

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: September 11, 2025

PREPARED BY: Anthony J. Mejia, City Clerk

SUBJECT: STUDY SESSION: CONSIDERATION OF AMENDING THE
APPOINTMENT PROCESS FOR MAYOR AND MAYOR PRO TEM

RECOMMENDATION:

Provide direction regarding the appointment of the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem:

1. Clarify that declining service as either Mayor or Mayor Pro Tem resets a Councilmember's "last served" date for purposes of rotation priority.
2. Add a deferral option in tie situations, allowing Members to voluntarily defer service without penalty.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

Each December, the City Council appoints the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem in accordance with Resolution No. 2024-013. In preparing for this year's appointments, staff reviewed the adopted process and identified one area where the language is ambiguous and another where there is no method for allowing Councilmembers to voluntarily defer service in tie situations. The purpose of this study session is to consider whether clarification or additions are warranted to ensure the process remains consistent with City Council direction.

Resolution No. 2024-013, adopted in April 2024, governs the annual appointment of the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem on a rotating basis. The Resolution provides:

- The Mayor Pro Tem is appointed based on the longest continuous service since last serving as Mayor, if ever.
- In the event of a tie, the appointment is resolved by chance (coin toss or drawing straws).
- If a Councilmember declines service, they are treated as if they had served in that year, moving them to the end of the rotation.

The first issue concerns declining service. Under the current rules, if a Councilmember declines the role of **Mayor Pro Tem**, their rotation priority is not affected, because priority is based only on how long it has been since they last served as **Mayor**. A declined Mayor Pro Tem term is treated as though it was completed, but it does not reset the date of their last Mayoral service. This creates the possibility for a Councilmember to skip serving as Mayor Pro Tem and keep their place in the rotation until they choose to serve.

Under the proposed amendment, however, declining service would reset the "last served" date. For example, if a Councilmember declined appointment in December 2023, they would be treated as though they last served as Mayor with a term ending December 2024.

The second issue arises when multiple Councilmembers qualify for Mayor Pro Tem at the same time. Under the current rules, the only options are to resolve the tie by chance or for one or more Members to decline and be moved to the end of the rotation. This means that a Councilmember who is willing to let another Member go first must either accept a decision by chance or sacrifice their place in the rotation entirely.

For example, a tie could occur in December 2024 if multiple Members shared the same “last served” date or otherwise entered the rotation at the same time. Under the current rules, this tie could only be broken by chance or by two Members declining and being moved to the end of the rotation. A voluntary deferral option would instead allow one or more Members to step aside for that year while preserving their place to be considered again the following year.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Staff recommends amending the procedures as follows:

Section 5 – Declining to Serve (Proposed Amendment):

If a Member declines service as Mayor or Mayor Pro Tem, that Member shall be deemed to have last served as Mayor in the year for which service is waived, and their future placement in the rotation shall be adjusted accordingly.

Example: If a Member declines appointment as Mayor Pro Tem in December 2025, they will be treated as though they last served as Mayor with a term ending December 2026.

Section 5A – Voluntary Deferral in Tie Situations (New Section):

In the event of a tie under Section 3, one or more tied Members may voluntarily defer service to allow another tied Member to serve. Such a deferral shall not be deemed a “decline” under Section 5 and shall not alter the deferring Member’s place in the rotation, except that the deferring Member shall be reconsidered in the following year’s appointment. If no Member voluntarily defers, the tie shall be resolved under Section 4.

Example: If three Members are tied in December 2025 and two choose to defer, the remaining Member will serve as Mayor Pro Tem with a term ending December 2026. The two deferring Members will then be considered for appointment in December 2026 (for the term ending December 2027) without losing their place in the rotation.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Take no action – Maintain Resolution No. 2024-013 as currently written.
2. Adopt Section 5 – Declining to Serve (Proposed Amendment) only.
3. Adopt Section 5A – Voluntary Deferral in Tie Situations (New Section) only.

Legal Review:

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

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact associated with this action.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution No. 2024-013