

City of Palm Desert Staff Report

Meeting Date: April 23, 2026

Prepared By: Anthony J. Mejia, City Clerk

Department: City Clerk's Office

Subject: Study Session Regarding Interview Procedures for the City's Boards, Commissions, Committees, and Task Forces

Recommendation

Provide direction to staff regarding whether the City's current interview procedures for Boards, Commissions, Committees, and Task Forces should be retained, modified, or replaced, including interview procedures, use of standardized interview questions, and the process for identifying recommended appointees following interviews.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this study session is to obtain City Council direction on the interview procedures for the City's appointed bodies. The discussion includes whether to retain, clarify, or modify the current streamlined reappointment process, whether to use standardized interview questions for future interview meetings, and whether to use named ranked choice ballots to identify recommended appointees following interviews.

Background

On April 22, 2021, the City Council approved interview procedures for members seeking reappointment to certain appointed bodies. Under that action, the City Council established a streamlined reappointment process for some appointed bodies, under which an incumbent seeking reappointment to the same body would not be interviewed unless requested by a Councilmember.

Under the current framework, the following appointed bodies are subject to a streamlined reappointment process:

- Civic Engagement Committee
- Cultural Arts Committee
- Environmental Resources Committee
- Historic Preservation Committee
- Homelessness Task Force
- Library Advisory Committee
- Parks and Recreation Committee
- Public Safety Committee
- Housing Commission

Under the current framework, interviews are required for reappointments to the following appointed bodies:

- Architectural Review Commission
- Building Board of Appeals
- Finance Committee
- Planning Commission
- Rent Review Board

Since the adoption of the current framework, staff has identified implementation questions regarding how the streamlined reappointment process operates when additional applicants seek appointment to the same seat, as well as broader questions regarding whether the current distinction between appointed bodies continues to reflect the City Council's intended approach.

Discussion

Staff's review of the current procedures has identified two issues for City Council consideration.

First, the current language does not clearly address how staff should proceed when an incumbent on a streamlined appointed body timely applies for reappointment and one or more additional applicants also apply for the same seat. The policy does not expressly state whether no interviews should be scheduled, or whether other applicants may be interviewed while the incumbent is considered for reappointment without an interview.

Second, the current framework gives incumbents on certain appointed bodies a procedural advantage unless a Councilmember requests an interview. While that approach promotes administrative efficiency, it may also reduce opportunities to reconsider long-serving incumbents and to interview non-incumbent applicants for the same seat.

Option 1: Clarify Existing Streamlined Reappointment Process

For appointed bodies subject to the streamlined reappointment process, if an incumbent timely applies for reappointment to the same seat and no Councilmember requests an interview, the incumbent would be deemed recommended for reappointment and placed on a subsequent City Council agenda for approval.

This is the narrowest revision to the current procedure. It resolves the ambiguity while preserving the streamlined approach previously approved by the City Council.

The benefit of this option is efficiency. It preserves the least burdensome process for routine reappointments while retaining Council discretion to request an interview.

The drawback is that it would formalize a process under which an incumbent on a streamlined body may be reappointed without an interview, even when another applicant seeks the same seat.

Option 2: Universal Interviews

Require interviews for all applicants, including incumbents, for all Boards, Commissions, Committees, and Task Forces.

This option creates a single rule for all appointments and reappointments. It ensures that every applicant is considered through the same public interview process.

The benefits are consistency, transparency, and regular reconsideration of incumbents.

The drawback is reduced efficiency. Interview meetings would become longer and more frequent, including in routine reappointment situations where no competing applicant has applied.

Option 3: Interviews Whenever There Is Competition for the Seat

Require interviews whenever more than one applicant applies for a seat, including when an incumbent seeks reappointment and one or more additional applicants also apply for that same seat. For streamlined appointed bodies, a Councilmember could also request an interview even if the incumbent is the only applicant.

This option preserves efficiency when an incumbent is the only applicant, while requiring interviews when the City Council must choose among multiple candidates. It also preserves the City Council's discretion to request an interview in other circumstances.

The benefits are that it preserves a streamlined process in uncontested cases, ensures that all candidates are interviewed when a seat is contested, and avoids requiring interviews in every reappointment cycle.

The drawback is that the process would vary depending on whether a seat is contested or whether a Councilmember requests an interview. As a result, one incumbent may be interviewed while another is not, based on the circumstances of the application cycle or City Council interest in conducting an interview.

Option 4: Automatic Interview After a Defined Service Threshold

Maintain a streamlined reappointment process for certain appointed bodies, but require an interview for any incumbent seeking reappointment to a third or subsequent term, regardless of whether another applicant has applied.

This option preserves efficiency for shorter-serving incumbents while creating a regular review point for longer-serving incumbents.

The benefit is that it addresses extended tenure without requiring interviews in every reappointment cycle.

The drawback is that this option would require interviews for long-serving incumbents even when there is no competing applicant, which reduces the benefit of the streamlined process over time.

Summary of Options

The following options reflect four different approaches to reappointments:

- **Option 1** would retain the current streamlined structure and clarify how it operates.
- **Option 2** would require interviews in all cases.
- **Option 3** would require interviews when more than one applicant applies for a seat, while preserving Council discretion to request an interview in other cases.

- **Option 4** would retain a streamlined process in some cases but require interviews for incumbents after they have served a defined number of terms.

Additional Procedural Considerations for Future Interview Meetings

In addition to the reappointment procedures discussed above, Senate Bill 707 requires covered City Council meetings to include remote public access through a two-way telephonic or audiovisual platform. As a result, future interview meetings will occur in a more formal public setting than in the City's past practice.

In that setting, it is recommended to use a standardized bank of interview questions. A preapproved list could promote a more consistent process while still allowing flexibility within the time available for each interview.

If the City Council elects to use a standardized question bank, it may select questions from the approved list and ask follow-up or clarification questions related to an applicant's responses or application materials.

The City Council may also wish to authorize the City Clerk, in consultation with the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem, to update the question bank from time to time in order to address newly pertinent issues and newly formed bodies. For transparency and ease of public access, the City Clerk would maintain the approved interview questions on the City's website.

Selection Method Following Interviews

The City Council Subcommittee on Boards and Commissions has recommended that, following interviews, the City Council use named ballots and a ranked choice voting method to identify recommended appointees.

Under this approach, each Councilmember would complete a ballot listing their ranked preferences for each seat after the interview process. Ballots would be submitted to the City Clerk and retained as part of the appointment process record. The City Clerk would then tabulate the ballots following the meeting and present the results at the subsequent City Council meeting at which the Council would consider affirming the appointments or engaging in additional discussion before taking final action.

Because appointment decisions must be made openly, secret ballots would not be used. Named ballots would preserve a clear record of each Councilmember's preferences as part of the public appointment process.

Legal Review

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

Financial Impact

There is no direct fiscal impact associated with this item beyond the normal staff time required to administer the appointment and interview process. Depending on the interview framework selected by the City Council, future staff time associated with scheduling, agenda preparation, and meeting administration may increase modestly.

Attachments

1. Draft Interview Questions
2. April 22, 2021 Staff Report

Conflict of Interest Awareness Checklist

Note: *This checklist is informational only and does not constitute a legal determination. Each Councilmember remains responsible for identifying, disclosing, and evaluating any disqualifying interests under the Political Reform Act and applicable FPPC regulations.*

1. Site-Specific Property Interest

Does this item involve a project site or other identifiable real property?

Yes

No

If yes, identify the project site:

Councilmembers should consider whether they own, lease, or hold interests in real property within 1,000 feet of the project site. (Gov. Code § 87103(b); FPPC Reg. 18702.2).

2. SB 1439 / Gov. Code § 84308 Applicability (Campaign Contributions)

Does this item involve a license, permit, other entitlement for use, or a contract or franchise agreement that is not competitively bid, a labor agreement, or a personal employment contract?

Yes

No

If yes, identify the applicant(s), appellant(s), party, or participant(s):

Councilmembers should review campaign contributions received within the prior 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).