

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: August 28, 2025

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

SUBJECT: APPROVE UPDATES TO THE OUTDOOR DINING DECK DESIGN GUIDELINES

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve updates to the Outdoor Dining Deck Design Guidelines.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

Since 2020, the City of Palm Desert has monitored its Outdoor Dining Deck Program (Program) that permits restaurant owners to build and utilize dining decks within city streets and public rights-of-way. The current expiration date of the program is June 30, 2026. The City Council has held multiple meetings since 2020 to discuss and act on the Program.

- In 2021, the Council took several actions to extend and refine its outdoor dining deck program. The Program was initially extended through June 2022, with direction to develop design guidelines approved by the Architectural Review Commission (ARC). Subsequent extensions pushed the Program through June 2024 and then to June 2026, along with the adoption of updated guidelines.
- In 2024 and 2025, the City held study sessions to discuss and move forward with implementing an annual lease fee and to plan for the El Paseo Street Rehabilitation project scheduled for Summer 2025.
- On June 12, 2025, the City held a study session to receive an update on the dining deck program, including current status of operators, next steps, and dining deck expectations. It was reported that, with the exception of the “Little Bar” restaurant, all dining deck operators were along El Paseo. A total of three (3) operators were communicating that they would re-install their dining deck after the El Paseo Street Rehabilitation project concluded.
- At the regular City Council meeting of June 12, 2025, the City Council formed an ad hoc subcommittee, consisting of Mayor Pro Tem Trubee and Councilmember Pradetto, to review the Outdoor Dining Deck Design Guidelines (Design Guidelines).

City Council discussions and actions relative to the Program are outlined in Table 1 on the next page:

Table 1 – Council Program Summary

Date	Topic/Action	Staff Report Link
June 24, 2021	Extended Program through June 30, 2022, and provide direction to establish ARC approved dining deck guidelines	Link
June 9, 2022	Extended Program through June 30, 2024	Link
November 16, 2023	Extended Program through June 30, 2026, and adopted updated dining deck guidelines	Link
April 11, 2024	Study session to discuss annual fee	Link
May 23, 2024	Study session to receive direction on El Paseo Street Rehabilitation project going into Summer 2025 and move forward with annual lease rate	Link
October 24, 2024	Establish an annual lease rate for dining decks	Link
May 22, 2025	Award contract for El Paseo Street rehab project for Summer 2025	Link
June 12, 2025	Study session to discuss outdoor dining deck program update	Link

Project Description:

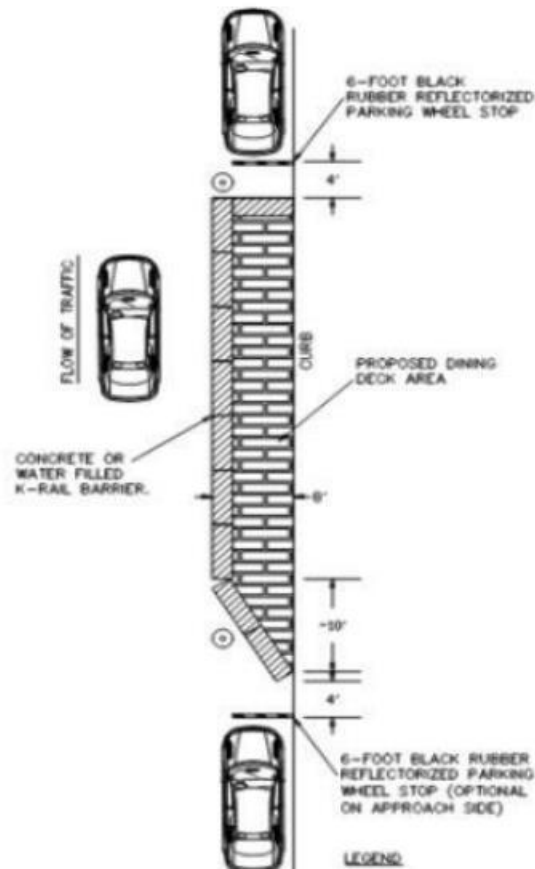
On July 1, 2025, City staff met with the Subcommittee to review the current Design Guidelines. The Subcommittee directed staff to update the guidelines to prohibit dining decks on streets like El Paseo and instead allow outdoor dining directly on the sidewalk next to a restaurant. If this sidewalk dining setup would not leave at least 5 feet of clear space for pedestrians, restaurants would need to build a temporary sidewalk in the street.

The existing guidelines already allowed restaurants to build decks that rerouted pedestrians around outdoor dining areas on the sidewalk, as illustrated in Exhibit 1 from the Guidelines below. Based on the Subcommittee’s direction, staff has updated the Design Guidelines which were presented to the Subcommittee on August 19, 2025. Changes are shown in red text in Attachment 1, and include:

- Adding: “Restaurants are not allowed to build dining decks on streets with speed limits over 15 mph. On these streets, restaurants may build a temporary sidewalk instead, which must follow the same rules and standards as dining decks.”
- Dining decks are still allowed on streets with speed limits of 15 mph or less, such as frontage roads along Highway 111.
- Updating the selection criteria to ban dining decks on 25 mph streets but allow sidewalk expansions if a temporary sidewalk is built and all requirements are met.

Temporary sidewalks and sidewalk expansions must follow the same rules as dining decks, including permits, insurance, fees, license agreements, safety and accessibility standards, inspections, and maintenance.

Exhibit 1 – Temporary Sidewalk Exhibit from Guidelines



Legal Review:

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

Public Outreach:

In May and June 2025, City staff spoke with several restaurant owners interested in applying for a Temporary Use Permit (TUP) to install a dining deck in October 2025. In August, staff notified these owners about the proposed changes. Three (3) restaurants have submitted public comments opposing the changes (Attachment 2). City staff had multiple meetings with these three (3) restaurants over the last two (2) years which included them making revisions to their dining decks to meet the 2023 updated Guidelines.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no direct financial impact with this action.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Amended Dining Deck Design Guidelines
2. Public Comments