

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

MEETING DATE: February 26, 2025

PREPARED BY: Carlos Flores, AICP, Principal Planner

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A RECOMMENDATION TO THE CITY COUNCIL TO DESIGNATE SANDPIPER CIRCLE 4 CONDOMINIUMS AS A HISTORIC LANDMARK DISTRICT (CRPC24-0005)

RECOMMENDATION:

Make findings and recommend the City of Palm Desert City Council adopt a resolution to designate the Sandpiper Condominiums Circle 4, located south of El Paseo Drive on Assessor's Parcel Numbers 640-230-002 through 640-230-027, as a historic district pursuant to Criteria A and E in Palm Desert Municipal Code Section 29.50.010 (CRPC24-0005)

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

The project is a request by Kerry Stern (Applicant) on behalf of Sandpiper to designate the existing Circle 4 Condominiums (Circle 4) located south of El Paseo, west of Highway 74, east of Edgehill Way, and North of Pitahaya Street, encompassing Assessors Parcel Numbers 640-230-002 through 640-230-025 and 640-230-027, as a historic district. A total of eleven (11) out of 17 Circles within Sandpiper have received a historical designation, as summarized in Table 1 below. The Circles are ordered by the approximate order in which the building clusters were built.

Table 1 – Sandpiper Historic Designation Summary

| Sandpiper Circle Number | Designation Date |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Circle 1 | 4/14/2022 |
| Circle 2 | 2/10/2022 |
| Circle 3 | 2/10/2022 |
| Circles 5-10 | 3/23/2017 |
| Circles 11 & 12 | 5/23/2013 |

The Cultural Resources Preservation Committee (CRPC) is asked to make a recommendation of approval to the City Council to formally designate a historic district, pursuant to PDMC Chapter 29.50 Historic Districts.

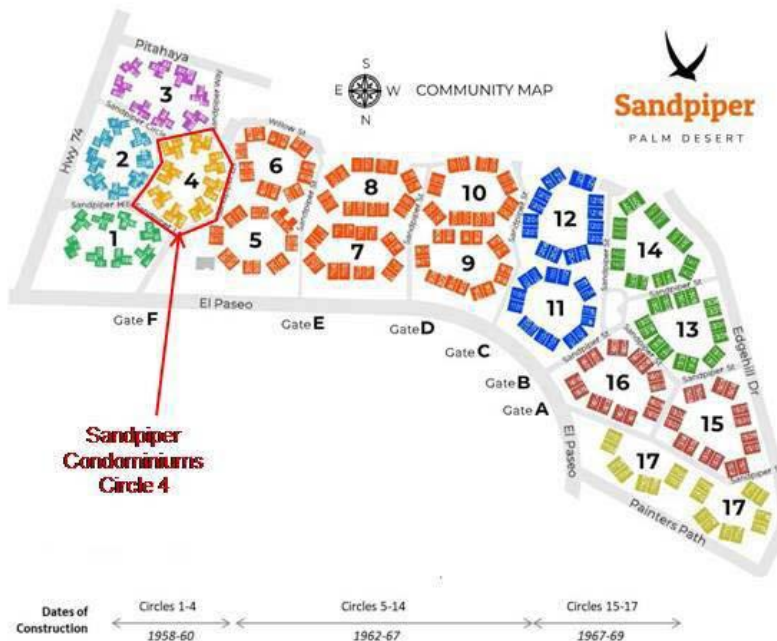
Project Description:

The Applicant has submitted their nomination application (Attachment 1) which provides a detailed analysis on the proposed designation, complete with justification, historical documentation, findings, and photographs. A summary of the nomination application is below:

Definition

The Sandpiper condominium complex (Complex) was developed with a total of 16 full circles and two half circles, originally designed and constructed from 1958-1960 (See Figure 1 below). Circle 4 was completed around 1960 and was meant to represent the start of a western expansion. The entirety of the Complex was constructed with a singular architectural vision where nearly every Circle was built simultaneously with similar materials and design.

Figure 1 – Sandpiper Community



Boundary

The main reasoning behind the proposal is to include Circle 4 to the rest of the approved historic districts within the Complex, as summarized in Table 1. Circle 4 was built with a similar vision, architecture, and materials as the rest of the Complex. The nomination includes the common area, a large pool with a poolside community that is consistent amongst each individual circle within the Complex, and surrounding landscaping. Detached carports were added in the 1970s after the development’s 1960 completion and are not a part of this application.

Physical Description

Circle 4 is a part of the first Circles (1-4) that were originally built and are the only circles with triplexes. Circle 4 has horizontal lines, flat roofs, expansive amounts of glass, clerestory windows, and other characterizing features of mid-century modern architecture that is consistent with the rest of the Complex and with architecture practices of Palm Desert in its time period.

Theme

A condominium complex with a “pin-wheel” green belt configuration is a critical theme of Circle 4 and the rest of the Complex, which is a concept derived from 19th century British planner Ebenezer Howard. Each Circle has a pool as a central hub and is built to emulate a car-free environment with buildings fronting onto a green belt, and streets running along the perimeters instead of interiors, as shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 – Aerial View Circle 4



Significance

As noted in the application, Palm Desert is known as a center of important mid-century architecture, and Circle 4 represents an excellent intact example of American Modernist architecture. Sandpiper Condominium Circle 4, completed in 1960 by the Los Angeles-based architectural firm of Palmer & Krisel, exhibits numerous stylistic markers that place them directly in the historic context of Palm Desert’s Modern Period.

ANALYSIS:

Pursuant to PDMC 29.20.010 Definitions, a “historic geographic district” means “*any geographic area that possesses a concentration, linkage, or continuity of historic or cultural resources of which fifty percent or more of the total retain integrity and which have been designated as a historic district by the city council or is listed in a county, state or federal register.*” The request for designation of any historic district may be initiated by any person, organization or entity and is subsequently referred to the CRPC for their recommendation to the City Council for a final determination. Per PDMC 29.50.010, a district may be designated if it is determined that the district represents a significant and distinguishable entity that at the local level does any of the following:

- A. Exemplifies or reflects special elements of cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, architectural, or natural history; or
- B. Is identified with persons or events significant in history; or

- C. Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; or
- D. Represents the work of master builders, designers, or architects; or
- E. Reflects distinctive examples of community planning or significant development patterns, including those associated with different eras of settlement and growth, agricultural, or transportation; or
- F. Conveys a sense of historic and architectural cohesiveness through its design, setting, materials, workmanship or associations; or
- G. 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 pre-history.

All of the previously designated Circles within Sandpiper noted in Table 1 were designated based on Criteria A and Criteria E listed above. The Applicant has provided justification for approval based off each Criteria listed above, which the CRPC can consider. Staff is recommending approval of the proposed designation based off Criteria A and Criteria E,. A summary of analysis for Criteria A and Criteria E is listed below:

Criteria A:

Applicant's Response:

Sandpiper Circle 4 exemplifies excellent examples of Mid-Century Modern aesthetics, engineering and architecture.

The project exemplifies special elements of culture, social, economic, aesthetic, and architecture, as outlined in the Application. Circle 4 represents an excellent intact example of American Modernist architecture. Sandpiper Condominium Circle 4, completed in 1960 by the Los Angeles-based architectural firm of Palmer & Krisel, exhibits numerous stylistic markers that place them directly in the historic context of Palm Desert's Modern Period. Circle 4 has horizontal lines, flat roofs, expansive amounts of glass, clerestory windows, and other characterizing features of mid-century modern architecture that is consistent with the rest of the Complex. The Circle layout, complete with a centralized pool and a "pin-wheel" green belt configuration is a critical theme of Circle 4 and the rest of the Complex, which is a concept derived from 19th century British planner Ebenezer Howard.

As noted, 11 other Circles within Sandpiper have previously been approved as historic districts based off Criteria A, and Circle #4 has all of the same architectural and design components as those previously approved.

Criteria E:

Applicant's Response:

The concept of a condominium, where the ownership of a building or property is a shared entity is a relatively modern phenomenon, although communal living is not. The first "condominium" was built in the United States in 1960 in Salt Lake City, Utah. The concept grew in popularity and by the end of the decade condominiums were present in all 50 states.

The site planning at Sandpiper is a pin-wheel configuration around a central hub (in this case the pool) and its greenbelt concept draws from 19th century British planner Ebenezer Howard's Garden City. Howard's concept envisioned a world where the best of city and rural life is combined to create a utopian environment. He espoused the need for green belts, in an effort to reduce congestion and to create a healthy environment in which to live. Palmer & Krisel expands this idea by creating an environment free from cars, a popular symbol of urban distress. Their site planning re-examines not only urban but suburban living. Palmer & Krisel deftly sited all vehicular roads and carports on the perimeter of each circle. Their buildings turn their "fronts" away from the street. The "front porch" no longer faces the street but is moved to look onto the green belt. In this, the pool becomes the "new street scape": the new social gathering place for the complex.

Beginning in 1956 with their first Palm Springs tract, Twin Palms, Krisel, the firm's lead designer for desert houses, and Alexander Homes, the home developer used variation of orientation and roofline, integration of indoor and outdoor living, and careful use of standardized elements to make modernist design affordable enabling an affordable 2nd home for the escape from the city. This popularized this post-and-beam architectural style in the Coachella Valley. Alexander houses and similar homes feature low-pitched roofs, wide eaves, open-beamed ceilings, and floor-to-ceiling windows. The houses facilitated indoor-outdoor living in the desert with sheltered patios and pools and in some cases breezeways clerestory windows improved air circulation while bringing light into the house. The interior designs included flexible room dividers to adapt the floor plan to the owners' preferences.

The response provided by the Applicant provides satisfactory evidence towards meeting the requirements of Criteria E. Additionally, 11 other Circles within Sandpiper have previously been approved as historic districts based off Criteria E, and Circle #4 has all of the same components as those previously approved.

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 February 14, 2025, 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.

Environment Review:

Designation of a historic district 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 as has no potential for resulting in any indirect or direct physical changes to the environment.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Sandpiper Circle #4 Nomination Application
2. Public Hearing Notice