

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: June 12, 2025

PREPARED BY: Carlos Flores, AICP, Interim Deputy Director of Development Services

SUBJECT: RESOLUTION DESIGNATING 73411 WILLOW STREET AS A HISTORIC LANDMARK

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a resolution entitled, "A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA, DESIGNATING AN EXISTING SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSE AT 73411 WILLOW STREET AS A HISTORIC LANDMARK PURSUANT TO CRITERIA C AND F IN PALM DESERT MUNICIPAL CODE SECTION 29.40.010 (ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBERS 630-082-007)."

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

On October 9, 2008, the Palm Desert City Council adopted Ordinance No. 1168, which established procedures for the designation of Historic Districts, as outlined in the Palm Desert Municipal Code (PDMC) Chapter 29.40. Requests for designation of any historic district may be initiated by any person, organization, or entity and require City Council approval upon recommendation of the Cultural Resources Preservation Committee (CRPC).

The proposal is a request by Todd Blake Verwers, AIA (Owner/Applicant), to designate an existing single-family house located at 73411 Willow Street (Property) as a historic landmark, pursuant to Palm Desert Municipal Code (PDMC) Section 29.40.010. The Applicant submitted a Project Application (Attachment 2) that provides a detailed analysis of the Property background, architectural description, alterations, and statement of significance.

Cultural Resources Preservation Committee (CRPC) Recommendation:

Per PDMC Chapter 29.40 Landmarks, the Cultural Resources Preservation Committee (CRPC) shall review a proposed designation at a public hearing and make a recommendation of approval or denial of a landmark designation based on findings in PDMC 29.40.010. At its April 23, 2025, regular meeting, the CRPC made findings pursuant to PDMC Section 29.40.010 under Criteria C and F and approved a recommendation to the Palm Desert City Council to adopt a resolution to designate the Property as a historic landmark.

Property Description/Context

The Property is a 0.35-acre property on Willow Street, a public street. The Property is improved and complete with a one-story, 4 bed/4 bath (including two (2) casitas), 2,799 square foot single-family house (House) that is estimated to have been constructed in 1958. The Property is surrounded by existing single-family homes. The City's Historic Resources Reconnaissance Survey identifies several homes on Willow Street designed and constructed by Patten & Wild as potentially historically significant based on age and architectural style. The House is built with

an “L”-shape design, as shown in Exhibit 2 below. Nearly all living spaces have access to the rear yard and the House provides integration of indoor and outdoor spaces.

Exhibit 1 – Vicinity Map

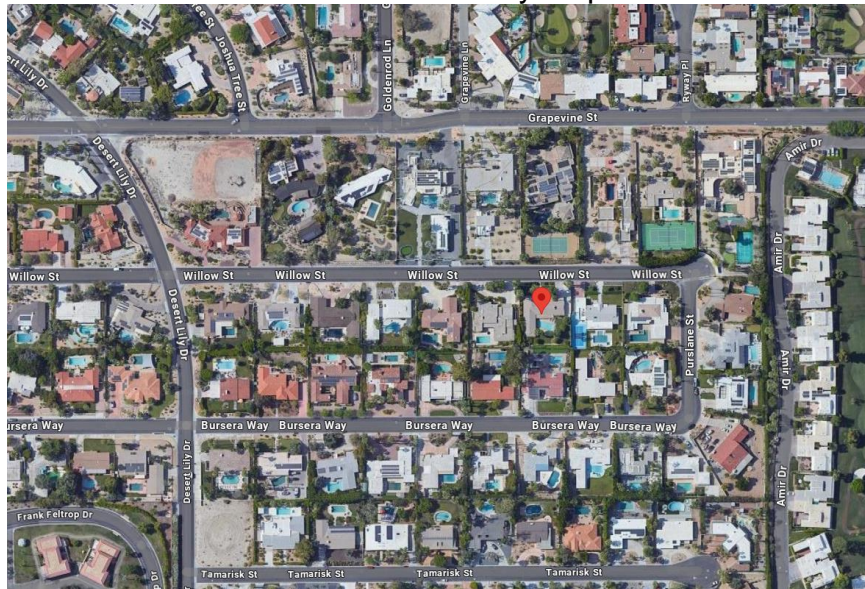
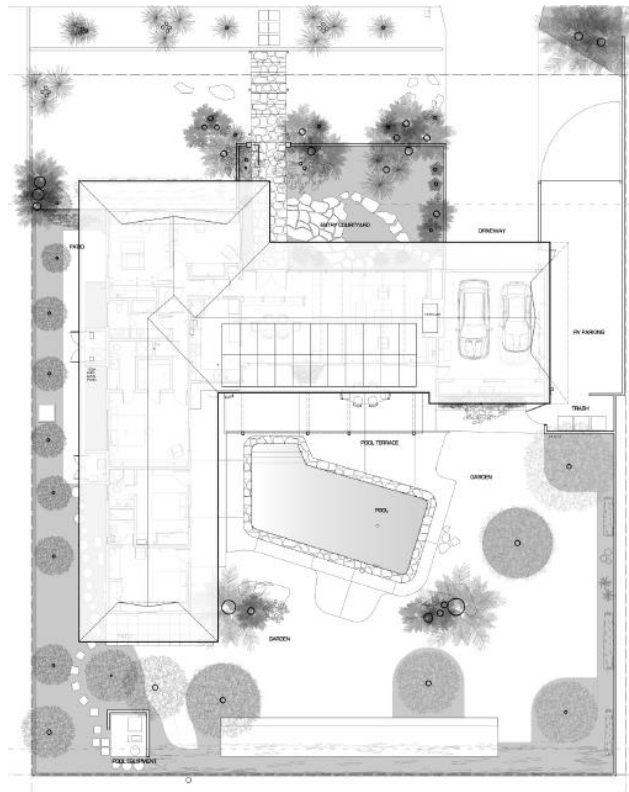


Exhibit 2 – Site Plan



Architectural Description

The House is designed in the modern/mid-century ranch style. It was designed by “Patten & Wild”, a Palm Desert based design-build firm that constructed numerous homes and commercial buildings in the 1950s. Page 22 of the Application provides a biography of “Patten & Wild”, including an overview of their influence in Palm Desert. The Application includes images of an original 1958 brochure marketing the unique aesthetic of the house, including Asian-inspired décor, furniture, and furnishings, most of which have since disappeared, with the exception of the entry door hardware detail and cabinet door pulls. The House includes components typical of the modern/mid-century ranch style, including a hipped, low-sloped roof, deep eaves, and wood siding. Page 8 of the Application provides character-defining features of the exterior and interior in support of the Application, including the roof, deep roof eaves, and window shutters.

Exhibit 3 – View of Home from Willow Street



The Project has a great sense of entry, highlighted by the entry courtyard and original stone steps at the entry. The Home includes “lush landscaping”, per the Application, which includes twenty-one (21) palm trees, fourteen (14) fruit trees, several of which are original palms and fruit trees, and a variety of grass and shrubs in both the front and rear yard. Exhibit 4 provides an aerial view highlighting the trees and overall landscaping.

Exhibit 4 -North Elevation



Figure 3 - NORTH ELEVATION (aerial view)

ANALYSIS

Pursuant to PDMC Title 29, a landmark means any cultural resource representative of the historical, archaeological, cultural, architectural, community aesthetic, or artistic heritage of the City. The City Council must make findings 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 and is eligible based on at least one (1) 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.

The Applicant has provided justification for approval of the landmark designation based on Criteria C and F, for CRPC consideration. Staff is recommending approval of the proposed designation based on Criteria C and F. A summary of the analysis is listed below:

Criteria C:

Applicant response: *The House "is a distinctive example of a unique, custom home in the desert ranch style, and a unique house from the portfolio of Patten & Wild's early projects in Palm Desert. Further, as mentioned above, this home exhibits features which foreshadowed the Desert Modern movement of the decade after its erection, and in this respect this residence was a transitional project for both Patten & Wild and the evolving architectural aesthetic of Palm Desert. While the Asian-inspired detailing and furnishings are arguably largely superficial, even "gimmicky", they reflect Californians' post-war interest in The Orient, not unlike the Polynesian-themed Tiki movement as a subculture and form-driver for midcentury Desert Modern architecture. The pagoda-like corners of the low-slung ranch style roof of the house are clearly a distinctive architectural characteristic, which can only be found on one other house in the neighborhood."*

City staff concurs with the Applicant's response and to supplement this analysis, the City's Historical Resources Reconnaissance Survey identifies houses on Willow Street, including this House, as contributing to a potentially historically significant district.

Criteria F:

Applicant response: The House “*epitomizes the community planning of south Palm Desert, and moreover its tradition for impressive single-family architecture. The Palm Desert Corporation and Shadow Mountain Park Inc. sought out well-designed homes in their subdivisions and the excellence of the Gracious Oriental house reflects this focus. Houses of this era in this neighborhood were generally custom or semi-custom modern designs with considered landscaping and grounds, centered around poolside leisure in close proximity to the historic Shadow Mountain Club, and signaled the trendsetting nature of these neighborhoods. The Gracious Oriental house was and is all of those things.*”

City staff concurs with the Applicant’s response and to supplement this analysis, the City’s Historical Resources Reconnaissance Survey identifies houses on Willow Street, including this House, as contributing to a potentially historically significant district.

Public Input

Pursuant to the requirements of PDMC Section 25.40.060, a 10-day notice of this hearing was posted in the Desert Sun on May 30, 2025, and mailed to all property owners within a five-hundred-foot radius of the subject property. At the time of preparation of this report, no comments have been received.

Legal Review:

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

Environment Review:

Designation of the existing single-family residence as a local historic 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 15060(c)(3); the activity is not considered a project as it has no potential for resulting in any indirect or direct physical changes to the environment.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommended action. As a designated historic landmark, the property owner may apply for a Mills Act contract to receive a reduction in property taxes in exchange for preserving the historic structure. However, this impact will occur at a future time.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft City Council Resolution
2. Project Application
3. Public Hearing Notice