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## Effort to make Royal Poinciana Way a historic district fails



Historical Society of Palm Beach County

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Royal Poinciana Way as it looked in 1937, when it was called Main Street



Meghan McCarthy/Palm Beach Daily News

A motion to make Royal Poinciana Way into a historic district was defeated Tuesday. Member William Feldkamp said it was a 'really lousy time' to discuss the matter on the day before the Town Council is scheduled to vote on Testa's plan to create an overlay on the street.

By **DAVID ROGERS**

DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

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A motion by outgoing member William Cooley to have the Landmarks Preservation Commission consider making Royal Poinciana Way a historic district failed Tuesday.

The vote took place at the end of the board's monthly meeting, a day before the Town Council prepares to vote on changes to its comprehensive land-use plan and on a zoning overlay that would allow broader development of the Testa family property on Royal Poinciana Way. The family owns the vacant gas station parcel there, along with its restaurant and the shops in Via Testa.

"The one thing that stands out in my mind is that, at the very least, this is a really lousy time to be discussing it," member William Feldkamp said. "Not so much because of the lack of audience but this really is, what, one day before the Town Council considers the Testa application."

Rachel Lorentzen and Cooley voted for the motion, while chairman Edward "Ted" Cooney, Feldkamp, Wallace Rogers and William Strawbridge voted against it. Lorentzen and Rogers, alternate members, typically do not vote, but commissioner Leslie Diver didn't attend the meeting while members Jacqueline Albarran and Dudley Moore left prior to the vote.

Chairman Cooney said the language in the overlay proposal coming before the Town Council today for first reading would exclude landmark properties. John Page, director of the Planning, Zoning and Building Department, concurred.

"As proposed, no property on that block would be able to utilize any of the overlay regulations if the [street] were landmarked," Page said.

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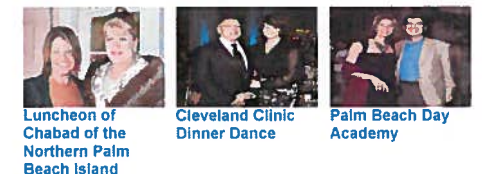
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Former Town Councilwoman Susan Markin and Seaspray Avenue resident Anne Pepper argued for consideration of designating Royal Poinciana Way a historic district. In December, the two asked that the board put the matter on its agenda.

"The Landmarks Commission could spearhead a vision for this area that encourages the preservation" of more than a dozen structures that the state suggested would contribute to a historic district, Pepper said, citing a 2007 survey conducted by the Division of Historical Resources.

"There is no other location in Palm Beach that is more historic than Royal Poinciana Way. It is our first main street, and it represents the beginning of our town," Markin said.

Alexander Ives, executive director of the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach, said it would be wonderful for the town to consider more historic districts. The Town Hall Square and Phipps Plaza are two existing historic districts in Palm Beach.

"The tradition has been to go house by house and maybe it's time we started looking, as Mrs. Markin said, in a broader view," Ives said.

But Ives urged members to be against any action that would suggest the board can be used as "an anti-development tool."

"That's not what landmarking is for. That's not the idea behind this commission," Ives said.

Royal Poinciana Way property owner Les Evans said many of the buildings on Royal Poinciana Way are not in good shape and are not historically significant. "There's nothing historic there. And the only thing this will do is impede redevelopment," Evans said. Worth Avenue might be a better historic district, Evans said.

In 2009, preservation consultant Jane Day told the landmarks board that, although charming, many of the buildings on Royal Poinciana Way are not significant from an architectural perspective. On Tuesday, Day said the issue of making the street a historic district is something she's struggled with since she became a consultant for the town in 1992.

Towns as diverse as Fort Pierce and Homestead have found value in creating historic districts for their main streets, Day said. In those instances, business owners worked with local, state and federal governments to rehabilitate their historic main streets, she said. Having properties with architectural integrity is key, Day said.

"I have to admit there were enough changes over time that I didn't believe that that street met the criteria for districting or, for many of them, as an individually listed landmark because of all the changes that had happened over time," Day said.

The consultant noted that when she recommended Pendleton Avenue as a street worthy of designation as a historic district, the Town Council voted against that move. At that time, 1999, the council was highly reluctant to landmark properties when owners objected. The council asked the board to landmark properties one at a time, she said.

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