

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: November 13, 2025

PREPARED BY: Carlos Flores, Deputy Director of Development Services
Shawn Muir, Community Services Manager

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON NORTH SPHERE REGIONAL PARK

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive an update on the plans for creating regional park space in the north sphere of Palm Desert. Discuss the opportunity to increase park space by entering a land lease agreement with California State University San Bernardino, Palm Desert (CSUSB-PD).

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

In September 2022, the City of Palm Desert (City) entered a park planning and design agreement for a new 27-acre park in north Palm Desert on Dinah Shore Drive. As part of this effort, the city conducted public engagement meetings, both in-person and online, with stakeholders, community groups, and park users to understand the needs for recreational space.

Through this effort, staff developed a comprehensive understanding of park needs in the city. Some of those are met with the new Dave Erwin Park, which will begin construction this fiscal year. However, athletic field space remains one amenity that has not yet been addressed. The public engagement revealed that soccer is the sport in the highest need of field space, followed by football. To address this, staff were asked to investigate two other sites that may accommodate a large regional park with athletic fields.

One of these sites is within the University Neighborhood Specific Plan (UNSP), an approximately 170-acre site on the northeast corner of Portola and Frank Sinatra. The other is on the campus of California State University San Bernardino, Palm Desert, east of Cook Street near Gerald Ford Drive.

UNSP Update

On March 9, 2023, the City Council adopted goals, including a goal to gather community input, design, and build a community and regional park in North Palm Desert within the SARDA portion of the designated UNSP area. On November 16, 2023, the Council awarded Contract No. C46680 to Interwest Consulting Group to update the UNSP and plan future land uses for the remaining 170 acres, including park space, community facilities, residential (including a minimum of 220 affordable units), and commercial uses. Since early 2024, the consultant has prepared two (2) draft land use concepts showing alternative placements of a regional park, as well as residential and commercial land uses, to present to the community for feedback during an outreach meeting.

The consultant analyzed the feedback and collaborated with City staff to finalize a land use plan for the 170-acre vacant site. The intent of the land use plan is to provide the general location

and sizes of the different land uses, ensuring that the 170-acre site provides the mix of land uses and realistic build-out with streets, drainage, open space, and all other infrastructure and City requirements.

On October 23, 2025, the City Council held a study session to receive an update on the UNSP, including the proposed final draft UNSP land use plan with a main park location, additional park and open space areas, and implementation of the UNSP. Discussion focused on providing flexibility in the location, size, and uses of these areas, particularly the main park, while balancing required housing units and future commercial areas to ensure appropriate buildout.

The main park is estimated at 22 acres, with an additional 34 acres of open space distributed throughout remaining 170 acres for passive and active recreation, and drainage. An additional 4.5 acres are set aside for community facilities, such as a community center or library, resulting in a total of approximately 60.5 acres dedicated to parks, open space, and community uses.

On November 4, 2025, the UNSP land use plan was presented to the City's Parks and Recreation Committee where City staff received concern about the size of the 22-acre main park being too small and asked to bring it back at their next meeting in December for formal review and recommendation.

CSUSB Update

Staff initiated meetings with CSUSB to discuss a potential park site on the university campus beginning in summer 2024. University representatives discussed campus needs for recreational and athletic space that would support their curriculum and enhance student life. Also included in the discussion were other potential park amenities, a park use and access arrangement, parking and security, maintenance, land use/lease, and construction costs.

A conceptual site plan was developed with both parties' input. The size of the site is approximately 29.5 acres. Based on this, an appraisal was ordered to understand the potential cost for the required land lease. Following this information gathering the following items were discussed, but would require further negotiation to move forward with the park planning effort. CSUSB sent over deal post on the term, ground rent with annual escalator, size and renewal option, which would prompt a new valuation of the site.

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| Land Use/Ownership | 20-year lease for \$250,000 per year = \$6,074,342 with escalator One (1) option for 20-year renewal at new rate Options after 40 years require negotiation. |
| Construction Cost | ~\$50M |
| Construction Duration | 24-36 months (estimated based on State approval process) |
| Maintenance | City to maintain park including landscaping, sidewalks, restrooms, fields and courts. Estimated cost is \$1.3M annually. Improvements must be permitted through State Architect. |

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| Park Amenities | Park Size approx. 29.5 acres 3 soccer fields 1 baseball field Pickleball/tennis/basketball |
| Park Use and Access | City-operated facility with designated days and times set aside for CSUSB use. Dedicated field(s) for CSUSB Students (Mon-Friday) and mutually scheduled special events. |
| Parking and Security | Student parking would not be permitted but is likely. CSUSB requests on-site security patrols. |
| Community Benefits | City's partnership would potentially help the CSU expand its student base by offering more amenities. Nearby residents would benefit but may have more limited access. |
| Utility Coordination | Potential agreement with IID for SCE to serve property. CSUSB in current litigation over water management responsibilities. |

Staff are requesting the City Council's review of the information collected, and input on the number, size and location of parks in north Palm Desert that best fit the community's needs. This input will help determine how best to pursue the UNSP park site.

Legal Review:

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

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this presentation, as no formal action is being taken at this time. Funding for planning the 170-acre parcel in the University area has been allocated in the FY 2025/26 General Fund budget.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Presentation (*to be distributed prior to the meeting*)