

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: September 12, 2024

PREPARED BY: Carlos Flores, AICP, Principal Planner

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION TO APPROVE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW BREEZE
BLOCK GARDEN WALL EXHIBIT AT 72861 EL PASEO

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve construction of a new breeze block garden wall exhibit at a city-owned property at 72861 El Paseo.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

The proposal is a request by the Historical Society of Palm Desert for consideration to construct a breeze block garden wall exhibit in the front yard of the historic Palm Desert Fire Control Station (Fire Station) located at 72861 El Paseo (APN: 640-220-052), a local, city-owned historic landmark.

On May 13, 2010, the Palm Desert City Council adopted Resolution No. 2010-27 to declare the Fire Station a local historic landmark, per the recommendation of the Cultural Resources Preservation Committee (CRPC) (Attachment 1). The Fire Station site is currently owned by the City of Palm Desert and leased to the Historical Society of Palm Desert (Applicant), which maintains its headquarters and archival center at the project site. The Fire Station was deemed eligible for designation as it “reflects distinctive examples of community planning or significant development patterns, including those associated with different eras of settlement and growth, agriculture, or transportation.”

Per the terms of the lease agreement, the proposed project requires approval by the City Council as a city-owned property.

Cultural Resources Preservation Committee:

Local historic landmarks require application and approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for new construction, pursuant to Palm Desert Municipal Code Section 29.60.020. On August 28, 2024, the CRPC considered a Certificate of Appropriateness for this project at a noticed public hearing and granted approval with a 4-0 vote. Staff did not receive any comments from surrounding property owners.

Project Description:

The Applicant is proposing a breeze block garden wall exhibit in the front yard of the Fire Station that would include the following:

- 11 breeze block wall segments spread throughout existing landscaped front yard
- Staggered wall heights ranging from minimum of 24” to a maximum of 42”
- Staggered wall widths ranging from 16” to a maximum of 48”

72861 El Paseo Breeze Block Garden Wall Exhibit

- Breeze blocks will be unpainted gray blocks, with custom and variety of design, and include a solid gray cap, as shown in Exhibit 1 below

Exhibit 1 – Breeze Block Design



The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties is summarized under Section 29.60.080. The proposed scope of work is compatible, as the construction will not require alteration of the existing historic resource on the site, and the modifications are detached wall structures. No historical materials or distinctive features will be removed from the site. The proposed work does not detract from the existing resource. The building was deemed eligible for designation as it “reflects distinctive examples of community planning or significant development patterns, including those associated with different eras of settlement and growth, agriculture, or transportation.” The proposed walls are compatible as it is incorporated into the existing front yard landscaped area and does not alter the site from its original designation. The proposed work is visible from publicly accessible areas but would not detract from the existing design.

Legal Review:

This report has been reviewed by the City Attorney’s office.

Environment Review:

Staff has reviewed the project in accordance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and finds that the project is Categorically Exempt from environmental review pursuant to Section 15303 – New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures (Class 3) of the State CEQA Guidelines. Class 3 applies to projects involving the construction of a small structure. The project includes walls, which is typically a ministerial action that is statutorily exempt from CEQA, however because it requires a discretionary certificate of appropriateness due to the historic designation, CEQA applies. Pursuant to Section 15300.2 of the CEQA Guidelines, a Class 3 exception may not be used if the project falls into any exceptions:

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1. *Cumulative impact: The project will not result in a cumulative impact due to the minor nature of the walls which comply with the Zoning Ordinance.*
2. *Significant Effect: There are no unusual environmental circumstances applicable to the property and there is no reasonable possibility that construction of the proposed walls will result in a significant impact on the environment.*
3. *Scenic Highways: The project site is not located within proximity to any officially designated state Scenic Highway. The nearest officially designated scenic highway is Highway 74 located approximately 670 feet east of the site, but the proposed walls would not be visible from said site.*
4. *Hazardous Waste Site: The project site has not been identified as a hazardous waste site per maps and databases provided by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC).*
5. *Historical Resources: The project site contains a local landmark. The walls are detached from the historic structure and minor in nature. Therefore, there is no potential for the project to cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of the historical resource.*

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact to the General Fund with this action. The Applicant would secure all materials and labor and complete all of the construction for the project.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Fire Station Landmark Designation Approval
2. Project Plans