

**CULTURAL RESOURCES PRESERVATION COMMITTEE  
CITY OF PALM DESERT  
STAFF REPORT**

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MEETING DATE: September 25, 2024

PREPARED BY: Nick Melloni, AICP, Principal Planner

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A RECOMMENDATION TO THE CITY COUNCIL TO APPROVE THE DESIGNATION OF THE AVONDALE GOLF CLUB CLUBHOUSE LOCATED AT 75800 AVONDALE DRIVE AS A HISTORIC LANDMARK (CRPC24-0001)

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

Make findings and recommend approval to the Palm Desert City Council to adopt a resolution to designate the existing clubhouse located at 75800 Avondale Drive on Assessor's Parcel Number 626-030-043 a local historic landmark pursuant to Criterion D and F of Palm Desert Municipal Code Section 29.40.010.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The item for consideration is a request by a property owner, Avondale Golf Club, to designate the Avondale Golf Club clubhouse located at 75800 Avondale Drive as a historic landmark. The Avondale Golf Club is an existing residential development located north of County Club Drive and bound by Eldorado Drive to the east and Frank Sinatra Drive to the north. The community was originally developed in the early 1970s and was originally known as the Del Safari Country Club.

This item was previously brought before the Cultural Resources Preservation Committee (CRPC) on June 26, 2024. At that time, the landmark request included the Avondale golf course. Staff recommended approval of the landmark request for the clubhouse and denial of the request for the golf club. The CRPC continued the item to ensure that Avondale obtained property owner authorization from members of the golf club and to bifurcate the application requests for the golf club and the clubhouse nominations. The applicant has provided a letter indicating they obtained authorization in accordance with the by-laws of the Avondale Golf Club to proceed with a nomination request for the Avondale Golf Club clubhouse structure only. The applicant has withdrawn their request to nominate the golf course.

The clubhouse is a modern-style, three-story, circular structure, which was originally designed by architect John Franklin Galbraith in 1969 and completed in March 1970. A landmark nomination and survey (survey), dated August 2024, was prepared to assess the eligibility for the site features as a local historic landmark.

The Cultural Resources Preservation Committee (CRPC) is asked to make a recommendation of approval to the City Council to formally designate the clubhouse as a local historic landmark.

Staff recommends the CRPC make findings that the clubhouse is eligible for historic designation under criteria D and F per Palm Desert Municipal Code (PDMC) Section 29.40.010 and make a recommendation of approval to the City Council.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Avondale Golf Club (Avondale) is a residential community located at the northeast corner of Country Club Drive and Eldorado Drive. The community is approximately 220 to 240 acres and is generally bound by Frank Sinatra Drive to the north, Eldorado Drive to the east, Country Club Drive to the south, and the Desert Falls Country Club residential community to the west. The existing golf course occupies approximately 124 acres of the community with the clubhouse located near the central area of the site. The golf course perimeter is lined with mature trees which adjoin existing single-family residential dwellings and private streets located within the community boundaries.

Originally known as “Del Safari Country Club”, the development of the community initially began in 1969, approximately four (4) years before City of Palm Desert incorporation in 1973. The original developers were a business partnership of Burton “Burt” Graham, and George Glickley of Chicago, Illinois. They envisioned the development of a country club with eighteen holes and residential units along the fairways, similar to other country club developments in the Coachella Valley at the time. Development of the golf course and clubhouse was completed by early 1970 before any residential units were constructed. The developers originally envisioned up to 250 residential units would be constructed along the perimeter of the golf course however only a small segment of these units were completed. Due to financial issues, the development was repossessed by a bank and auctioned to William “Bill” Stephens, who, in 1986 renamed the club “Avondale Golf Club”. In 1990 the club was sold to a consortium of its members.

**Figure 1 – Views of the Clubhouse in early 1970 shortly after completion**



**ANALYSIS:**

Pursuant to PDMC Title 29, Chapter 29.20, a “landmark” means any cultural resource representative of the historical, archaeological, cultural, architectural, community, aesthetic or artistic heritage of the City that is designated pursuant to this title or is a designated National Historic Landmark, California Historical Landmark or Riverside County Historical Landmark. A request for designation can be initiated by any person, organization, or entity; however, may only be acted upon with the written consent of the property owner. The property owner, Avondale Golf Club, and its president have submitted a written request for the landmark designation application.

A request for a cultural resource to be designated as a landmark by the City Council may be initiated upon completion of a survey and recommendation of the Committee. The Committee must determine that the structure retains integrity, meaning the structure contains most of the aspects that closely relate to the resource’s significance, including location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Eligibility for designation is based on any of the following criteria established under PDMC Section 29.40.010:

- A. Is associated with an event or events that have made a significant contribution to broad patterns of history; or
- B. Is associated with the lives of persons significant in the past; or
- C. Embodies distinctive characteristics, or is one of the few remaining examples of a style, type, period or method of construction or possesses high artistic value; or
- D. Represents the work of a master builder, designer, or architect; or
- E. Is an archaeological, paleontological, botanical, geological, topographical, ecological, or geographical resource that has yielded or has the potential to yield important information in history or prehistory; or
- F. Reflects distinctive examples of community planning or significant development patterns, including those associated with different eras of settlement and growth, agriculture, or transportation. (Ord. 1168, 2008)

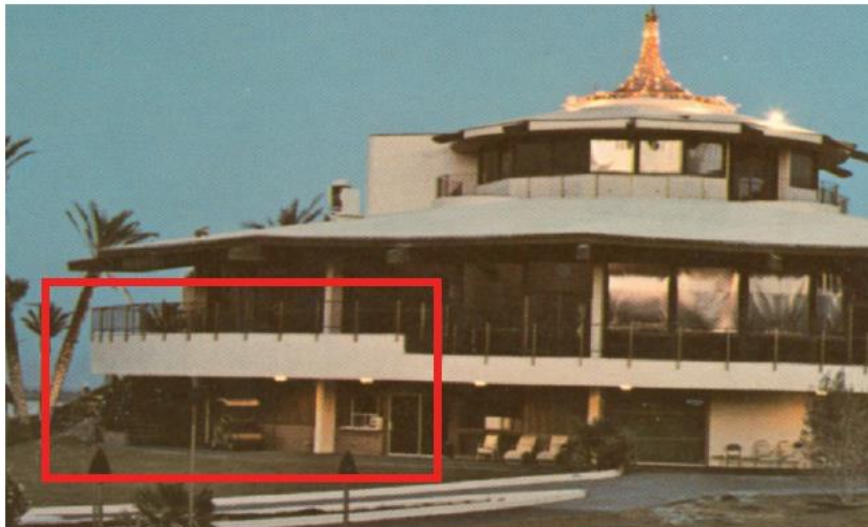
**Clubhouse Analysis**

The clubhouse is an eclectic modern style, three-story building which sits atop, and is partially set into the grade of an artificial hill near the central portion of the Avondale Community which is used as a dining room for the club with a bar, lounge and event space. The distinguishing characteristics of the building include its circular building footprint, and distinctive tiered roof structure which includes deep roof overhangs with exposed rafters, large windows, and large wraparound second-story balcony overlooking the golf course to the west. American architect, John Franklin Galbraith, designed the structure in 1969, and it was completed in March 1970. The eastern façade serves as its primary entrance to the building with a distinctive Porte cochere leading from Avondale Drive. The entry is at the top of the hill which leads into the second level of the structure. There is also a faux turret design element which once supported a decorative spire.

Along the north side of the building entrance, its circular shape becomes apparent as the form transitions to a large circular stucco wall with windows that project out from the face of the building. The entire western side of the building is completely circular in shape. The first floor of the structure is partially set into the grade of the hill, features a small patio addition on the north side, and is surrounded by paved areas used for golf cart parking. The second story of the western elevation features a balcony that wraps around the building to provide views over the golf course (see Figure 3 below). The southern elevation includes a portion of the wrap-around balcony and an enclosed service area to screen utilities for the building.

To the east of the clubhouse, there is a non-contributing accessory clubhouse building which is rectangular and constructed from fluted concrete masonry units with a simple shed roof featuring the red shingle roof used on the clubhouse building.

**Figure 3 – Views of the Western Elevation in 1970 (above) and present day (below)**



### Clubhouse Alterations and Character Defining Elements

Several alterations to the clubhouse have occurred over the years including:

- Entry Way – Modifications of the port cochere by removing a portion of the structure and overhang and lowering of the structure ceiling.
- Patio Structure Addition – On the north side of the building a patio cover structure was added to create an extended patio overhang.
- Decorative Spires – Originally, the primary roof and secondary turret featured decorative metal spires which were removed in the 1990s.
- Roof Structure – Protruding Beams. The roof design was extended so the overhangs fully extend over the protruding beams.
- Roof Structure – Material and Color – The roof material was changed from an original white roofing material to a light red shingle roof. Additionally, the white color of the original structure was painted beige.

The character defining elements of the structure include:

General:

- Curved/circular footprint of the building
- Protruding beams and roof overhang
- Stucco cladding throughout
- CMU blocks on first level
- Existing roofline and volume

Entryway/Eastern Façade:

- Sculptural, fluted entryway structure
- Two cutouts within porte cochere
- Placement of window on northern (tall) column of porte cochere
- Faux turret structure
- General volume and facade of northern wall of porte cochere
- Placement of five windows on curved wall (proceeding north) of two pairs of windows and one window in center
- Stucco lips encasing five windows

Western Façade

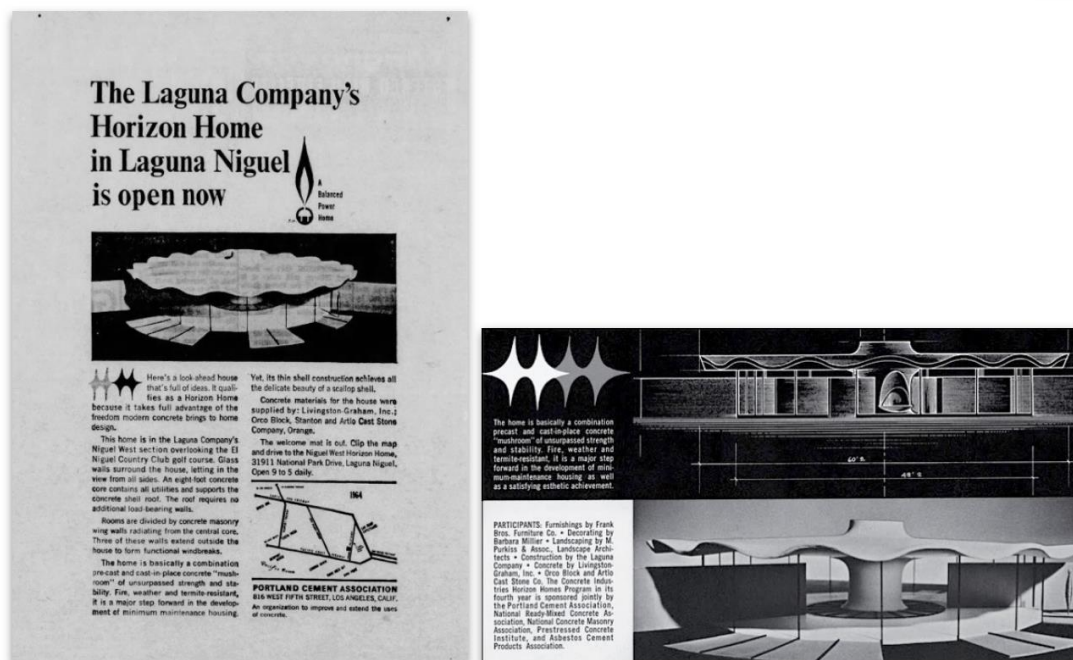
- Three-story configuration with wraparound balconies on the second and third floors
- Uninterrupted, sweeping curved facade
- Wooden beams and roof overhang
- Metal balcony railing on all balconies
- Placement of floor-to-ceiling windows
- Third-story bar room protruding from top of structure

Though alterations to the structure have occurred, the clubhouse retains most of its character defining elements and integrity to convey its cultural significance.

Architect - John Franklin Galbraith

The clubhouse architect, John Franklin Galbraith, AIA (1923-2012) was a prolific architect who was active in Southern California between 1949 and 1969. Galbraith's work is known for its distinctive mid-century modern styling which was applied to single-family homes, places of worship, and multi-family apartments. One of his more notable works is the Horizon Home (1964) in Laguna Niguel which features a circular footprint and roof shape (pictured below), a design element seen in the Del Safari Project. Del Safari is the only country-club-style project by Galbraith and is his last documented work as an architect.

**Figure 4 – Horizon Home (1964) designed by Galbraith**



Figures 10 and 11. The Horizon Home as designed by Galbraith and engineered by George Bissell, completed in 1964 to much fanfare.

Significance - Clubhouse

Pursuant to the requirements of PDMC 29.40.010, the structure is eligible for designation based on the following criterion:

Criterion D - Represents the work of a master builder, designer or architect

*The clubhouse is one of the final and more inventive works of John F. Galbraith A.I.A. (1923-2012), a modernist Pasadena architect who designed a wide variety of post-war modern buildings. His buildings were recognized, published, and epitomized larger trends in Modernism while rising above typical post-war Modernism. The Avondale clubhouse represents a later phase of his work which began to turn away from the rigidity of previous Modernism and embraced other styles and more sculptural qualities*

Criterion F – Reflects distinctive examples of community planning or significant development patterns, including those associated with different eras of settlement and growth, agriculture, or transportation.

*The Avondale clubhouse was built amidst a distinct era of country club development in the late 1960s and 70s along with projects such as Marrakesh, Mission Hills, and Ironwood. These developments featured golf courses surrounded by residences and centered around a clubhouse. In addition, this particular phase of golf course development was noted for its themed environments. The Avondale clubhouse epitomizes this trend of development between 1958 and 1977 with its architectural clubhouse.*

#### Public Input

Pursuant to the requirements of PDMC Section 25.40.060, a ten-day (10) notice of this hearing was posted in The Desert Sun on September 13, 2024, and mailed to all property owners within a 300-foot radius of the subject properties. At the time of preparation of this report, no comments were received.

#### Environmental Review

Designation of the clubhouse as a local landmark is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15060(c)(2), the general exemption rule, of the CEQA Guidelines as the proposed project will not result in any foreseeable indirect change in the environment. The project is also exempt under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(3) as the activity is not considered a project as defined under Guidelines Section 15378 and has no potential for resulting in any indirect or direct physical changes to the environment.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

There are no anticipated financial impacts by this action.

#### **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Avondale Golf Club Nomination (August 2024)
2. Property Owner Authorization
3. Avondale Golf Club Landmark Application
4. Minutes Cultural Resources Preservation Committee June 26, 2024
5. Public Hearing Notice