



# CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

## DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING SERVICES

### MEMORANDUM

**Date:** March 11, 2014  
**To:** Historic Site Preservation Board  
**From:** Planning Services  
**Subject:** Case HSPB #83 - The Palm Springs Racquet Club

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RECOMMENDATION: Direct Staff as appropriate.

PRIOR CITY ACTIONS:

May 2012: The Board initiated study for possible historic designation of the Charlie Farrell house at the Racquet Club.

November 2013: Staff presented preliminary results of its study on the Racquet Club at the November 2013 HSPB meeting. The study results suggested the intrinsic historic value of the site lies with the events, persons and setting of the Racquet Club itself, not simply the Farrell House. The Board directed staff to further summarize the preliminary study results and make a recommendation on how the Board may wish to proceed.

December 2013: Staff summarized the study results on the attached Historic Criteria Checklist. Staff advised the Board that the site is historically significant and that Class 1 designation of the site would further the purpose of the Historic Preservation ordinance. The study assessed the following structures at the Racquet Club:

- The tennis court, swimming pool, and clubhouse building, including "The Bamboo Room" constructed in 1934.
- The Charlie Farrell House constructed in the late 1930's.
- The Racquet Club Bungalows, designed by architect Albert Frey and constructed in the late 1940's.
- The enclosed pool addition on the Schiff House, designed by Albert Frey and constructed in 1960.

The research has yielded that the Racquet Club meets the definition of a historic site in the following ways:

1. The setting, created by the remaining buildings, tennis court and pool is significant because it reflects the casual environment in which dozens of movie stars and other celebrities came to socialize.

2. It is associated with **events of significance**, including internationally publicized tennis tournaments, celebrity parties and social gatherings.
3. It is associated with **persons of significance**, specifically movie stars and other celebrities including Ralph Bellamy and Charlie Farrell, the latter of whom was twice elected Mayor of Palm Springs.
4. It exemplifies a **period of local significance**, from 1934 to roughly 1960 when Palm Springs experienced tremendous growth due and emerged with an international reputation as a glamorous, exclusive and fashionable resort destination.
5. It presents **the work of a master architect**, namely Albert Frey, who designed several guest rental bungalows in the late 1940's and in 1960 designed a unique enclosed pool addition to the Schiff House, also located on the Racquet Club property.
6. It represents **a significant and distinguished entity**. Palm Springs became internationally known as a glamorous and exclusive resort destination for movie stars and other celebrities -- in great part, because of the Racquet Club, its celebrity guests and the events that took place there.

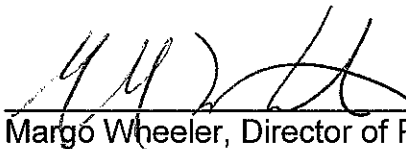
Staff believes historic designation of the Palm Springs Racquet Club, not simply the Farrell House at the Racquet Club, would further the purpose and intent of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

Staff seeks direction from the Board on how it wishes to move forward with designation proceedings. The Board may,

- Direct staff to
  - schedule site visits for Board members.
  - schedule a public hearing of the HSPB at its April meeting.
  - prepare a full staff report and recommendation for Class 1 designation of the Palm Springs Racquet Club<sup>1</sup>; or
- Direct staff to seek other information that the Board may still desire in order to make a decision; or
- Terminate the investigation, retain an archival file of the information and take no action.



Ken Lyon, RA, Associate Planner



Margó Wheeler, Director of Planning Services

Enclosures:

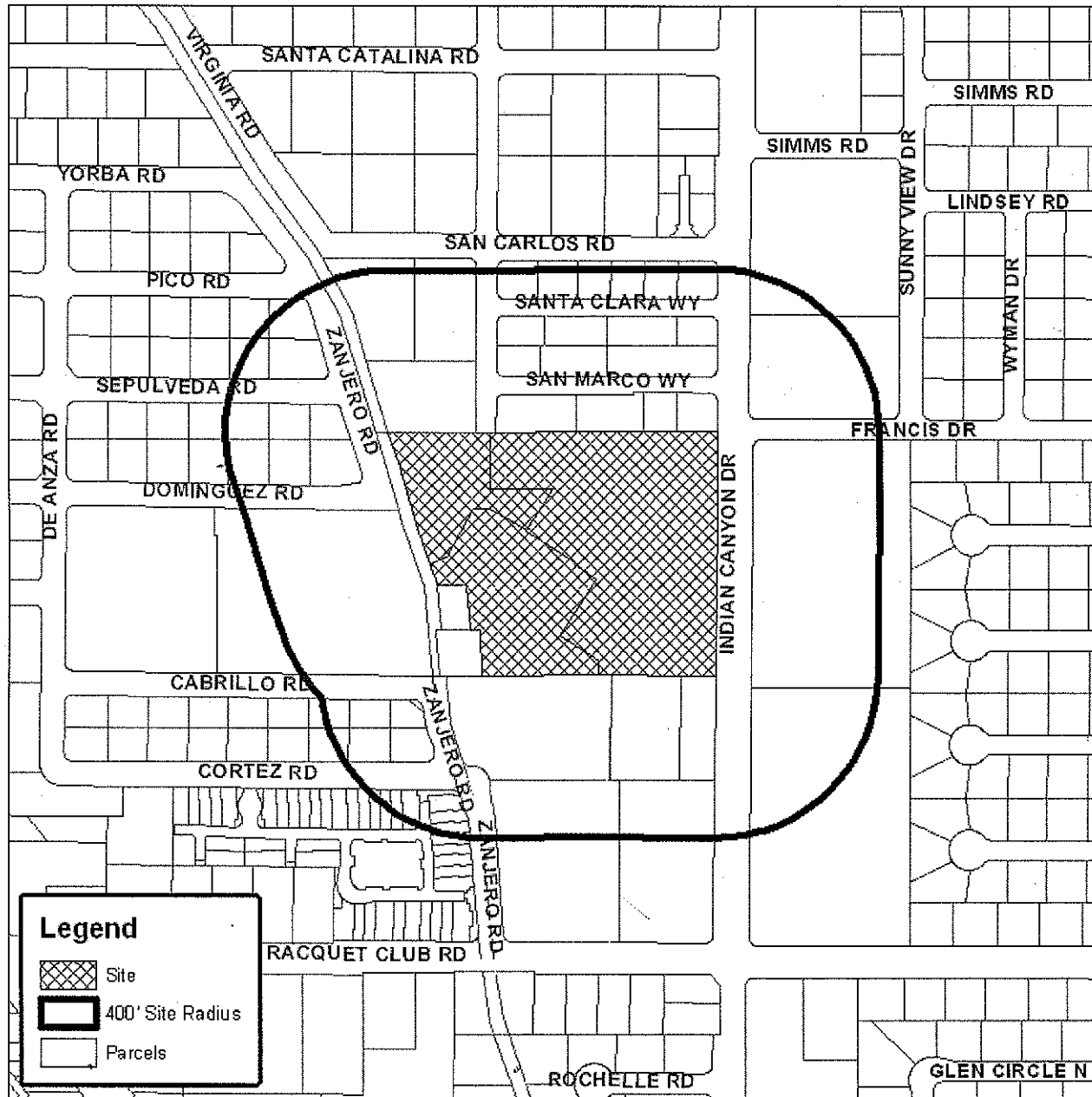
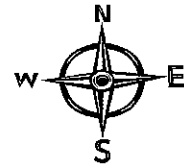
Vicinity Map.

December 3, 2013 Criteria Checklist Analysis on the Racquet Club




<sup>1</sup> On December 3, 2013, staff notified the owner in writing and by telephone of the study results and provided information on Class 1 designation and the Mills Act Historic Property Tax Reduction contracts. The owner requested that the Board defer further discussion on the matter until such time as they can be in attendance.



# Department of Planning Services Vicinity Map



**Legend**

-  Site
-  400' Site Radius
-  Parcels

## CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

**CASE NO's:** HSPB 83

**APPLICANT:** City of Palm Springs

**DESCRIPTION:** Discussion of investigation findings for possible future historic designation of the Palm Springs Racquet Club at 2743 N. Indian Canyon Drive, APN: 504-040-038



# City of Palm Springs

Planning Services Department

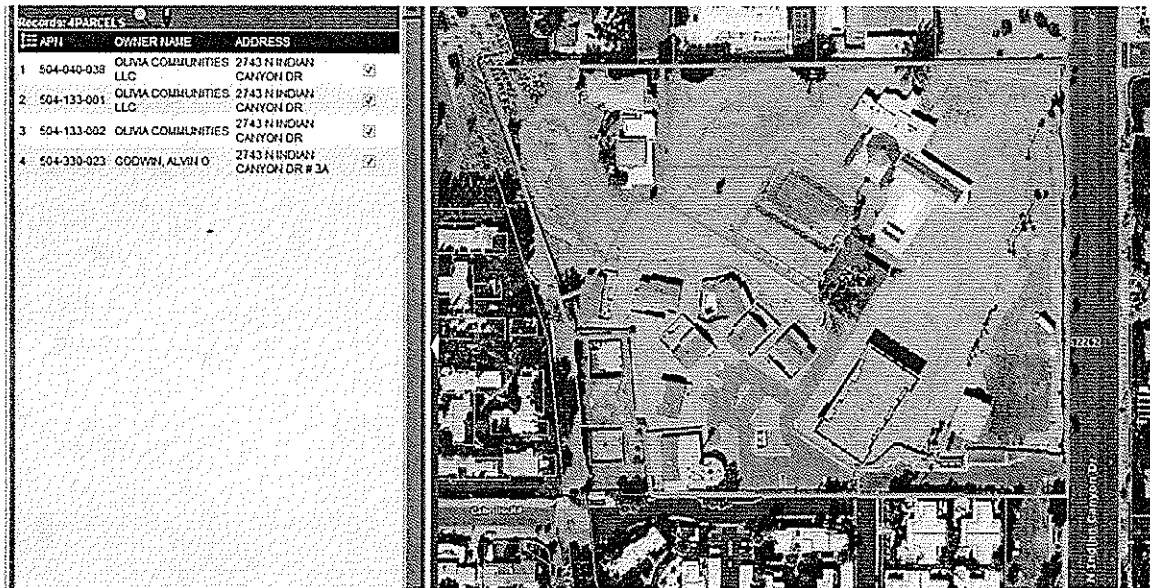
3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way • Palm Springs, CA 92262  
 Tel: 760-323-8245 • Fax: 760-322-8360

**CRITERIA CHECKLIST FOR DETERMINING CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR POSSIBLE HISTORIC SITE DESIGNATION (Pursuant PSMC 8.05.020):**

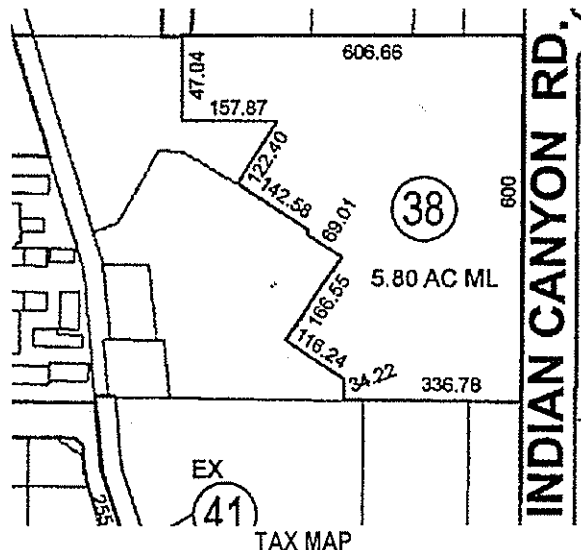
December 3, 2013.

Prepared by: Ken Lyon, RA, Associate Planner

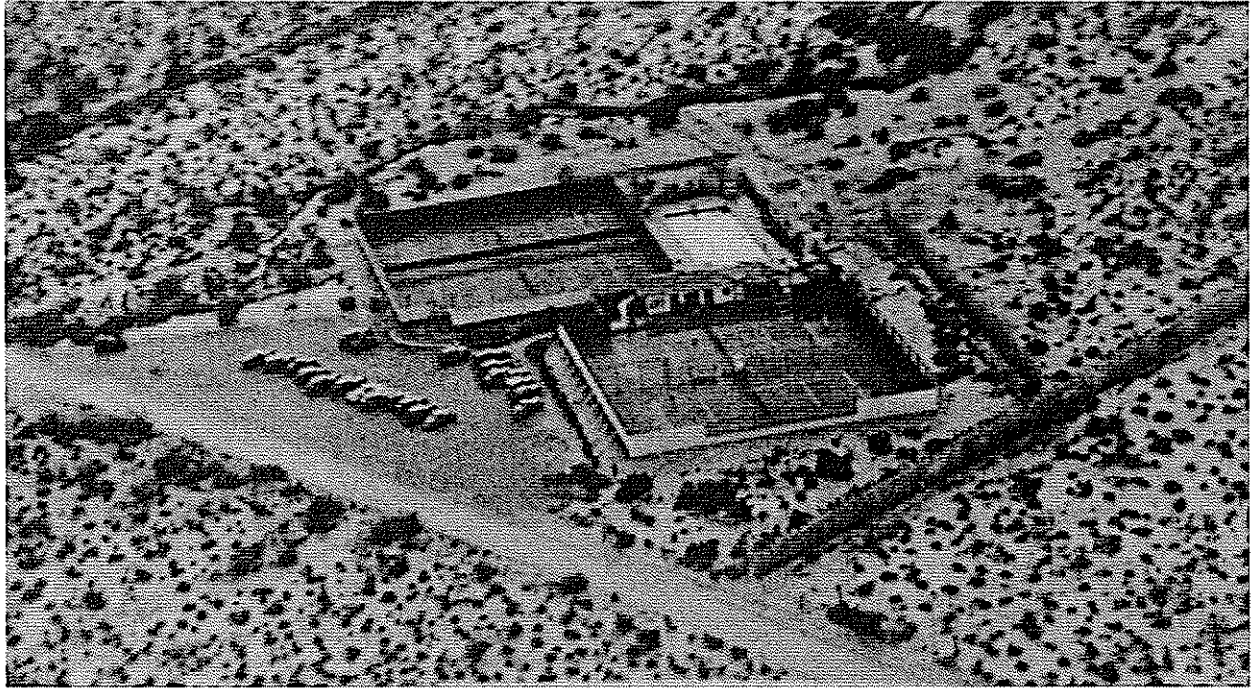
Site Address / APN No.: 2743 North Indian Canyon Drive The Palm Springs Racquet Club



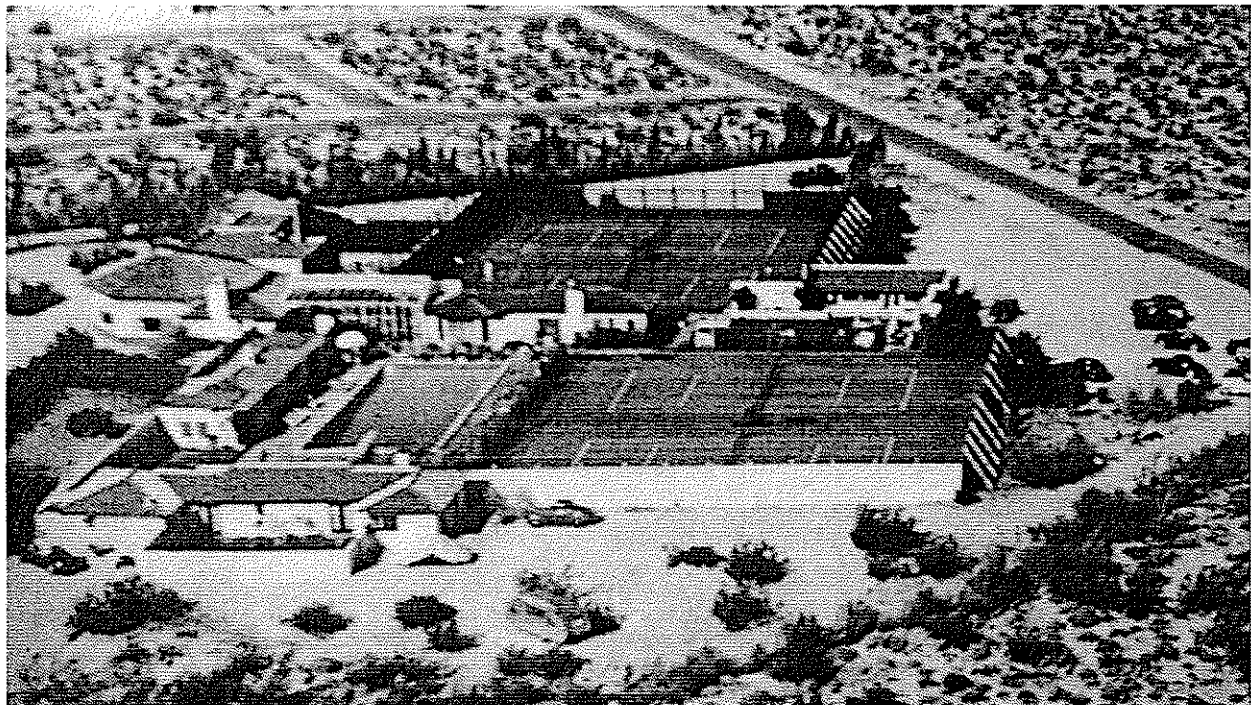
AERIAL PHOTO (c.2013) Showing parcels that comprise the current Racquet Club property.



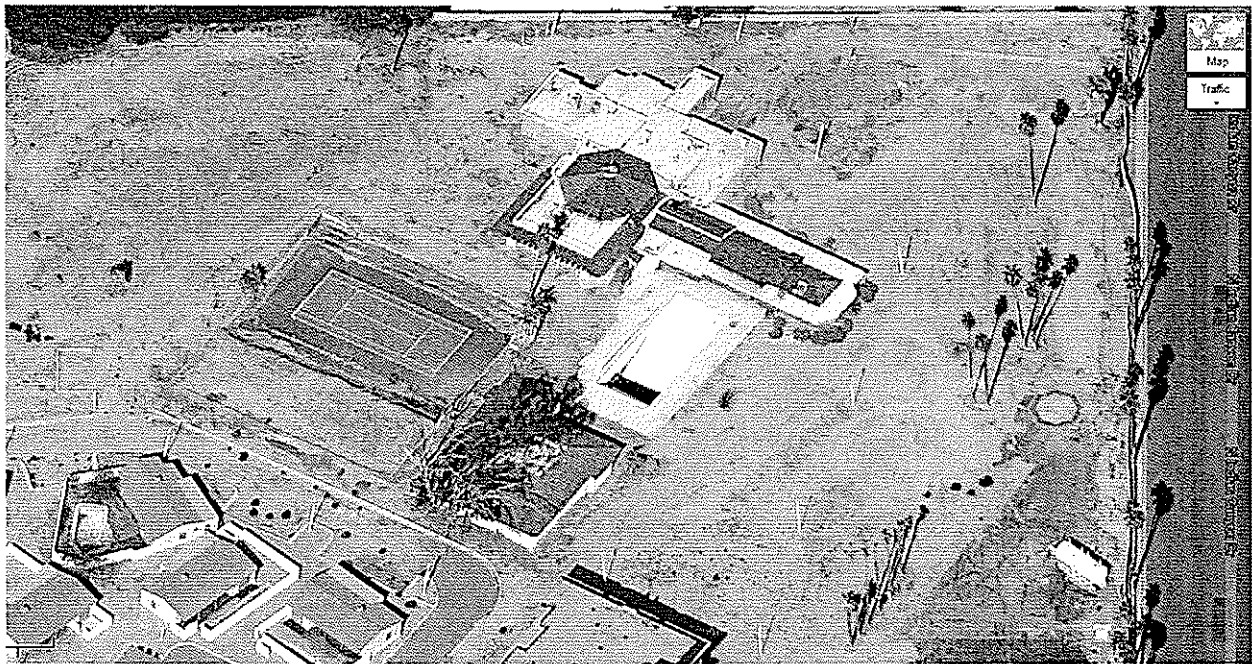
A significant amount of historic research was conducted in 2004 and a historic resources report dated October 8, 2004 was prepared by the John Ash Group Architects. That report comprehensively surveyed and documented the historic significance of the Palm Springs Racquet Club. Much of the information contained in the responses to this checklist were taken from that historic resources report.



AERIAL PHOTO LOOKING SOUTHWEST c.1934 showing original 4 courts, swimming pool and restaurant, (note the octagonal Bamboo room had not yet been constructed. Indian Canyon Drive in the lower part of photo)



AERIAL PHOTO LOOKING NORTHEAST (c.1940) original tennis courts, pool, Farrell residence, restaurant, Garden Room, dressing rooms, and octagonal Bamboo Room. (Indian Canyon Drive is to the right in this photo).



**Current Conditions Exhibit 1:**

(from top to bottom:) – Clubhouse with octagonal Bamboo Lounge, swimming pool, tennis court (c. 1934) and Farrell House (c. late 1930's. Lower left are the Albert Frey-designed cottages (c. late 1940's).



**Current Conditions Exhibit 2:**

(from top to bottom:) Charley Farrell House (c. late 1930's), Albert Frey-designed bungalows (c.late 1940's) , New two-story condo building (right side, c.2005), Schiff House lower left with Frey-designed enclosed pool addition (c.1960). (The two square structures at the lower left are DWA-owned structures and not a part of the Racquet Club).

This site is historically significant because (check all that apply):

- ✓ It includes a building, structure or archaeological condition that is unique or significant due to its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship or aesthetic effect. Explain:

Although none of the surviving buildings at the Racquet Club are particularly significant in terms of design, materials or workmanship, collectively the Setting of the Club that is created by the surviving buildings is significant - which was a casual, informal place for movie stars, directors, producers and other celebrities in Hollywood to get away from the business of the movie industry for socializing and recreation.

Construction of the Palm Springs Racquet Club began in 1933 with the construction of two tennis courts and a simple three-sided wood wind shelter. Shortly thereafter in 1934, two more tennis courts, and a swimming pool were added. In the same year, the wind shelter was replaced with a clubhouse building with a restaurant and lounge that included a dance floor. The clubhouse also included a bar area which had an octagonal roof and was dubbed "The Bamboo Room". The design of the Bamboo Room is credited to film director Mitch Leisen, a friend of Charlie Farrell and Ralph Bellamy. In the late 1930's a ranch style home was constructed just south of the swimming pool. This became the residence of Charlie and Virginia Farrell until 1951. (In 1952, the Farrells purchased and moved to the Alexander Henry residence in the Movie Colony neighborhood at 630 East Tachevah). Most of the structures at the Racquet Club were built in a rustic "California Ranch" vernacular style.

- ✓ It is known to be associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community. Explain:

From its beginnings in the mid 1930's the Palm Springs Racquet Club was "the" social gathering place for celebrities and well-known persons associated with the Hollywood movie industry. Its period of significance spans from its initial construction in 1934 through roughly 1960. During this period, the celebrity status of the Racquet Club contributed to putting Palm Springs "on the map" as an exclusive and glamorous getaway. Events including internationally publicized tennis tournaments occurred at the Racquet Club.

- ✓ It is known to be associated with lives of persons who made meaningful contribution to national, state or local history. Explain:

The Palm Springs Racquet Club was created by the business partnership of nationally known movie actors Ralph Bellamy and Charlie Farrell. Initially constructed to give the two avid tennis players courts with "unlimited play time". They quickly created a private tennis and social club and sold memberships to their friends and associates in the movie industry. It became a place where the Hollywood social set could satisfy their need for privacy and recreation away from the business of making movies. Holding a membership in the Palm Springs Racquet Club was a status symbol at the time. Among the countless famous "persons of local and national significance" who were guests of the Racquet Club were: actors Judy Garland, Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy and Alice Faye, singer Bing Crosby, and singer/songwriter Phil Harris. By the 40's membership in the club evolved and it became popular with top business, political and society leaders as well.

In particular, however Charlie Farrell's name is synonymous with the Palm Springs Racquet Club. Farrell managed the club for many years and was elected mayor of Palm Springs twice; first in 1948 and again in 1953. Farrell is a person of local significance in that his creation of the Racquet Club helped transform Palm Springs in to a world-renowned exclusive resort community.

- ✓ It reflects or exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history. Explain:

The Racquet Club contributed to a period of tremendous growth of Palm Springs and in development of the City's reputation as a glamorous and exclusive resort destination. Its period of significance is documented from 1934 to about 1960. Palm Springs' exclusive resort reputation grew, due in part to the star-studded social scene at the Racquet Club, and so too did the City's permanent and seasonable population.

- ✓ It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. Explain:

(Does not apply).

- ✓ It presents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or that possesses high artistic value. Explain

Internationally known architect Albert Frey and the firm Clark and Frey designed several buildings at the Racquet Club including several quest bungalows in the 1940's and in 1960 Frey designed an enclosed pool addition to the Schiff House in the southwest corner of the Racquet Club property.

- ✓ It represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction such as a historic district, etc. Explain:

The Palm Springs Racquet Club is a significant and distinguishable entity, in that it was a popular destination that drew many persons of significance to Palm Springs, most notably well-known movie stars, movie production studio executives and others associated with the movie industry in Hollywood.

- ✓ It has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to national, state or local history or prehistory. Explain:

(Does not apply).

- ✓ The property owner supports the nomination of this site for historic designation.

The owner was notified in writing on December 3, 2013. No response has been received received at the time of this writing.