

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: August 28, 2025

PREPARED BY: Sijifredo Fernandez, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: STUDY SESSION: REGULATIONS FOR EXTERIOR LIGHTING AND
ILLUMINATION ON COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

RECOMMENDATION:

Provide feedback on updating Palm Desert Municipal Code Chapter 24.16, Outdoor Lighting Requirements, for exterior lighting and illumination on commercial buildings.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

City of Palm Desert commercial businesses utilize a variety of lighting designs to attract customers to their respective businesses. Palm Desert Municipal Code (PDMC) [Chapter 24.16](#), Outdoor Lighting Requirements, provides the regulations for outdoor lighting but does not capture the full extent of designs proposed by businesses and property owners. Multiple commercial businesses have installed decorative lighting that requires interpretation of the code to determine permissibility and process. The PDMC has a definition for “Decorative lighting” but no guidance on standards or process for installation of such lighting. City staff seeks clearer, objective standards and processes for alternative lighting designs to avoid using subjective standards, provide clarity for business owners, and establish guidelines for City enforcement.

On August 22, 2024, the City Council held a study session to review commercial exterior lighting practices. During that session, staff presented potential options for citywide decorative lighting standards. The City Council directed staff not to take immediate action but to continue monitoring the situation. While no formal applications for exterior lighting have been submitted to date, staff has continued to evaluate emerging practices. At the City Council’s request, this item is being brought forward for further discussion.

Policy Consideration

City staff are specifically seeking City Council direction on the permissibility and review process for the following types of lighting:

- **Building façade tube lighting:** Linear or tube-style lighting installed along the edges or contours of building façades. These lights are typically light emitting diode (LED) or neon-style and are used to outline or accentuate building shapes. Façade tube lighting has the most significant visual impact during nighttime hours, when the lighting becomes the most prominent design feature of a building.
 - City staff recommends requiring a Design Review application for any proposed tube lighting and discouraging its use. The City’s Architectural Review Commission has typically rejected proposals for tube lighting. Tube lighting can

create visual clutter, detract from architectural quality, and conflict with the City's design intent.

- **Window framing lighting:** Lighting that outlines or frames individual windows, often using LED or rope lighting.
 - City staff recommends prohibiting its use except when associated with holiday lighting and limited to the holiday season. For the purposes of our outdoor lighting section, "holiday lighting" is permitted forty-five days prior to the holiday and to be removed thirty days after the holiday. Continuous window outlining lighting can appear overly commercial, inconsistent with community character, and create excessive glare. Limiting it to holiday periods balances ornamental/festive use with long-term design quality.
- **String lights:** Small hanging lights, typically suspended on cords, often used in patio or pedestrian spaces.
 - City staff recommends allowing continued use when located in a usable area (such as an outdoor patio or walkway) or when used to highlight an architectural feature. String lights are generally low-impact, pedestrian-friendly, and contribute to creating inviting outdoor spaces when used in appropriate settings and often don't detract or create glare.

Based on the feedback provided, City staff will prepare a policy document and/or incorporate it into the ongoing Unified Development Code (UDC) project.

Legal Review:

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

Fiscal Impact:

There is no financial impact associated with this report.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Presentation