

# CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

---

MEETING DATE: November 13, 2025

PREPARED BY: Erica Powell, Management Analyst

SUBJECT: DEACCESSION OF SWIM DIVE PLAY BY ARTIST PAUL HOBSON

---

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

Approve the deaccession of *SWIM DIVE PLAY* by artist Paul Hobson located at the Palm Desert Aquatic Center.

## **BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:**

*SWIM DIVE PLAY*, commissioned in 2011 for installation at the Palm Desert Aquatic Center, consists of 45 etched shapes of swimmers and divers integrated into the pool deck. Originally sandblasted and stained into concrete, the designs were later converted to a painted epoxy coating due to premature wear from heavy foot traffic and pool maintenance.

### **Maintenance History:**

Since installation, *SWIM DIVE PLAY* has required ongoing maintenance far exceeding that of any other piece in the City's public art collection.

- Annual repainting (2011–2017): Average of \$1,270 per year
- Repainting and monthly cleaning (2018 – Present): \$80/hour, included in routine billing
- 2023 renovation impact: \$4,627 to remove and repaint four diver shapes during locker room upgrades

Despite consistent upkeep, the artwork continues to deteriorate due to chemical exposure and high-traffic conditions, requiring continual repainting to maintain visibility and form.

### **Restoration Assessment:**

In 2025, staff explored a full restoration using on-site stenciling. This option was deemed impractical due to:

- Inability to recreate the original imagery without visible shadowing
- Labor-intensive, hand-cut stencil requirements
- Anticipated repainting needed every one to two years
- Estimated total cost exceeding \$50,000, including:
  - \$20,000 for artist design recreation
  - \$20,000 – \$30,000 for stencil fabrication and site work
  - \$10,000 for surface preparation

These costs exclude materials and offer no assurance of improved durability.

**Deaccession Justification:**

The proposed removal meets multiple criteria of the City’s Public Art Deaccessioning Policy:

- Excessive Maintenance: Annual maintenance exceeds \$2,200 (repainting \$1,270 + cleaning \$80/hour x 12 months = \$2,230)
- Deterioration Beyond Original Design: Repeated repainting has altered the original appearance.
- Restoration Impracticality: Cost and available methods cannot preserve artistic intent or ensure durability.

**Artist Consultation:**

Artist Paul Hobson was contacted by phone on September 16–17, 2025, and provided feedback on the proposal. Mr. Hobson expressed openness to potential restoration approaches that may deviate from his original design; however, he noted that the swimmer and diver figures would need to be recreated, as the original digital design files are no longer available. Staff followed up by email on October 16, 2025, to inform Mr. Hobson that the staff report recommendation was to deaccession the artwork. On October 17, 2025, Mr. Hobson responded that he was “sad to see it go.”

**Removal Coordination:**

The Palm Desert Aquatic Center will temporarily close from November 17, 2025, through early January 2026 for major facility upgrades. Coordinating removal during this period will minimize disruption and avoid future maintenance costs.

**Committee Recommendation:**

At its October 8, 2025, meeting, the Cultural Arts Committee reviewed the request to deaccession *SWIM DIVE PLAY* and unanimously recommended approval of the permanent removal.

**Legal Review:**

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

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

The removal of *Swim Dive Play* will be incorporated into the Palm Desert Aquatic Center renovation project managed by the Public Works Department. The associated 1,027 square feet of concrete replacement was included in the original bid and will be completed under the approved Public Works contract awarded by the City Council on October 23, 2025, to the most responsible bidder for an amount not to exceed \$500,000, including contingency (Project No. CFA00009). Coordinating the artwork removal within the ongoing renovation will minimize disruption to public operations and eliminate future maintenance costs.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Photographs of *SWIM DIVE PLAY*
2. Cultural Arts Committee Staff Report dated October 8, 2025
3. Deaccession Worksheet for *SWIM DIVE PLAY*
4. City’s Public Art Deaccessioning Policy