

**ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW COMMISSION  
CITY OF PALM DESERT  
STAFF REPORT**

---

MEETING DATE: March 25, 2025

PREPARED BY: Kenny Taylor, Associate Planner

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION TO APPROVE A DESIGN REVIEW FOR A FAÇADE MODIFICATION TO AN EXISTING RETAIL STOREFRONT FOR WHITE HOUSE BLACK MARKET AT 73061 EL PASEO SUITES 6&7.

---

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends the Architectural Review Commission find that the project satisfies all findings for design review approval and approves the project.

Alternatively, the ARC may choose to approve the project with conditions, or deny the project as presented.

**BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:**

Executive Summary:

- Case No.: MISC25-0004

**Project Summary:**

White House Black Market, Applicant, is requesting design review approval for a façade modification to a storefront located at 73-061 El Paseo, Suites 6&7 (Assessor's Parcel Number 627-231-018). The request is to modify an existing vacant storefront building to establish a new retail tenant space for the "White House Black Market" (WHBM) business.

**A. Property Description**

The project location is an existing 3,041 square-foot (sf), ground-floor suite at The Shops on El Paseo commercial building located on the south side of El Paseo between Highway 74 and Ocotillo Drive. The development was originally approved as a 4,050 square foot expansion to the existing El Paseo Collection multitenant commercial building and was approved by the City Council on July 7, 1987, per Resolution No. 87-65 (Case. No. PP87-22 and VAR 87-1). This development is characterized by retail and commercial storefronts fronting El Paseo with unique or branded architectural treatments contained within architectural neutral piers throughout the development.

Since its original construction formerly known as “Adobe Plaza” the project remodel includes prominent towers at the corners at Highway 74 and Ocotillo unifying a parapet wall, based off building permit records.

The current building storefront has undergone minor façade revisions approved at a staff level, including color changes of the awnings, revising the stone veneer at the corner, and revising the corner entry doors to the existing building storefront walls previously known as retail establishments (Burberry and Summer Colony Living). The proposed façade modification for WHBM utilizes a simple modern design with a single architectural coating, using a textured stucco siding finish to provide texture and interest. The existing pilasters, storefront window placement, and roof tile will remain. Other storefronts within the existing building utilize unique storefronts featuring a mix of design elements and building materials, unified by a continuous building envelope, consistent with the Downtown Design Guidelines. As mentioned in Finding A below, the proposed modification complies with the design principles of the General Plan and Chapter 25.20 Downtown Design Guidelines. The project proposes to remove architectural details, a projected architectural element, and different materials with varying colors from the existing façade and replace it with stucco façade treatment that is one color, awnings, and minimal black trim tile installed at the base of the façade.

B. Zoning, General Plan and Adjacent Uses

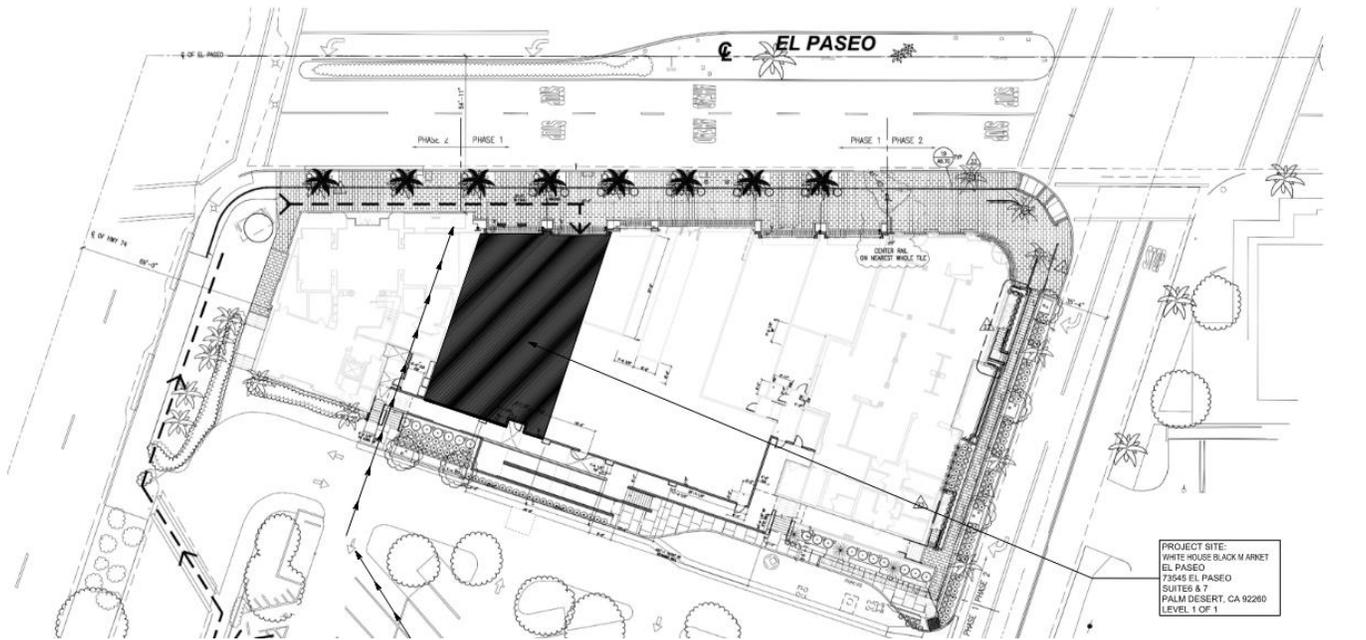
**Table 1 – Adjacent Land Use and Designations**

|                     | <b>Existing Uses</b>   | <b>General Plan</b>  | <b>Zoning</b>          |
|---------------------|--|----------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Project Site</b> | Vacant Building – Previously (Burberry & Summer Colony Living) | City Center/Downtown | Downtown District      |
| <b>North</b>        | Mixed Use – Retail/Restaurants                                 | City Center/Downtown | Downtown District      |
| <b>South</b>        | Parking Lot  | City Center/Downtown | Downtown Edge District |
| <b>East</b>         | Mixed Use – Retail/Restaurants                                 | City Center/Downtown | Downtown District      |
| <b>West</b>         | Mixed Use – Retail/Restaurants                                 | City Center/Downtown | Downtown District      |

C. Project Description

The project Applicant is requesting design review approval for a façade remodel to an existing storefront located at 73061 The Shops on El Paseo, Suites 6 & 7. The request is for WHBM, a retail store specializing in women’s clothing apparel, which will occupy the entire space. The storefront has El Paseo frontage located at The Shops on El Paseo.

Figure 1 – Site Plan



The applicant is proposing to modify an existing building to accommodate the needs of a new retail clothing store. The project will include a storefront façade improvement, including the following:

- Removal of two (2) existing arched storefront metal awnings.
- Removal of existing upper arched glass storefront windows.
- Remove the existing metal glossed storefront window trim.
- New Benjamin Moore Decorator's White CC-20, flat painting to match the existing paint exterior.
- Installation of two canvas Sunbrella black overhang awnings.
- Installation of storefront powder coat metal trim.
- Installation of storefront black tile trim.

The main entry for the WHBM will be located in the front façade facing El Paseo. The existing upper arched sign boxes will be removed and replaced with stucco siding matching the façade. Additionally, the existing façade entry tiles will be removed and replaced with stucco wall siding to match the treatment on the front building façade while retaining the existing pilaster.



No structural modifications are proposed to the exterior of the existing building. No modifications are proposed to the existing roof tile, nor the rear or side elevations. Interior modifications to the floor plan are shown for reference. Exterior signage is shown on the plan set but is not included in the scope of this Design Review and will be subject to staff review for conformance with The Shops on El Paseo Signage Criteria.

The following analysis provides a breakdown of Chapter 25.20 Downtown Design Guidelines that are recommended for the building design as well as the development requirements of the Municipal Code that apply to the project. Items include context, architectural character, massing, articulation, exterior building materials, open space, landscaping, and parking.

Chapter 25.20 Downtown Design Guidelines emphasizes the importance of avoiding corporate and box-like architecture, encouraging the inclusion of design elements such as wall recessions, large window displays, awnings, canopies, bulkheads, arcades, galleries, stoops, and similar architectural details to add visual interest and to store front buildings along El Paseo. While the proposed modification excels in its efforts for window placement, it only minimally complies with the guidelines' emphasis on avoiding corporate architecture and adding visual interest to the building design.

### **Zoning Ordinance Summary:**

The subject property is zoned Downtown District (D), which allows retail stores as a permitted use. The project meets all development standards within the Downtown District.

### Findings

Revisions to storefront facades are subject to review and approval of a design review by the ARC pursuant to Palm Desert Municipal Code (PDMC) Section 25.68.020 (A)(2). Findings for ARC decisions of design review applications are listed under Palm Desert PDMC Section 25.68.040 as follows:

- A. That the proposed development conforms to any legally adopted development standards.

*The existing structure conforms to the applicable development standards set forth in the PDMC Chapter 25.20 Downtown Design Guidelines for the Downtown District. Chapter 25.20 Downtown Design Guideline emphasizes the importance of avoiding corporate and box-like architecture, encouraging the inclusion of design elements such as wall recessions, large window displays, awnings, canopies, bulkheads, arcades, galleries, stoops, and similar architectural details to add visual interest to storefront buildings along El Paseo. The proposed façade minimally complies with design guidelines. As presented the project will remove existing architectural details, projected architectural element, and different materials with varying colors, from the existing façade and replace it with stucco façade treatment that is one color, awnings, and minimal black trim tile installed at the base of the façade resulting in a flat monotonous form. While the project minimally complies with design guidelines it*

*seemingly removes architectural interest and uniqueness from the existing façade and modifies it to a static form and color. The project meets the findings as presented but the façade could be enhanced to better align with the intentions of the established development standards.*

- B. That the design and location of the proposed development and its relationship to neighboring existing or proposed developments and traffic is such that it will not impair the desirability of investment or occupation in the neighborhood; and that it will not unreasonably interfere with the use and enjoyment of neighboring existing or proposed developments and that will not create traffic hazards or congestion.

*The proposed façade modification is compatible with surrounding developments and will not create additional traffic which would impair investment in the neighborhood. The existing building provides for future tenants to propose unique or branded storefronts which utilize a mix of exterior building materials with an existing neutral pier system. The proposed use is a retail use that will replace a former retail use, therefore, a substantial increase in traffic generation is not anticipated.*

- C. That the design and location of the proposed development is in keeping with the character of the surrounding neighborhood and is not detrimental to the harmonious, orderly, and attractive development contemplated by this title and the General Plan of the City.

*The proposed facade is generally compatible with the development pattern along El Paseo as it provides a retail storefront within a walkable pedestrian-oriented district. The land use designation is City Center/Downtown in the General Plan, which promotes high-intensity mixed-use development anchored by civic, cultural, and retail activity. This district's intended built form and character consist of buildings at or near the sidewalk that provide easy access to storefronts. Staff can affirmatively make this finding but raise concerns about the character of the design as it relates to existing development in the vicinity. The applicant proposes the removal of existing metal eyebrow canopies, buildout of the existing sign box area, removal of the decorative stone veneer, and removal of aluminum accent columns. The resulting design alters the building proportions, resulting in a flat, monotonous form. There is no design sensitivity to the existing context of the structure or surrounding development.*

- D. That the design and location of the proposed development would provide a desirable environment for its occupants, as well as for its neighbors, and that is aesthetically good composition, materials, textures, and colors.

*The proposed façade would preserve the existing storefront windows, wall stucco, entry doors, and tile roof. The remainder of the façade would be modified to remove minor architectural elements and cover with white textured stucco. Other storefronts within the existing building utilize unique storefronts featuring a mix of design elements and building materials, unified by a continuous building envelope, consistent with the*

*Chapter 25.20 Downtown Design Guidelines. The Downtown District does not establish specific design parameters, so staff can affirmatively make this finding. Staff does raise concerns about the simplicity and box-like architecture which lacks articulation provided in the proposed design as detailed below:*

*Building Articulation: Architectural elements are intended to enliven building facades by arranging forms, materials, textures, and components to avoid monotony. Buildout of the sign band would result in a flat “boxy” face, exaggerated by applying white stucco on the entire building surface. The Applicant proposes an extension of the vertical expansion joints on the front of the building to break up the existing recessed stone veneer frontage with the addition of black awnings, and no additional elements are proposed to add visual interest to the building exterior. In comparison to other storefronts within The Shops on El Paseo, which utilize a mix of design elements (i.e., articulation, awnings, etc.) and materials (i.e., stucco, wood, metal, etc.) to create depth and interest, the proposed façade has a monotonous form that is inconsistent with nearby storefronts.*

- E. That the proposed use conforms to all the requirements of the zone in which it is located and all other applicable requirements.

*The proposed project conforms with legally adopted development standards set forth by the Downtown District (D) zoning district. As proposed, no substantial changes would impact the site or its surroundings, consistent with the Downtown (D.O.) District, Title 25 Zoning Code, and General Plan regulations.*

- F. The overall development of the land shall be designed to ensure the protection of public health, safety, and general welfare.

*The proposed modifications are limited to the exterior building façade. These modifications do not alter the land use, accessibility, or facilities on site. In addition, the overall building design does not present any adverse impacts to the protection of public health, safety, and general welfare.*

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- 1. Project Plans