

# CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

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MEETING DATE: January 22, 2026

PREPARED BY: Chris Gerry, Senior Project Manager

SUBJECT: APPROVE WAYFINDING MASTER PLAN (PROJECT NO. MST00003)

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

Approve the Citywide Wayfinding Master Plan and provide direction on the preferred naming convention for the Palm Desert Civic Center.

## **BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:**

The City of Palm Desert (City) has been undertaking a comprehensive effort to update and unify its directional and entry monument signage. Wayfinding signage assists residents and visitors in navigating to key destinations, while entry monument signage identifies major gateways and reinforces Palm Desert's visual identity. This effort has included coordination with City departments, advisory bodies, and the broader community across multiple phases. A summary of prior meetings and key milestones is provided in Attachment 1.

On May 22, 2025, the City Council approved the wayfinding and entry monument signage design set, establishing the preferred design direction for the Citywide Wayfinding Master Plan (Master Plan). Since that action, staff has continued working with the design consultant to refine signage placement, directional hierarchy, and naming conventions. The item today incorporates these refinements and is presented for final consideration of the Master Plan (Attachment 2).

## **Wayfinding Framework:**

The wayfinding destinations, language, and placement are guided by principles that emerged as staff and the design consultant translated the system from concept to street-level application. This framework reflects how signs function in real-world conditions, how information is perceived by motorists and pedestrians, and aligns with prior City outreach and survey feedback emphasizing clarity, simplicity, and visual cohesion. This framework includes:

- Less is more, particularly along key corridors such as El Paseo. The wayfinding system emphasizes restraint by reducing the overall number of signs and avoiding unnecessary message density, supporting both corridor aesthetics and sign legibility.
- Limit single-destination signs where feasible. Wayfinding signs are designed to prioritize clarity by consolidating multiple related destinations on a single panel where appropriate, reducing the number of standalone signs and minimizing visual clutter.
- Use clear, concise, and consistent language. Destination names are drafted to fit on a single line where possible, avoid compound phrasing, and maintain consistent terminology and naming conventions across the system.

- Establish Civic Center as the campus identity. The Civic Center is treated as a unified destination representing the broader civic campus, with internal wayfinding relied upon to direct visitors to individual facilities once onsite. Naming convention concepts for the campus are discussed later in this staff report.

**Signage Quantity and System Refinement:**

As the Master Plan advanced from concept to implementation, staff and the design consultant conducted a focused review of sign quantities and placement to ensure the system functions efficiently at the street level. This refinement emphasized consolidating messages, eliminating redundancies, and aligning sign types with how users encounter and navigate destinations.

The proposed system reflects a more intentional distribution of destination, parking, and pedestrian signage. Destination and parking information is consolidated where appropriate to reduce standalone signs, while pedestrian-oriented signage is selectively introduced to support onsite navigation in key activity areas. These adjustments improve legibility, reduce visual clutter, and better align sign placement with user decision points. The table below summarizes the refinement of sign types across the system.

<b>Signage Type</b>	<b>Existing</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Destinations	67	51
Parking	11	3
Pedestrian	0	4
<b>Total:</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>58</b>

**Destination Naming and Prioritization:**

As part of finalizing the Master Plan, staff and the design consultant reviewed destination naming, abbreviations, and prioritization to ensure clarity, consistency, and legibility across the wayfinding system. Given physical sign size constraints and the need for quick comprehension at travel speeds, destination names were evaluated to balance formal accuracy with practical readability. The proposed language reflects commonly recognized destination names while remaining aligned with official facility titles and City standards.

Destinations are organized into Primary and Secondary categories to establish a clear and functional hierarchy within the wayfinding system. This hierarchy considers overall wayfinding demand, sign capacity constraints, network coverage, and each destination’s role in citywide navigation. Primary destinations represent the City’s most significant and widely accessed civic, cultural, educational, and commercial anchors and serve as key orientation points for residents and visitors, warranting more consistent directional emphasis across multiple corridors.

Secondary destinations may also have community recognition or cultural significance, but do not require the same level of directional repetition. For parks and recreational facilities, sites generally under 20 acres are generally categorized as Secondary to maintain consistency, manage message density, and prioritize destinations with broader wayfinding demand.

Primary and Secondary destinations can be found in the Master Plan (Attachment 2). As new destinations are constructed and become operational, staff will apply these same criteria to evaluate potential additions or refinements to the wayfinding system based on observed use patterns, access points, and navigational needs. Any proposed changes that may be considered substantial would be brought forward to the Active Transportation Program Subcommittee for recommendation and to City Council for consideration.

The table below summarizes the recommended destination nomenclature, priority designation, and frequency of inclusion within the Master Plan.

Proper Nomenclature	Proposed Language	Priority	Frequency
El Paseo	El Paseo	Primary	23
McCallum Theatre	McCallum Theatre	Primary	23
College of the Desert	College of the Desert	Primary	23
Palm Desert Civic Center	Civic Center	Primary	22
The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens	The Living Desert Zoo	Primary	18
University of California, Riverside - PD Campus	UCR	Primary	10
California State University, San Bernardino PD Campus	CSUSB	Primary	9
Desert Willow Golf Resort	Desert Willow	Primary	9
The Joslyn Center	The Joslyn Center	Secondary	6
Historical Society of Palm Desert	Historical Society	Secondary	5
Cahuilla Hills Park	Cahuilla Hills Park	Secondary	5
Freedom Park	Freedom Park	Secondary	4
Cap Homme / Ralph Adams Park	Homme Adams Park	Secondary	2
Hovley Soccer Park	Hovley Soccer Park	Secondary	2
Entrada Del Paseo	Entrada Del Paseo	Secondary	2
Artists Center at the Galen	Artists Center	Secondary	2
Eric Johnson Memorial Gardens	Eric Johnson Gardens	Secondary	2

**Proposed Naming Revisions:**

Most of the naming conventions above remain consistent or slightly modified within the existing wayfinding system. Notable recommended revisions include:

- The Living Desert Zoo: The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens is referenced using three naming conventions across the existing wayfinding system. Following coordination with The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, staff recommends the use of “The Living Desert Zoo.” This abbreviated form maintains alignment with the organization’s identity and allows the destination name to fit clearly and consistently within the available sign panel dimensions.
- Entrada Del Paseo: While the existing wayfinding system includes destinations located within Entrada Del Paseo, it does not reference the paseo itself, instead identifying individual tenants such as the Chamber of Commerce and Artists Center. Staff recommends incorporating “Entrada Del Paseo” as a named destination, along with Artists Center and Eric Johnson Gardens, to better reflect the broader district, improve visitor orientation, and more accurately represent the diverse uses at that location.

- **Palm Desert Civic Center:** The existing wayfinding system references this destination as “Civic Center / Park.” Given the breadth of civic, cultural, recreational, and community uses located within the Civic Center campus, staff recommends simplifying the destination name to “Civic Center.” This approach recognizes the site as a multi-use civic hub rather than a single park facility and aligns with the Master Plan’s goal of reducing compound phrases for visual consistency and readability. On December 10, 2025, the Active Transportation Program Subcommittee requested additional consideration of this naming convention. In response, staff evaluated the following options for Council consideration:
  1. Retain the existing “Civic Center / Park” terminology, acknowledging its familiarity, while noting this naming convention would represent an exception to the Master Plan’s approach of minimizing compound phrasing.
  2. Adopt “Civic Center” as the primary destination, allowing the broader campus to be identified at the corridor level while relying on new or existing internal wayfinding to direct visitors to specific facilities once onsite; and
  3. Consider rebranding the campus, recognizing that while the site functions as a civic center in form, an alternative name could better reflect its evolving and diverse mix of uses. If the City were ever to pursue renaming the campus, implementation of this Master Plan may represent an opportune time to do so.

**Conclusion:**

Staff recommends approval of the Master Plan, including the proposed destination hierarchy, naming conventions, and signage refinements. While Civic Center naming approaches are presented for Council consideration, approval of the Master Plan is not contingent upon selecting a final Civic Center name, and will allow staff to proceed with implementation, including procurement and eventual construction.

**Legal Review:**

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

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

The Wayfinding Master Plan, along with the estimated implementation costs, is included in the approved Fiscal Year 2025–26 Financial Plan and Capital Improvement Project (CIP) List under Measure A and Bond Funds. Therefore, approval of the Master Plan results in no current financial impact to the General Fund.

The table below illustrates the project budget and expenditures to date:

<i>Description</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Expenses</i>	<i>Balance</i>
<i>FY 24/25 2134300-5000910 (Master Plan)</i>	\$162,500		
<i>2134300-5000910 (Wayfinding)</i>	\$1,875,000		
<i>4514300-4400100 (Monument)</i>	\$1,200,000		
<i>Design Wayfinding Master Plan – A46980</i>		\$87,500	

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<i>Contingency – A46980</i>		\$20,000	
<i>Design Entry Monument – A47210</i>		\$55,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,237,500</b>	<b>\$162,500</b>	<b>\$3,075,000</b>

Costs associated with implementation of the Wayfinding Master Plan will be considered and addressed through subsequent City Council actions.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Project History Summary
2. Wayfinding Master Plan
3. PowerPoint Presentation

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST AWARENESS CHECKLIST:**

- Site-Specific Property Interest** – Councilmembers should check if they own or lease real property within 1,000 feet of the project site (Gov. Code § 87103(b); FPPC Reg. 18702.2).
  
- SB 1439 Applicability (Campaign Contributions)** – Applies to licenses, permits, or other entitlements for use, and to contracts or franchise agreements other than competitively bid, labor, or personal employment contracts.

**Applicant(s)/Appellant(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

Councilmembers should review any campaign contributions received within the last 12 months from parties or participants to the proceeding and must not accept contributions over \$500 from those parties for 12 months following the final decision (Gov. Code § 84308).

*Note: These indicators are informational and do not constitute a legal determination. Each Councilmember is responsible for identifying and disclosing any disqualifying interests in accordance with the Political Reform Act and FPPC regulations.*