

# CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

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MEETING DATE: June 26, 2025

PREPARED BY: Daniel Hurtado, Public Safety Analyst

SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF A FIVE-YEAR FIRE SERVICES COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT WITH THE RIVERSIDE COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT TO PROVIDE FIRE PROTECTION, FIRE PREVENTION, RESCUE, AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Approve the proposed Five-Year Cooperative Agreement with the Riverside County Fire Department, effective July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2030, for the continued provision of fire protection, rescue, In-house fire marshal, hazardous materials mitigation, and emergency medical services within the City of Palm Desert.
2. Authorize the City Manager to execute the Cooperative Agreement and any future amendments that do not result in material changes to service levels or exceed adopted budget appropriations.

## **BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:**

The City of Palm Desert contracts with the Riverside County Fire Department (County), operating under the authority of the County through a Cooperative Fire Programs Agreement with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). This structure enables the County to deliver coordinated fire and emergency medical services throughout the region, with CAL FIRE responsible for staffing, management, and day-to-day operations in Palm Desert.

The City's current one-year cooperative agreement, approved on June 13, 2024, is set to expire on June 30, 2025. The proposed five-year agreement, effective July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2030, continues this long-standing partnership and supports enhanced long-term planning, regional alignment, and service sustainability. Other contract cities within Riverside County have similarly adopted multi-year agreements to strengthen operational continuity.

There are currently four fire stations in operation in Palm Desert—Stations 33, 55, 67, and 71. Under the proposed agreement, the City will fund 69 full-time personnel, which includes suppression, EMS, and two dedicated in-house Fire Marshal positions. The City also funds a medic unit stationed at Indian Wells Station 55, as part of its participation in the Cove Communities Services Agreement with Indian Wells and Rancho Mirage. The Cove Communities also pays for Fire Engine 33. Fire Engine 102 will come online following the completion of construction of Station 102, and operational costs will be shared with the County.

In calendar year 2024, Palm Desert fire and EMS units responded to 11,638 total incidents, including 11,536 jurisdictional calls. EMS represented the majority of service demand, with 4,964 ambulance transports provided from Palm Desert

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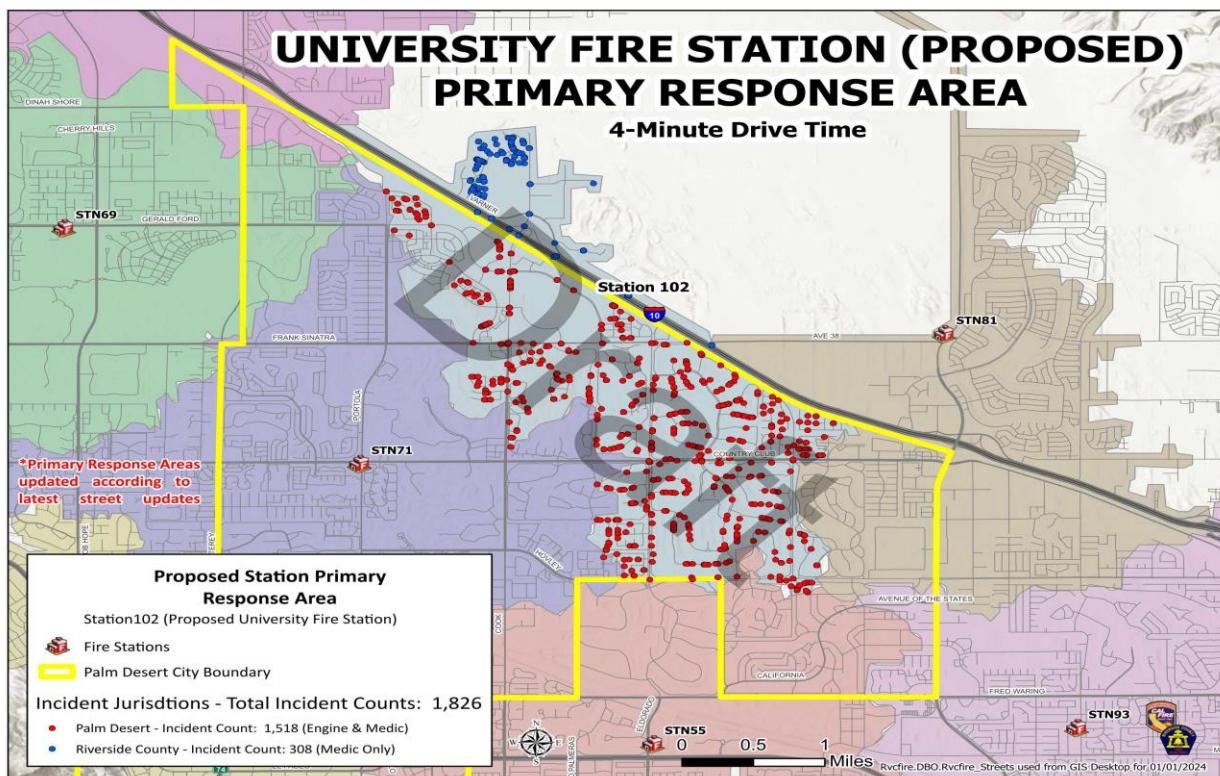
Calls for Service			Average Response Times
Year	Incident Total GIS*	Incident Total Jurisdictional*	Code 2 & Code 3 Incidents
2024	11,638	11,536	4.02
2023	11,507	11,389	4.15
2022	10,926	10,865	4.28
2021	10,167	10,068	4.16

\*Code 2: Respond to the call with lights only. Code 3: Respond to the call using lights or sirens.

The average response time for all emergency and non-emergency calls requiring a fire or medical response was 4.02 minutes.

Fire Station 71, located at Portola Avenue and Country Club Drive, remains the City's highest-volume station, handling more than half of the City's total calls in previous years. To relieve this demand and enhance citywide response capabilities, Fire Station 102 is scheduled to open during the first year of this agreement term. Its staffing and operating costs are incorporated into the proposed five-year plan.

A service area map is included below to illustrate the anticipated response zone for Station 102. Strategically located in Palm Desert's central corridor, the new station will significantly reduce response times in the surrounding neighborhoods and help balance operational load across the City's other four stations.



The construction and staffing of Station 102 is made possible through funding from Measure G, the voter-approved one-cent sales tax increase passed in November 2024. Measure G was adopted to support key public safety and infrastructure investments, including the design, buildout, and activation of Fire Station 102. This additional revenue stream enables the City to expand fire services while maintaining financial stability and ensuring adequate emergency coverage for a growing population.

### **Fire Marshal Services and Integration into City Operations**

As part of this agreement, the City will transition Fire Marshal services (Exhibit D) from County oversight to in-house management. This strategic shift aligns with recent upgrades to the City's permitting and compliance systems and supports the Council's broader goal of achieving fire prevention by design.

Currently, fire prevention activities—including plan review, code compliance inspections, and permitting—are managed externally and operated outside of the City's standard workflows. This structure limited coordination across departments and added complexity for businesses, developers, and residents. By bringing these services in-house, Palm Desert will enhance service efficiency, improve regulatory oversight, and integrate life safety practices across all stages of development and operations.

The in-house model will consist of a fully staffed Fire Prevention Division, including two full-time Fire Marshal positions. These positions will be supported by Deputy Fire Marshal-level leadership and Fire Safety Specialists, enabling a comprehensive and scalable fire prevention program that serves both regulatory and community safety needs.

### **Fire Marshal and Fire Safety Specialist Responsibilities**

The in-house Fire Marshal team, including Deputy Fire Marshals and Fire Safety Specialists, will be responsible for delivering comprehensive fire prevention services to ensure code compliance, community safety, and effective coordination with stakeholders.

#### **Core Responsibilities:**

- Conduct day-to-day plan reviews and field inspections for new development, construction projects, annual business operations, multi-family residences, cannabis facilities, and special events.
- Evaluate building and system designs for compliance with fire and life safety codes, including fire suppression systems, fire alarms, hydrant placement, access, and water supply requirements.
- Perform state-mandated inspections pursuant to California Health and Safety Code §§ 13146.1, 13146.2, 13146.3, 13217, and 13235.

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- Lead fire code enforcement, recommend updates to City ordinances, and interpret fire codes to support compliance and resolve complex safety issues.
- Respond to fire safety complaints and serve as a technical resource to applicants during the permitting and construction process.
- Provide oversight of fire prevention programs, including policy development, interagency coordination, and support to development review teams.
- Manage operational activities such as staff scheduling, training, and preparation of reports to ensure consistency and efficiency across local and regional jurisdictions.

This integrated team approach enhances responsiveness, streamlines permitting, and ensures a consistent application of fire safety standards citywide. The proposed in-house Fire Marshal model will launch with two full-time positions, collectively responsible for managing an estimated 500 plan reviews and 1,000 inspections per year.

**Legal Review:**

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

**Strategic Plan:**

This item relates to the Public Safety and Emergency Services section of the Palm Desert Strategic Plan, specifically under Priority 1: Enhance the delivery of public safety services. The priority's strategy is to expand the existing services provided by the fire and police departments to address future growth and safety concerns. This cooperative agreement continues the tradition of providing excellent fire protection, emergency medical, and related services to the community.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

The costs for the 5-year agreement are reflected in the Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26. The following outlines the revised cost estimate for Fire Services during the next five years. Budgets have been included and are sufficient, with the support of Measure G revenue, to cover this request in Fire Fund Account No. 2304220-4304500. There is no additional impact to the General Fund with this action.

Proposed Cost Estimate	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Staffing	\$14,844,675	\$18,310,692	\$19,226,227	\$20,187,538	\$21,196,915
Fire Marshall & Specialist	\$440,916	\$462,962	\$486,110	\$510,416	\$535,936
Support	\$4,859,428	\$4,954,903	\$5,202,648	\$5,462,781	\$5,735,920
Direct Charges	\$1,365,442	\$1,365,442	\$1,365,442	\$1,365,442	\$1,365,442
Other Engine Use	\$130,050	\$130,050	\$130,050	\$130,050	\$130,050
Total Ops	<b>\$21,640,511</b>	<b>\$25,224,049</b>	<b>\$26,410,477</b>	<b>\$27,656,226</b>	<b>\$28,964,262</b>
Truck #33 (Gross)	\$3,736,177	\$3,922,986	\$4,119,135	\$4,325,092	\$4,541,346
Truck #102 (Gross)	\$467,022	\$2,942,239	\$3,089,351	\$3,243,819	\$3,406,010
Total Budget for Rivco Fire	<b>\$25,843,710</b>	<b>\$32,089,274</b>	<b>\$33,618,963</b>	<b>\$35,225,137</b>	<b>\$36,911,619</b>

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These cost estimates will be reviewed and updated annually during the budget process to ensure alignment with the most current data and funding allocations.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Palm Desert Cooperative Agreement