

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: June 26, 2025

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

SUBJECT: APPROVE A GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT FROM SMALL TOWN NEIGHBORHOOD TO NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER AND CHANGE OF ZONE FROM PLANNED RESIDENTIAL TO OFFICE PROFESSIONAL FOR A PROPERTY ON THE NORTHWEST CORNER OF FRED WARING AND FAIRHAVEN

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Hold a public hearing and introduce an Ordinance entitled, "AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA, APPROVING A GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT FROM SMALL TOWN NEIGHBORHOOD TO NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER FOR A 2.21 ACRE PROPERTY ON THE NORTHWEST CORNER OF FRED WARING DRIVE AND FAIRHAVEN AVENUE AND MAKING A FINDING OF EXEMPTION UNDER CEQA. (ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER 640-040-016)."
2. Adopt a Resolution entitled, "A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA, APPROVING A CHANGE OF ZONE FROM PLANNED RESIDENTIAL TO OFFICE PROFESSIONAL FOR A 2.21 ACRE PROPERTY ON THE NORTHWEST CORNER OF FRED WARING DRIVE AND FAIRHAVEN AVENUE AND MAKING A FINDING OF EXEMPTION UNDER CEQA. (ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER 640-040-016)."

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

A 2.21-acre property located on the northwest corner of Fred Waring Drive and Fairhaven Avenue ("Project Site") is currently improved with one building (a vacant but former church), parking, and landscaping. The Project Site has a vacant church building that is approximated to have been built in 1968 and has not changed uses since original construction and operation. The building was identified as a potential historic resource in the City's Historic Reconnaissance Survey. The rest of the Project Site is improved with existing parking, landscaping, and vehicular access, including a shared vehicular and parking agreement with the property directly to the west.

On January 13, 2000, the Palm Desert City Council (Council) adopted Resolution No. 00-4, 00-5, and Ordinance No. 931 for a 10.3-acre property directly north of the Project Site, which approved the following:

- General Plan Amendment and Change of Zone to add a Senior Overlay
- Precise Plan to construct a 250-unit retirement community

On December 14, 2000, the Council adopted Resolution 00-140, 00-141, and Ordinance No. 975 for a 2.74-acre property directly west of the Project Site, on the north side of Fred Waring, 330 feet west of Fairhaven drive, which approved the following:

- Change of Zone from Planned Residential – 7 to Office Professional
- General Plan Amendment from Medium Density Residential to Office Professional
- Construction of a 64,521 square foot, two-story office complex, including shared access to the Project Site.

Project Summary:

Statewide Services (Applicant) on behalf of Dignity Investment Group (Owner) has submitted a General Plan Amendment (GPA) and Change of Zone (CZ) application to facilitate the conversion of the former church into a medical building for consistency with the adjacent medical office complex. The conversion would include renovating the interior of the building. The GPA would amend the General Plan land use designation from Small Town Neighborhood (STN) to Neighborhood Center (NC) and the CZ would change the zoning designation from Planned Residential (PR) to Office Professional (OP). Neither STN nor PR allow medical or professional offices; however, NC and OP do allow these uses.

The project request does not include any formal construction documents or new buildings proposed. Any future construction of new buildings or subdivisions would require new and additional applications with public review.

A. Property Description

The Project Site has not had any change of use or proposed new uses for its existing building since City incorporation. As shown in Exhibit 1 below, the Project Site is fully improved with the existing church building, uncovered and covered parking, landscaping, and vehicular access.

Exhibit 1 – Project Site Aerial



B. Zoning, General Plan and Adjacent Uses

Table 1 – Adjacent Land Use and Designations

	Existing Uses	General Plan	Zoning
Project Site	Vacant (former Church)	Small Town Neighborhood (Existing), Neighborhood Center (Proposed)	Planned Residential (PR)-7 (Existing), Office Professional (Proposed)
North	Existing Residential	Small Town Neighborhood	PR-7
East	Existing Residential	Small Town Neighborhood	R-2
West	Existing Medical Offices	Town Center Neighborhood (TC)	Office Professional

C. Project Description

The Applicant's proposal is to convert the existing building into a medical office facility, to provide cohesiveness and consistency with the adjacent development to the west. The Project Site is conveniently located on Fred Waring Drive which has many properties zoned OP, as demonstrated in Exhibit 2 below. Properties shown in purple are zoned OP and the Project Site is highlighted with a red square.

Exhibit 2 – Zoning Map Snapshot



General Plan Amendment

The change in land use would provide consistency and cohesion with the adjacent medical office complex. The current General Plan STN land use designation is intended *“To provide moderate intensity neighborhood development that features a variety of housing choices and mixed uses, while preserving or enhancing the existing inventory of 1950’s Desert homes.”* This definition and the accompanying allowed land uses offer limited options and are inconsistent with how the Project Site has been used since City incorporation, as a non-residential use. The change to a Neighborhood Center land use designation, is intended *“To provide a concentration of commercial businesses and civic amenities within walking and biking distances of neighborhoods.”* This change in land use would not remove the ability to construct housing.

Change of Zone

The proposed CZ from PR to OP facilitates the use of the building for medical purposes. PR is mostly focused on facilitating residential developments meanwhile the OP designation *“is intended for various levels of intensities for business, office, administrative, research and development, and/or professional land use”*. Residential and religious land uses would still be permitted in the OP zone, with approval of a conditional use permit, and both zoning designations have the same maximum height of 40 feet.

Public Input

Public noticing was conducted for the June 26, 2025, Planning Commission meeting per the requirements of PDMC Section 25.60.060 and Government Code Sections 65090 to 65094 and 65854. This includes the requirements of Section 65854 recently updated pursuant to Assembly Bill 2904. A public hearing notice was published a minimum of 20 days before the hearing date in The Desert Sun newspaper on June 6, 2025. Notices were mailed to all property owners within 500 feet of the project site.

Environmental Assessment/Environmental Review:

The Development Services Department finds that the Project is exempt from CEQA per Section 15301 of the CEQA Guidelines as the Project is a Class 1 Exemption for “Existing Facilities” development. Class 1 applies to projects involving the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. The proposed project change of land use would impact existing facilities and allow for their operation with additional uses. Additionally, the Project does not qualify for any of the exceptions pursuant to Article 19 of the CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 for “Exceptions.” A notice of exemption would be filed after project approval.

Legal Review:

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

Planning Commission Recommendation:

On May 20, 2025, the Planning Commission adopted Planning Commission Resolution 2891, recommending the City Council approve the proposed General Plan Amendment and Change of Zone. Public comments were received for this meeting in support and opposition of the project (Attachment 4).

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact as a result of this action.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Ordinance
2. Draft Resolution
3. Public Hearing Notice
4. Planning Commission Public Comments