

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: June 26, 2025

PREPARED BY: Anthony J. Mejia, City Clerk

SUBJECT: CLARIFICATION ON THE 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN PROJECT TIMELINE

RECOMMENDATION:

Provide direction to staff on whether to maintain the proposed 10-month Strategic Plan timeline or proceed with an 18-month project timeline, with plan adoption occurring after the November 2026 election.

BACKGROUND:

On June 12, 2025, the City Council approved a Professional Services Agreement with Berry, Dunn, McNeil & Parker, LLC (“Berry Dunn”) for the preparation of a new 10-year Strategic Plan. Berry Dunn was selected following a competitive RFP process, and their proposal includes a comprehensive planning effort designed to conclude by June 2026. At the same meeting, the City Council also approved the use of the National Community Survey (NCS) to support broad-based community engagement.

While there was support for the project’s goals and the consultant team, the City Council expressed concerns about adopting a Strategic Plan while the City continues its transition to full district-based governance. With Councilmembers for Districts 1, 2, and 3 elected in 2024, and Council representation for Districts 4 and 5 scheduled for November 2026, some Councilmembers preferred to begin the process after all five districts are represented. Ultimately, the Council agreed to proceed with the planning and engagement process now but to delay adoption of the final Strategic Plan until after the November 2026 election.

ANALYSIS:

Although the City Council approved the contract on June 12, 2025, execution was postponed in anticipation of scope and cost adjustments resulting from the revised project timeline. Berry Dunn is currently evaluating how this change will affect its work plan and fee structure. While specific revisions have not been finalized, anticipated impacts include:

- Additional project management and facilitation hours
- Extended stakeholder engagement and plan revision periods

The updated project timeline and cost estimate will be included in the supplemental materials distributed and posted prior to the June 26, 2025, City Council meeting.

Staff Recommendation:

While respecting Council’s concerns regarding governance timing, staff recommends proceeding with the original 10-month engagement timeline. Although the City has continued to advance major initiatives without reference to the 2014 Strategic Plan, this effort provides an opportunity to

proactively define shared priorities, integrate recent achievements, and guide decision-making in a more deliberate and coordinated manner.

Delaying adoption until after the November 2026 election may result in the loss of momentum and institutional knowledge. It also places newly elected Councilmembers in the challenging position of being asked to adopt a 10-year plan before fully understanding the City's operations, priorities, and stakeholder perspectives.

To ensure that both current and future City Councils have a continuous and active role in shaping and aligning the Strategic Plan with the evolving needs of the community, staff proposes the following framework of structured check-ins. This approach integrates the annual Goal Setting process as a mechanism to assess progress, adjust priorities, and support long-term alignment:

- **February 2026:** Goal Setting, following the current practice of soliciting candidate goals from the City Council
- **June 2026:** Adoption of the Strategic Plan
- **November 2026:** Election of Councilmembers for Districts 4 and 5
- **February 2027:** Goal Setting aligned with the Strategic Plan (Year 1)
- **February 2028:** Goal Setting aligned with the Strategic Plan (Year 2)
- **November 2028:** Election of Councilmembers for Districts 1, 2, and 3
- **January 2029:** Council Study Session to assess and realign the Strategic Plan based on current conditions and Council composition
- **February 2029:** Goal Setting aligned with the Strategic Plan (Year 3)
- **February 2030:** Goal Setting aligned with the Strategic Plan (Year 4)
- **November 2030:** Election of Councilmembers for Districts 4 and 5
- **January 2031:** Updated National Community Survey (NCS) results and comprehensive mid-cycle review of the Strategic Plan
- **February 2031:** Goal Setting aligned with the Strategic Plan and NCS-informed realignment (Year 5)

Legal Review:

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

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The existing contract with Berry Dunn totals \$128,900, plus \$12,890 in contingency funds. Any extension to the timeline will likely require additional funding, with the amount to be determined upon receipt of the consultant's revised proposal.

ATTACHMENT:

1. 2014 Strategic Plan