investigative Commander Rick Sanchez of the Cathedral City Police Department.

Griffin was arrested last week while Edmund was already behind bars on unrelated charges.

"I want to thank the local police for not giving up on this case. So many people have been needing closure on Professor Diaz's murder," UFC Hall of Famer Cub

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Council seeks changes to plan for apartments in La Quinta

Developer to revise 252-unit complex before council votes

Tom Coulter Palm Springs Desert Sun | USA TODAY NETWORK

The fate of a contested 252-unit apartment complex proposed along a main thoroughfare of La Quinta will remain up in the air for several more months.

Amid strong pushback from many neighboring residents, the city council opted Tuesday to send the proposal back to the planning commission, while requesting more changes to the developer's plans for the northeast corner of Washington Street and Avenue 50.

The council asked for building plans without any three-story structures, given many residents' complaints about impacts on mountain views, as well as changes to the proposal's architecture and perimeter designs. The developer signaled it's open to nixing the three-story buildings.

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SPLASH HOUSE 2023

Founder reflects on 10 years, says fans are 'better than ever'

Brian Blueskye

Palm Springs Desert Sun | USA TODAY NETWORK

A lot can happen in a decade. But Palm Springs resident Tyler McLean's dance music festival Splash House gets better with age.

"It's a great feeling to still love what we're doing and (be) so invested that it continues to thrive," McLean said. "It doesn't feel like it's slowing down, and we haven't tapped the full potential of it either. It feels like there's a lot of things we want to do (and) improve on, and the fan base is better than ever."

The Palm Springs pool party/music festival is celebrating its 10th anniversary this summer, and McLean, its founder, said the event's prominence speaks to the popularity of Palm Springs as a tourist destination over the past decade. That prominence has allowed Splash House to

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Apartment

Continued from Page 1A

Earlier, the city’s planning commis- sion declined to endorse most of the pro- ject, following two lengthy meetings in recent months. However, the commis- sion will now get another chance to re- view the project, likely no sooner than October.

Known as La Quinta Village Apart- ments, the project initially included 282 units, but the developer, Costa Mesa- based Irwin Partners Architects, revised the plan after residents raised concerns about its impacts on traffic, mountain views, parking and more at a commis- sion meeting in March. After that meet- ing, the developer resubmitted their pro- posal with fewer apartments, fewer three-story buildings and a revised traf- fic study.

Residents who spoke Tuesday largely maintained the same concerns, with a vast majority of speakers opposing the project. Members of the council, mean- while, were less worried about the ef- fects on traffic and safety, but they raised questions about whether approving the complex would amount to “kicking the can” down the road on the city’s affor- dable housing mandates from the state.

Most apartments at the complex would be sold at market-rate prices, while 74 units would be available at “moderate” rates, or a monthly rent of \$2,079 for a one-bedroom space and \$2,339 for two bedrooms, as set by state formulas. The project does not allocate any units for people with low incomes.

The La Quinta Village Apartments would include covered parking, a club- house, a pool, a spa, barbeque areas, a putting course, a pickleball court and a dog park for its residents.

The 14-acre corner site was previous- ly zoned for a senior community, known as “La Paloma,” which was set to include individual, assisted living and memory care units. Plans for that 208-unit com- munity were first approved by the city in 2004, but economic challenges eventu- ally caused the project to fall through.

As part of the La Quinta Village pro- posal, the council was also being asked to amend the city’s general plan by revis- ing its Housing Element, a state-man- dated plan for the city to address its housing needs. The city’s current Hous- ing Element identifies the site for 280 low-income units, so approving the cur- rent proposal would force the city to identify a new spot for potential affor- dable housing.

Irwin Partners identified a roughly 12- acre site at the northeast corner of Washington Street and Fred Waring Drive as an alternative for potential af- fordable housing, but the council has not made a decision.

The developers also offered a few in- centives as part of the project, telling the



The La Quinta city council is considering plans to build a 252-unit apartment complex on this empty lot at the corner of Avenue 50, left, and Washington Street in La Quinta, seen Tuesday. JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN

city they would double the capacity of Imperial Irrigation District’s nearby electrical substation that serves the sur- rounding community.

Plenty of residents showed up at the meeting Tuesday to urge the council to reject the project. While a study found the project “would not significantly im- pact” nearby traffic, several residents pushed back.

Resident Thomas Emison said cars typically go 60-plus mph coming down Washington Street, and he worried about the project causing dangerous U- turns for people coming southbound to access the complex. Project officials said Tuesday they plan to widen Avenue 50 to include a new bike lane and a new traffic lane to relieve some congestion.

As a resident of Saguaro Road, just north of the site, Emison also said the project setbacks would result in restrict- ed backyard views for him and his neigh- bors, criticizing the garages planned along the northern property line. The de- veloper later said they were open to re- moving the garages from the site plans altogether.

Several residents also took issue with the project’s proximity to multiple schools and activity centers. The site is just west of Harry Truman Elementary School and La Quinta Middle STEM Academy, as well as a Boys and Girls Club and several sports fields.

Keith Meyer, representing the HOA for Duna La Quinta, caddy-corner from the project site, said his group was op- posed to the project, and he encouraged the council to look at affordable housing

“only in the areas that have much better access, roadways, commercial availabil- ity, transit and jobs.”

“We’ve already talked about plopping three-story buildings down in a residen- tial, golf resort neighborhood,” Meyer said. “The council is making a decision here that will impact this corridor in the community forever.”

Only a couple people who spoke were on board with the project.

George Christopher, who has served on Imperial Irrigation District’s advisory committee, said upgrading the power grid in La Quinta is critical. After doing multiple drives through the area, he was also skeptical that anyone accessing the apartment complex would need to go near the schools along Avenue 50.

After more than an hour of public comments, the council weighed in with mixed feelings on the project. Mayor Linda Evans said she was “not a fan of kicking the can” by reassigning the low- income housing designation to the site at Highway 111 and Fred Waring Drive, which she added probably won’t be de- veloped soon.

Responding to concerns about the traffic impacts, she added, “We have to absorb those. That’s why we build inter- sections.”

The mayor asked the developers why they didn’t submit plans for low-income housing from the start. Vincent Whittaker, an attorney representing the devel- oper, said such a project “doesn’t fit that area,” while other officials said they would have to entirely rework their funding to accommodate such a change.

Councilmember Kathleen Fitzpatrick said the project would probably offer housing to the local workforce, and she stressed the need for more options. A 2021 report from the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership found that 84% of La Quinta’s workforce comes from other cities in the valley.

“I know personally that there are peo- ple who have been looking for apart- ments in this area who have not been able to find apartments in this area,” Fitzpatrick said.

A couple councilmembers also took issues with comments from a few resi- dents who raised crime as a potential concern related to the new develop- ment, saying those points felt discrimi- natory.

“We have a lot of affordable housing projects in the city and don’t have those kinds of crime waves in this community,” councilmember John Peña said. “We all lived in apartments, whether you were in college or school or starting off before you start your family and buy your own.”

While the project’s fate is still to be determined, some council members in- dicated they want it to go forward, if pos- sible.

“I would like you to pay attention to the things that were said by us, by our community, and let’s see if we can move it forward,” Fitzpatrick told the develop- er.

Tom Coulter covers the cities of Palm Desert, La Quinta, Rancho Mirage and Indian Wells. Reach him at thomas.coulter@desertsun.com.



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