

# CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

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MEETING DATE: April 24, 2025

PREPARED BY: Carlos Flores, AICP, Principal Planner

SUBJECT: ACCEPT THE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT AND CITY-WIDE  
HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

Accept the Historic Context Statement and City-wide Historic Resource Survey, as presented

## **BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:**

On June 8, 2023, the City Council approved the Cultural Resources Preservation Committee (CRPC) FY 2023-24 Workplan Goals, including the following goal that was also a part of the FY 2024-25 CRPC Workplan:

- Establish a historic resources survey and a City-wide historic context statement.

On June 27, 2024, the City Council awarded a contract (Contract No. C47900) to Architectural Resources Group (“ARG”), a historic preservation planning and architecture firm, to complete a Historic Context Statement (Context Statement) and City-wide Historic Resources Survey (Survey). The contract scope of work tasks include:

- 1) Project kickoff and background review
- 2) Community Engagement
- 3) Drafting of Historic Context Statement
- 4) Reconnaissance Survey
- 5) Public presentation of findings

### **Task 1 and 2: Project kickoff, background review and Community Engagement**

Tasks 1 and 2 of the project involved community outreach, and background research, including a kickoff meeting with the CRPC at its regular meeting of August 28, 2024. On December 10, 2024, City staff and ARG hosted a community outreach meeting to share updates on the project. The event provided residents with an overview of the project, showcased preliminary findings from the team’s research and reconnaissance survey, and introduced the draft historic context statement. Attendees also had the opportunity to provide valuable feedback and ask questions about the survey process. A project page was created on the “Engage Palm Desert” website.

### **Task 3 and 4: Drafting of Historical Context Statement and Survey Findings Document**

ARG has completed a draft Historic Context Statement and Survey Findings Document (Document), attached to this report. The Document serves as a valuable information tool that can assist City staff, the public, and decision makers in understanding, identifying, evaluating, and protecting identified historical resources and guide local preservation planning and land use decisions. While the City and the Historical Society of Palm Desert have developed several well-

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### Historic Context Statement and City-wide Resources Survey

researched lists of known historic properties such as the *2007 History and Tour of Palm Desert Historical Sites*, Palm Desert has not prepared a comprehensive citywide survey. The scope of this project is to establish a citywide historic context statement and conduct a survey of all properties in the city constructed through 1980 (up to 45 years of age by the time of this project's completion in 2025) and preliminarily identify those that appear potentially eligible for local, state, or federal listing.

The Palm Desert Context Statement and Survey are intended to serve as a basis for the identification, evaluation, and documentation of historic resources within Palm Desert's city limits. It is also intended to help inform future land use and planning decisions to ensure that the City's historic, architectural, and cultural resources are duly recognized and appropriately managed.

### Historic Context Statement

Per the Document, a Context Statement's aim is *"to identify and describe broad historical patterns so that one may better ascertain how a community's built environment and cultural climate came to be."*

Six contexts were identified in the Document and within each of these contexts are themes. The six (6) contexts are:

- The Palm Desert Area (Pre-1910)
- Early Development in Palm Desert (1910-1945)
- Palm Desert Planned Community Development (1946-1956)
- Palm Desert Diversified Development (1957-1966)
- Palm Desert Country Clubs and Incorporation (1967-1980)
- Architecture and Design (1910-1980)

### Task 4: Reconnaissance Survey Findings

Per the Document, *"a reconnaissance survey... informs the project team about a city's patterns of development and major and minor physical components, as well as enables a street-by-street look at all of the city's resources at once for effective comparative analysis. The reconnaissance survey provides the basis for the subsequent intensive-level survey. Based upon observations made during reconnaissance, the survey team added individual properties that appeared to be potential resources, as well as cohesive groupings of properties that appeared to be potential historic districts."*

A total of 237 resources were identified in the Survey phase as potentially eligible for designation, as identified in Appendix D, including: 207 individual resources and 30 groupings of resources (potential historic districts).

### Task 5: Public presentation of findings

On March 26, 2025, the Cultural Resources Preservation Committee (CRPC) was presented the Document at its regular meeting. The CRPC recommended that the City Council accept the historic context statement and certify the City-wide Historic Resources Survey. The final action needed for this task and this contract is for City Council to review and accept the Document.

Future Tasks:

Approval of the Document is a critical step for the City to apply for a “Certified Local Government” (CLG) designation. This designation is granted by the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) to local governments who demonstrate a commitment to historic preservation and provides cities with funding opportunities, technical assistance, and streamlines processes.

Approval of the Document would provide a valuable reference guide for City staff, decision makers, and the public for future historic preservation. Properties that apply for landmark designations in the future would be able to utilize the Document as a reference to determine if the property is listed as potentially significant and if the designation fits with the City’s historic context statement. The City could also move forward with an intensive-level survey that provides deeper, more detailed research of properties identified on the reconnaissance survey.

**Legal Review:**

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

**Strategic Plan:**

This project supports Priority 1 of the Palm Desert Strategic Plan by assessing the current cultural landscape of the City and Policy 9.5 of the City’s Environmental Resources Element by encouraging the preservation of historic resources.

**CRPC Recommendation:**

Per Palm Desert Municipal Code Section 29.30.040(B)(1), the CRPC is responsible for certification of survey findings. On March 26, 2025, the CRPC was presented the Document at its regular meeting and recommended that the City Council accept the historic context statement and certify the City-wide Historic Resources Survey.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

Acceptance would conclude the scope of work for Contract No. C47900, which was not to exceed \$82,700.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Historic Context Statement and City-wide Resources Survey Document
  - a. Appendix A Survey Area Map
  - b. Appendix B Chronology Map
  - c. Appendix C Recon Survey Findings Map
  - d. Appendix D Preliminary Property List
  - e. Appendix E Tract Development Summaries