

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: September 14, 2023

PREPARED BY: Erica Powell, Management Analyst

REQUEST: APPOINTMENT OF LORI DAVIS AS THE PALM DESERT POET
LAUREATE

RECOMMENDATION:

Appoint Lori Davis as Palm Desert's inaugural Poet Laureate.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

A City Poet Laureate is an honorary position and can uplift the artistic achievement of the City and local community through active participation in ceremonial, educational, and community activities. At its meeting on March 9, 2023, the City Council unanimously requested the creation of this ceremonial position and appointed Mayor Pro Tem Quintanilla and Councilmember Harnik to a subcommittee to provide staff with direction on a process for selection of a Poet Laureate.

On April 10, 2023, City staff met with the subcommittee to establish and agree upon the following:

Eligibility Requirements: Applicants were required to be Palm Desert residents for a minimum of at least one (1) year and remain a primary resident during the appointment period. Have a demonstrated connection and/or commitment to the literary community in Palm Desert. The applicants must have an understanding of the City's culture and history with a strong interest in serving and being a representative of the City.

Term: will be one (1) year, beginning October 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024.

Duties:

- Create a City of Palm Desert poem
- Participation in the following City events:
 - City's 50th Anniversary Celebration on November 18, 2023
 - Veterans' Day observed event, November 11, 2023
 - State of the City, date TBD in 2024
 - Independence Day Celebration, July 4, 2024
- Mentor a junior poet
- Propose and execute at least one (1) community outreach event

Honorarium: Annual honorarium of \$3,500, paid quarterly, and mileage reimbursement to and from events will be paid in addition to this honorarium. Invoices for these expenses must be submitted within thirty (30) days.

The Poet Laureate must follow a Code of Conduct and receive Ethics Training upon onboarding.

Creation of a Jury Panel: Members were to include writers, educators, librarians, advocates from the creative community, City Council member/s and Cultural Arts Committee member/s. The jury was responsible for reviewing and selecting a Poet Laureate. The volunteer jury panel consisted of:

- Jack Ahrens, College of the Desert
- Tod Goldberg, UCR Palm Desert Center
- Liz Hauer, Chair of the Cultural Arts Committee
- Karen Kraut, McCallum Theatre Education Program
- Agam Patel, UCR Palm Desert Center
- Mayor Pro Tem Karina Quintanilla, City of Palm Desert
- Joan Tyler, Interim Head Librarian, Palm Desert Library/County of Riverside

On May 10, 2023, City staff released the Call for Nominations via press release and ongoing social media posts. Media included:

- PSTribune.com – May 10
- Gene Nichols Morning Show Interview with City staff, Alpha Media – May 11
- NBC Palm Springs - May 12
- Facebook - May 10, 12, 16 June 1, 26, 28
- Twitter - May 12, June 2, June 27

On June 30, 2023, after the Call for Nominations closed, the jury panel conducted a blind round review of the eight (8) applications received. The top three (3) applicants were invited to an in-person interview and performances with the jury panel at UCR Palm Desert Center on August 10, 2023. After careful consideration, the Jury Panel unanimously recommended the appointment of Lori Davis as Palm Desert's Poet Laureate as she is well qualified to serve in this role and has met the eligibility requirements set forth by the subcommittee. Her resume is attached to this report, but highlights include:

- She is a long-time, 27-year resident of Palm Desert.
- She has an established her career as a writer and an English teacher.
- She holds an MFA in Creative Writing and has been active in local poetry events.

Strategic Plan:

The creation of a Poet Laureate position contributes to the Arts and Culture Mini-Vision contained in the Strategic Plan, which states:

“Arts and culture give a community its soul. Palm Desert is the cultural core of the Coachella Valley. Cultural tourism drives economic growth in Palm Desert. The community is host to internationally recognized cultural events that bring significant economic benefits to the city. Palm Desert is a leader in arts education, ensuring a well-rounded population that possesses high levels of creativity and critical thinking skills.”

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The costs associated with appointing a Poet Laureate are an annual honorarium of \$3,500 paid quarterly (\$875/quarter) and mileage reimbursement submitted within thirty (30) days of travel. Both the honorarium and mileage shall be in an amount not to exceed \$5,000. Funds are available in the Public Art budget – Account No. 4364650-4309200.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Call for Nominations 2023/24 Poet Laureate
2. Lori Davis' Application