

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: April 10, 2025

PREPARED BY: Nick Melloni, AICP, Principal Planner

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE PALM DESERT UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT CODE AND
DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT REPORT

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive an update on the Palm Desert Unified Development Code and the Development Regulations Assessment Report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City of Palm Desert is working with Clarion Associates to assist in updating its development regulations and creating a new Unified Development Code (UDC), which will integrate and update or replace various existing City ordinances relating to zoning (Title 25), subdivision (Title 26), grading regulations (Title 27), and related topics such as landscaping and outdoor lighting. The UDC project intends to modernize regulations to better accomplish the City's long-term goals and vision. The new UDC will provide updated standards to implement the City's adopted and future plans, and to provide a strong foundation for future development in Palm Desert.

The study session will present the Development Regulations Assessment Report ("assessment report"), which is intended to serve as a roadmap for the Palm Desert UDC moving forward. This assessment report is a narrative which outlines five (5) key focus areas which serve as overall goals for the project:

1. Streamline the Development Review Process;
2. Enhance the Development Standards;
3. Fine-Tune the Zoning Districts;
4. Clarify the Land Use Regulations; and
5. Create a More User-Friendly Code

The assessment report is intended to provide a methodical assessment of the current development regulations and provides recommendations for how these regulations should be improved to address the five focus areas. The report is also accompanied by a Detailed Review of Current Ordinances, which analyzes the code in a chapter-by-chapter format. City staff will work with Clarion Associates, with the guidance of the City Council Subcommittee and a Technical Advisory Committee to begin drafting the annotated outline of the project, followed by drafting of the new Unified Development Code.

BACKGROUND:

On June 27, 2024, the City Council awarded a contract to Clarion Associates to develop a Unified Development Code for the City of Palm Desert (Contract No. C47890).

On September 12, 2024, City staff and Clarion Associates introduced the UDC project by providing an outline of the intent of the project, a timeline, and overview of the project phases and seeking direction on the formation of an Ad Hoc Subcommittee to review public drafts of the various work products throughout the project. The Council directed staff to await the November 2024 election results before forming the subcommittee to ensure continuity between City Council members.

On December 12, 2024, the City Council appointed Mayor Harnik and Councilmember Pradetto to an Ad Hoc Subcommittee on the Unified Development Code.

Between September 2024, and February 2025, the City and Clarion conducted initial outreach for the project which comprised of several meetings to gather stakeholder input by meeting with City staff, City review bodies including the Architectural Review Commission and Planning Commission, members of the development community to assist in identifying Development Code issues and values moving forward. An online survey was also provided for additional feedback. During this time, Clarion and City staff conducted an in-depth review of the City's existing development regulations.

ANALYSIS:

Section 2 of the Draft Regulations Assessment report outlines groups of issues that emerged from Clarion's review of the City's development regulations and initial project outreach. The discussion includes initial recommendations for how development regulations should be improved to address concerns associated with each focus area:

1. Streamline the Development Review Process
 - a. Consolidate and reorganize procedures.
 - b. Clarify the role of the Architectural Review Commission (ARC).
 - c. Provide objective review criteria
 - d. Allow minor modifications to approved requests
 - e. Improve the subdivision procedures

2. Enhance the Development Standards
 - a. Update the grading standards
 - b. Clarify view protection standards
 - c. Modify site design standards
 - d. Strengthen building design standards
 - e. Update Subdivision design standards
 - f. Consider flexible alternatives

3. Fine-Tune the Zoning Districts
 - a. Refine base zoning standards
 - i. Align zoning districts with the General Plan Land Use designations
 - ii. Reorganize zoning district information
 - b. Clean up overlay districts
 - c. Depict all overlay districts on the Zoning Map

- d. Clarify housing overlay district standards
 - e. Retire unused overlay districts.
4. Clarify the Land Use Regulations.
- a. Create a (single) consolidated land use table
 - b. Clean up land uses
 - c. Update use-specific standards.
5. Create a More User-Friendly Code
- a. Consolidate development regulations
 - b. Incorporate graphic elements
 - c. Define all key terms

Next Steps:

Following this session, City staff will work with Clarion and the Ad Hoc Subcommittee to prepare an annotated outline of the code issues and then begin drafting of the new Unified Development Code over the course of the next year.

Legal Review:

This report has been reviewed by the City Attorney's Office.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact to the General Fund with this action.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Development Assessment Report dated April 2025
2. Detailed Review of Current Ordinances dated April 2025
3. Palm Desert Unified Development Code Update Presentation