

# MUSEUM MARKET PLAZA SPECIFIC PLAN

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## DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

## II. REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

### Introduction

This section of the EIR establishes the context for the proposed project, by describing the project site, surrounding area, and regional context. The environmental resources and constraints on the site and in the area are characterized, and provide an introduction to the analysis which is provided in Section III.

Areas addressed include existing land uses on the site and surrounding lands, topography, climate, soils and geology, water quality and resources, hydrology, cultural resources, visual resources and air quality, noise, traffic and circulation, recreational resources, and public facilities and services.

In accordance with Sections 15063, 15064 and 15065 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, an Initial Study was completed to identify potentially significant impacts associated with implementation of the proposed project. The Initial Study is included in its entirety in Appendix A. A Notice of Preparation (NOP) was prepared and transmitted to the State Clearinghouse, and local and regional agencies, and posted at the Riverside County Clerk's office. The NOP is also included in Appendix A.

### A. Existing Land Use

The proposed project site is located in the urban core of the City of Palm Springs. The project area consists of 20.6± acres, generally located north of Tahquitz Canyon Way, and west of North Palm Canyon Drive. More specifically, the project area includes:

- The existing Desert Fashion Plaza, bounded by Tahquitz Canyon on the south, the Hyatt Suites hotel on the north, Museum Drive on the west, and North Palm Canyon Drive on the east.
- Lands located east of North Palm Canyon Drive, west of Indian Canyon Drive, and somewhat north of Tahquitz Canyon Way, which are developed with multiple one and two story commercial buildings and parking lots.
- On the east side of Belardo Road, north of Arenas Road and south of Tahquitz Canyon, a surface parking lot which accommodates both Mercado Plaza tenants and customers, and general public parking.
- The southwest corner of Cahuilla Road and Tahquitz Canyon Drive, which is currently vacant land, and has been graded and scraped in the past.

The Desert Fashion Plaza consists of approximately 350,000 square feet of interior space, which is currently mostly vacant, but which has in the past been fully occupied and operational as a regional shopping center. The project also includes surface, above ground and below ground parking. The parking structures connect to the existing and operating Hyatt Suites structure immediately north of the project site. This area totals 16.65 acres.

On the east side of Palm Canyon Drive, and west of Indian Canyon Drive, are a total of approximately 51,000 square feet of partially occupied space, consisting of a mixture of retail commercial, office commercial and restaurant land uses. Surface parking areas also occur adjacent to Indian Canyon, in the northern and southern extremities of this portion of the site. This area totals 1.89 net acres.

The parking lot on the east side of Belardo, north of Arenas Road, consists of 1.22 acres fully developed as a surface parking lot, with associated landscaping.

The portion of the project area located at the southwest corner of Cahuilla Road and Tahquitz Canyon Way consists of 0.83 net acres.

The majority of the project area is designated Central Business District (CBD) in the General Plan, with corresponding CBD zoning. The area located at the southwest corner of Cahuilla Road and Tahquitz Canyon Way is designated Small Hotel, and has an R-3 (High Density Residential) zoning designation.

## **B. Surrounding Land Use**

Lands to the north of the project area are fully developed, and include the O'Donnell Golf Course and the Hyatt Suites Hotel north of Andreas Road (extended) and west of North Palm Canyon Drive. On the north side of Andreas Road, east of Palm Canyon Drive are single and two story commercial buildings which are occupied with multiple businesses in small buildings. Some of these buildings have residential units on the second floor.

On the east side of Palm Canyon Drive, between Andreas Road and Tahquitz Canyon Way but outside the project area are multiple one and two story commercial retail buildings, including one

which extends the entire length of Tahquitz Canyon Way between Palm Canyon and Indian Canyon. These buildings are occupied by multiple businesses.

On the east side of Indian Canyon Drive, between Andreas Road and Tahquitz Canyon Way, is the existing Spa Hotel, including parking areas, fitness center, and hotel spa. The hotel is currently operational, and a replacement structure is being designed, although project-specific plans are not available at this writing.

On the south side of Tahquitz Canyon Way, west of Palm Canyon Drive, are two story commercial buildings, a parking lot, and a resort hotel of two stories in height, which extends from Baristo Road to Cahuilla Road. West and south of Cahuilla Road at Tahquitz Canyon are a mixture of restaurant, small hotel and single and multiple family residential land uses, which extend to the foot of the San Jacinto mountains on the west, and to Arenas Road and beyond on the south.

On the west side of Museum Way is the Palm Springs Art Museum and its associated courtyards and parking areas, which extend from Tahquitz Canyon Way to the O'Donnell Golf Course.

On the west side of Baristo Road, south of Tahquitz Canyon Way, are two resort hotels, both two stories in height.

On the south side of Arenas Road, west of Palm Canyon Drive and east of Baristo Road, is a restaurant and its surface parking lot.

Lands to the north of the project area have General Plan designations of CBD and Open Space – Parks/Recreation; lands to the south are designated Small Hotel and CBD; lands to the west are designated Public/Quasi-Public, Open Space – Parks/Recreation, High Density Residential and Small Hotel; and lands to the east are designated CBD. On the east side of Indian Canyon is the Section 14 Master Plan area, which includes high-density residential, commercial, entertainment and resort hotel land use areas.

Lands to the north of the Specific Plan area are zoned CBD and O-20 (Open Land, 20 acre minimum); lands to the south are zoned R-3 and CBD; lands to the west are zoned CBD, R-3 and O-20; and lands to the east are zoned CBD and C-2 (General Commercial).



Source: Google, 2007

### **C. Topography**

The project area is located in Downtown Palm Springs. The surrounding mountain ranges include the San Bernardino Mountains, which extend to the north and northwest of the City; and the Little San Bernardino Mountains, which lie to the northeast. East of the project area is the gently sloping Coachella Valley floor. The Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains are located to the south and west of the City, respectively. Portions of these ranges were designated a National Monument in 2000. The higher, visible peaks in these ranges include Toro Peak, at 8,715 feet above mean sea level; and San Jacinto Peak, at 10,834 feet above mean sea level. Northwest of the City is the San Gorgonio Pass and a portion of the lower slopes of the San Bernardino Mountains.

Geology and soils within the project area are suitable for construction, and the project area is relatively level with slopes ranging from zero to five percent. The project area occurs at an elevation of about 450 feet above mean sea level. The topography is shown on Exhibit II-2.

The primary sediments encountered on the site are alluvial sands, as is the case with the floor of the Coachella Valley in general, which is covered with alluvial sediment washed down from the surrounding mountains. In general, the alluvial sill trends from coarser to finer and from shallow to deeper as distance increases from the mountains towards the center of the Valley.

### **D. Climate**

Climate in the Coachella Valley is influenced by topographic features and geographic location. The region experiences the dry and hot Sonoran Desert climate, characterized by large quantities of sunlight, high daytime temperatures and cool nights. Summer days can reach temperatures exceeding 120°F, and winter nighttime temperatures on rare occasions can drop to below freezing. The surrounding mountain slopes are typically cooler and experience an approximate 5°F temperature decrease for every 1,000-foot increase in elevation.

The Coachella Valley experiences low mean annual rainfall, averaging between four (4) and six (6) inches. During drought years, precipitation is substantially less, for example, rainfall in the 2001-2002 drought year was less than 0.5 inches. Mean annual rainfall is low, averaging 3.0 inches in Palm Springs on the desert floor and about 15 inches in the nearby mountains. The majority of rainfall occurs in the winter, with occasional intense storms occurring in late summer or early fall. Rainfall produced by these sometimes-intense storms often falls on surrounding mountain slopes rather than on the Valley floor.

Wind also has a substantial impact on the climate of Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley. As the desert floor heats up, cool ocean-modified air masses from the west are drawn into the Valley through the narrow San Gorgonio Pass. This draw effect generates strong wind gusts, which pass over the most erosive portions of the Valley floor, transporting large quantities of sand and dust throughout the region. Winds are typically out of the northwest at speeds of less than 13 miles per hour. Winds can exceed 25 mile per hour or more.

## **E. Geology and Soils**

The project area is located in the northwestern Coachella Valley and is part of the tectonically active Salton Trough. The Salton Trough is a closed, internally draining trough that was filled with a complex series of fractured rock materials during Pleistocene and Holocene time. The Pleistocene and Holocene are the two most recent periods of geologic time, spanning from two to three million years ago to the present.

The San Andreas Fault system or rift zone, dominates the geology of the Coachella Valley. The project area is approximately five miles southwest of the San Andreas rift zone. A rift zone consists of a major fault, in this case, the San Andreas, and a series of associated smaller faults. The Banning and Mission Creek faults are two smaller faults within the San Andreas rift zone that have produced seismic events recently felt in the Coachella Valley.<sup>1</sup>

The Palm Canyon Fault is exposed in the bedrock in the southern portion of the City, occurring along the east side of Palm Canyon. It has been inferred by several researchers as extending northward beneath the City of Palm Springs under the alluvium. No evidence to date has been presented as to the existence or precise location of the Palm Canyon Fault within the alluvial deposits, or the potential activity of this feature.

The San Jacinto, Imperial, and Elsinore faults are additional regional faults that have produced seismic events felt in the vicinity of the proposed project. The San Jacinto Fault Zone is considered one of the most seismically active fault zones on Southern California.

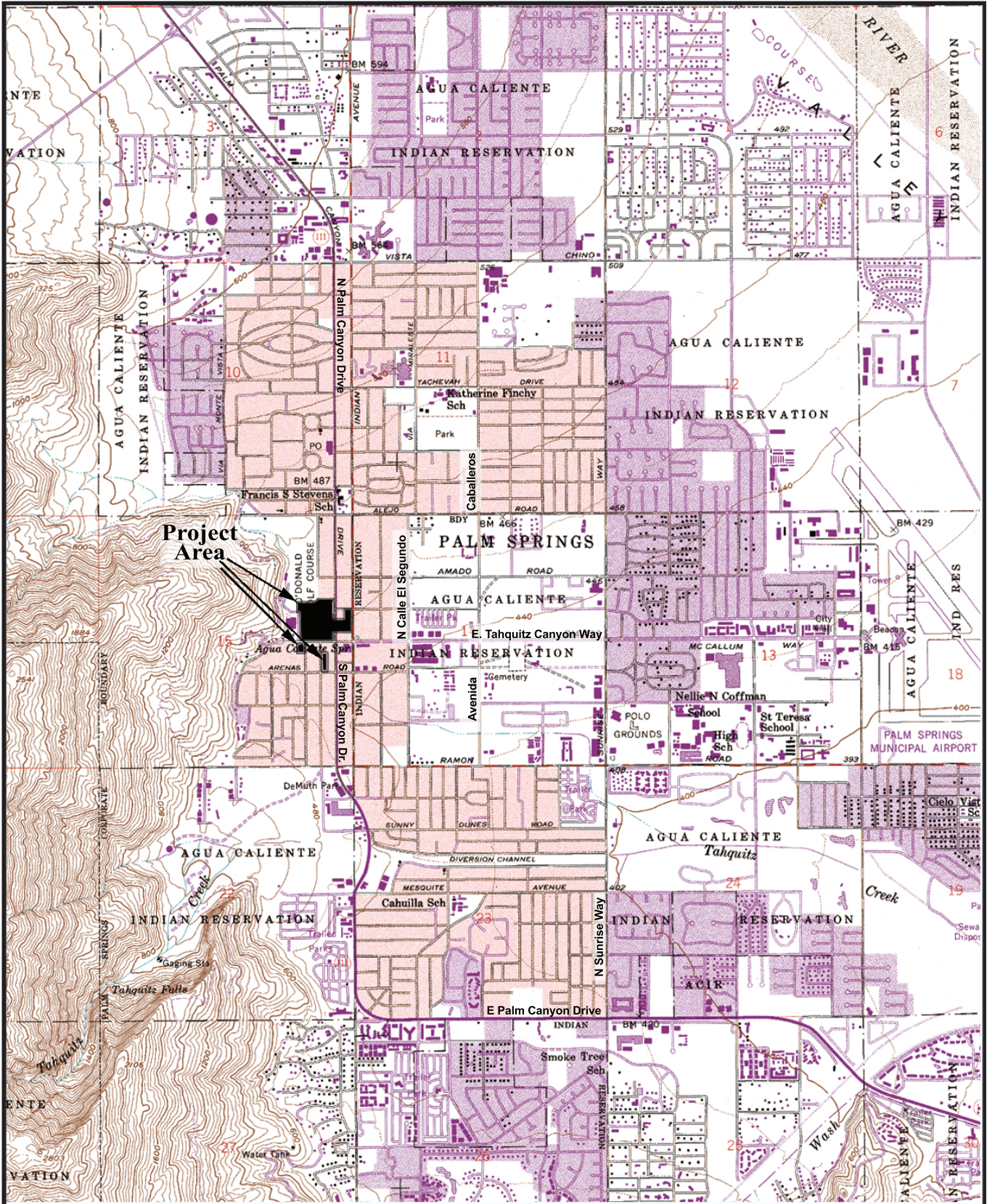
The project site lies within Seismic Zone 4, as established by the Uniform Building Code. No major active or potentially active fault is known to cross the project area, nor is the site located within an Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone.<sup>1</sup>

Because of the relatively low ground water level, the potential for liquefaction is very low at the project site, with the exception of the immediate area surrounding the Aqua Caliente Springs, located at the northwest corner of Tahquitz Canyon Way and Indian Canyon Drive. Other geotechnical hazards concerning the project site include seismically induced ground settlement, and surface susceptibility to caving within deeper excavations. The project site also lies within the boundaries of an Active Blowsand Hazard Area, and therefore impacts associated with sand accumulation are likely. Incidents of rock fall and seismically induced landslide hazards are low to none within the project area.

Impacts associated with implementation of the proposed project from geological or soil hazards are addressed in Section III-D of this EIR.

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<sup>1</sup> Seismic Safety Element, "Riverside County General Plan," prepared by the Riverside County Planning Department, 1984, as amended.



Source: USGS Quad 7.5 Minute Map  
 Palm Springs, CA 1957, Photorevised 1988

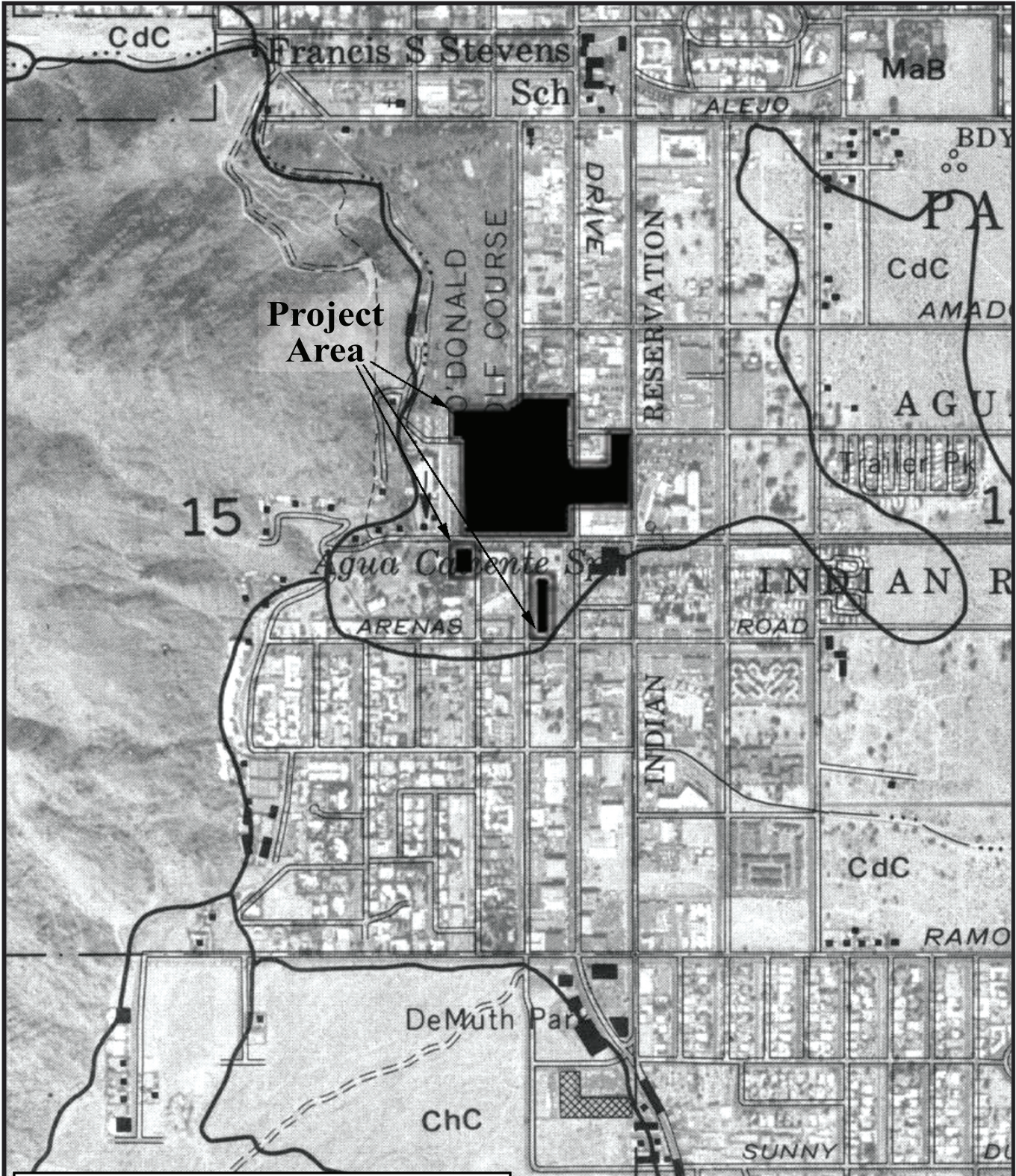


Exhibit

The Museum Market Plaza project area consists of three primary soil types: Carsitas gravely sand, Myoma fine sand, and Carsitas fine sand (Exhibit II-3). Carsitas gravely sand is moderately sloping, ranging from zero to nine percent with moderate erosion potential; the hazard of blowing soil is slight and runoff is slow. Myoma fine sand is nearly level or gently sloping soil with slight erosion potential; the hazard of blowing sand is high and runoff is very slow. Carsitas fine sand is nearly level or gently sloping soil with slight erosion potential; the hazard of blowing sand is high and runoff is very slow. These soils are well drained and consist of coarse textured alluvium including sands, loamy sands, cobbly sands, and stony sands. Native soils found near the surface tend to be loose, but fairly firm below a depth of three or four feet. Because of the development which has occurred within the project area, little native soil is expected to occur near the ground surface. Soils within the majority of the project area have been modified and engineered to support the existing development.

Based on information compiled by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Soil Conservation Service, all soils types within the project area are considered agriculturally “poor” agricultural soil (i.e., Class VIII under dry conditions, and Class IV under irrigated conditions).





**Soils Legend**

**MaB - Myoma fine sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes**

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Soils Conservation Service, Palm Springs Quadrangle



**Exhibit**

**II-3**

## **F. Hydrology**

The Coachella Valley hydrological condition can be characterized as a subtropical desert with low levels of precipitation. The slopes of the San Jacinto, Santa Rosa, San Bernardino, and Little San Bernardino Mountains are subject to more moderate conditions, with a general increase in precipitation and a decrease in mean annual temperatures with increases in elevation. Mean annual rainfall is very low from the desert floor into the foothills, ranging from 4 to 6 inches per year and averaging about 5 to 6 inches along the Little San Bernardino foothills. In some years no measurable rainfall has been reported. Most of the rainfall occurs during the cooler months of November through March, but occasional high-intensity thunderstorms and tropical storms occur in late summer and early fall. Although the ground may be generally dry at the beginning of a storm, sufficient amounts and intensities of rainfall can saturate the surface, substantially reducing percolation and increasing runoff.

Floods that impact the Valley are associated with general winter storms, combining high-intensity rainfall and rapid melting of the mountain snowpack; tropical storms out of the southern Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Cortez; and summer thunderstorms. Summer storms pose a greater threat of flooding to the Valley than winter storms because of their high intensity and the short duration of the rainfall.

Major historic storm events are used to gauge the potential for future flooding. Benchmark storms used by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to calculate the most intense credible storm include the storm of September 24, 1939. It was centered over Indio and consisted of a thunderstorm that preceded a major storm off the west coast of Mexico. This intense storm generated 6.45 inches of rain in a period of 6 hours. Tropical storm Kathleen is another example of the storm runoff potential in the area. During September 9–11, 1976, very heavy rainfall was generated over a three-county area, with Palm Desert receiving 6.81 inches of rain. The surrounding hills and mountains received as much as 14 inches, with rainfall amounts generally increasing with elevation.

### **Local and Regional Flood Control**

Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District and the Coachella Valley Water District have jurisdiction over regional flood control facilities within the project area. Local facilities are maintained by the City. Drainage generally flows southeasterly until intercepted by the Baristo Flood Control Channel, an existing watercourse. This concrete-lined drainage course, originating from the San Jacinto Mountains and the Downtown Palm Springs area, channels stormwater runoff just south the project area and eventually discharges the runoff into Tahquitz Creek and the Whitewater River Channel, south and northeast, respectively, of the project area.

Although a single storm can result in precipitation equal to the average of several years, this would be considered a rare occurrence. Area climate dictates that existing drainage courses will typically be dry throughout portions of the year, with no flow at all. However, according to the

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), portions of the City are subject to periodic flooding. Exhibit III-14 shows that FEMA has designated the project site as Zone X, which is considered to be protected from flooding, or have a less than 2% chance of annual flood.

Many roadways in the Palm Springs area are flooded when larger storms occur. This results in reduced access to those areas during relatively brief periods when those storm events occur, amounting to what is considered a minor inconvenience, and very seldom posing any threat to the public or property.

As designated by the Master Drainage Plan for the City of Palm Springs, the storm drain system is intended to carry the ten-year storm event underground, while the 100-year event would be carried within the street right-of-way. The City Engineer has stated that the current standard is adequate.

Although flooding is not a chronic problem in the project area, suggested ways to minimize the risks due to flash flooding are detailed in the City of Palm Springs General Plan. The measures to reduce the potential for flood hazards, called out in the City's Master Drainage Plan, state that the City's underground storm drains are intended to collect local urban runoff and are, with few exceptions, located either in existing or proposed street rights-of-way. The Palm Springs Master Drainage Plan proposes the initiation of an underground drain, which will intercept and convey the entire ten-year storm runoff to an outlet downstream. It is recommended that new construction and improvement in watercourse or conservation areas avoid an increase in flood levels during the occurrence of the 100-year storm event. Though concrete flood control channels have been utilized in the past, due to the loss of biological habitat, reduced percolation to groundwater, and visual impact, the construction of soft-bottomed channels with rock-lined embankments is encouraged. Open space areas should endorse the use of extensive landscape to provide the maximum permeable area to reduce site runoff<sup>2</sup>.

Hydrology impacts associated with development of the project site are addressed in Section III-F of this EIR.

### **G. Water Resources and Quality**

The local water supply to the project area is provided by Desert Water Agency (DWA), which operates community water systems that are largely dependent on groundwater extraction. Groundwater has historically been the principal source of water supply in the Coachella Valley and is jointly managed by DWA and the Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD). The groundwater table is recharged by infiltration of natural runoff from the San Jacinto, Santa Rosa, San Bernardino, and Little San Bernardino Mountains. Groundwater recharge is also supplemented by imported Colorado River water transported by the Metropolitan Water District (MWD) aqueduct, which passes through the north end of the Coachella Valley.

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<sup>2</sup> "City of Palm Springs General Plan," October 2007.

The Coachella Valley, although located in one of the driest regions of the country, has a substantial subsurface groundwater basin. The groundwater basin in the Coachella Valley is a northwest-southeast trending sub-surface aquifer, which generally extends from the Whitewater River in the northwest to the Salton Sea in the southeast. The Whitewater River Subbasin serves as the underground repository for the Palm Springs area and much of the urbanized area of the Coachella Valley. It encompasses about 400 square miles and is divided into four subareas: Palm Springs, Thermal, Thousand Palms, and Oasis. The Palm Springs subarea is the main area of recharge to the subbasin; it is also the subarea that underlies the project area, and has an estimated total water storage capacity of 4.6 million acre-feet. The entire Upper Whitewater River groundwater storage capacity is estimated at 14.2 million acre-feet.

Despite this vast water supply, water table levels fluctuate with demand. DWA and CVWD use wells to extract groundwater from the Whitewater River subbasin. Currently, there are more than 100 active wells, and nearly 75 enclosed reservoirs for water storage. In 2006 DWA and CVWD extracted 213,037 acre-feet of groundwater from the Upper Whitewater River Subbasin to meet demand and provide potable water to Valley users<sup>3</sup>.

Overdraft for the Upper Whitewater River Subbasin in 2006 was estimated at 15,515 acre-feet annually, with a cumulative overdraft through 2006 estimated at 679,716 acre-feet. This analysis assumes a non-consumptive return of 35% to groundwater in storage, considers cumulative overdraft since 1973, and includes 98,959 acre-feet of SWP Exchange water replenishment.

In order to prevent adverse impacts from the depletion of groundwater reserves, a groundwater replenishment program has been initiated. The Coachella Valley Water District and DWA acquire water from the Colorado River, State Water Project, groundwater, and other sources. Water from the State Water Project is transported via canals and aqueducts to the Central Valley and Southern California where it provides drinking water to over 23 million people and irrigation water for about 755,000 acres.

The Coachella Valley has no direct access to State Water Project waters, and exchanges its allocation with other users for Colorado River water, which is delivered directly to the Valley. The Colorado River is the largest source of imported water to the Valley and supplies most agriculture occurring in the Coachella Valley. DWA and CVWD's original entitlement to SWP water was 61,200 acre-feet per year. In 2004, CVWD purchased an additional 9,900 acre-feet per year of SWP entitlements from the Tulare Lake Basin Water Storage District. In addition, DWA and CVWD negotiated an annual exchange agreement for 100,000 acre-feet of SWP entitlements from MWD. DWA and CVWD have procured 16,000 acre-feet and 7,000 acre-feet from Berrenda Mesa Water District and a second transfer from Tulare Lake, respectively. These annual deliveries will begin in 2010. Thus, the maximum current (2008) SWP entitlement for DWA and CVWD is equal to 171,100 acre-feet per year, and will be 194,00 acre-feet per year in 2010. DWA's maximum allocation of SWP water is 50,000 acre-feet per year, and will be 55,750 acre-feet per year in 2010.

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<sup>3</sup> "Coachella Valley Water District Engineer's Report on Water Supply and Replenishment Assessment, Upper Whitewater River Subbasin Area of Benefit 2007/2008," prepared by Water Resources Branch, Engineering Department, Coachella Valley Water District, April 2007

In Palm Springs, including the project area, water quality is generally much better than that of the Lower Coachella Valley Basin, although water quality in the Coachella Valley is generally good to excellent. Exceptions are usually limited to perched and semi-perched water tables occurring in the southern portions of the Whitewater River subbasin, where ongoing crop irrigation has increased total dissolved solids. More recently, long-term discharge from on-lot septic systems has been linked to groundwater contamination occurring at different locations within the Coachella Valley region. In order to ensure water quality and safety, water agencies in the Coachella Valley comply with regulations set forth by state and federal agencies, including the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and State Department of Health Services.

The proposed project's impacts on water resources are addressed in Section III-G of this document.

## **H. Cultural Resources**

### Paleontological Resources

The City is located well outside the boundary of the ancient Lake Cahuilla, an area where paleontological resources have occurred. Soils in the City are generally post-Pleistocene age alluvium from the surrounding mountains, too new in the context of paleontology to yield fossilized remains. The project area, having previously been developed, and the surrounding City center, are not expected to contain paleontological resources.

### Pre-historic Resources

The City of Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley lie within the historical territory of the Desert Cahuilla, a Native American Tribe. Around 1000BC, the Cahuilla became a distinct tribe as indicated by linguistic evidence. The Coachella Valley yields evidence of Cahuilla settlements dating more than 500 years ago, to a time when a large population of the tribe was living adjacent to Ancient Lake Cahuilla. With the rapid evaporation of Lake Cahuilla, the mountains and canyons surrounding the Valley became increasingly important and the canyons adjacent to Palm Springs have yielded evidence of use by the tribe as sources of water, plant and animal foods, and rock for tool-making.

The project site is currently developed and has been for many years. Ground disturbance, excavation, grading and other construction activities related to the existing development on and surrounding the project site have precluded the potential for buried cultural resources.

### Historic Resources

The City's modern history began in the early 1870s, when John Guthrie McCallum purchased land in the area and later subdivided it. Rapid expansion in the area began in the 1920s, with the City's spreading reputation as a health resort, and the increased interest of the Hollywood movie community. Until the end of World War II, architecture in the town was primarily of Mission Revival and Spanish Colonial Revival styles, with hotel and retail development centered around Palm Canyon Drive. During the post World War II period, tourism stimulated the rapid urban

growth of Palm Springs and the City is now widely known for its excellent examples of modernist architecture.

Historic resources in the project area include two designated sites of historic interest that were previously occupied by early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings. However, the buildings were demolished in the mid 1960s and replaced by the Desert Fashion Plaza, which although occupying a historic site, has no intrinsic architectural or aesthetic merit. The project site also includes the Town and Country Center, a commercial complex in the Modernist style, constructed in 1948. In 2003, the building was determined as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historical Resources, with a local level of significance. Several other listed historic buildings exist in close proximity to the project site.

Impacts of development of the proposed project on cultural resources are discussed in Section III-C of this EIR.

### **I. Visual Resources**

The topographic features of the Coachella Valley are the result of complex and active geological forces which have created a low desert surrounded by the ranges, ridges and peaks of the San Jacinto, San Bernardino, Little San Bernardino and Santa Rosa Mountains. The unique topographical relief of the Coachella Valley provides attractive, highly valued viewsheds and several Coachella Valley communities, including Palm Springs, are active participants in the preservation and protection of these important visual resources.

The project site is located in the center of Downtown Palm Springs, immediately east of the San Jacinto Mountains. These mountains, together with the Santa Rosa Mountains and the more distant Little San Bernardino Mountains, form a spectacular backdrop to the City. Distinctive longitudinal views exist throughout the City, with all the east-west and north-south streets in the project area offering scenic mountain views. Tahquitz Canyon Way is designated as a scenic corridor in the General Plan.

Architecture of eclectic character and tall palm trees are definitive components of the Palm Springs townscape, with the vertical rhythm of the palms acting as an effective foil to the general horizontality of the built form. The Palm Springs Art Museum, designed by architect E. Stewart Williams in 1974, and located adjacent to the western boundary of the project site, at the foot of the San Jacinto mountains, is widely recognized as an outstanding example of desert architecture in the Modernist style.

Although renown for its uniquely Californian Modernist buildings, the City is also rich in interesting examples of Spanish and Mediterranean styles. The 'Palm Springs Walk of Stars' adorns the sidewalks of Palm Canyon Drive and other Downtown streets, adding unique visual interest to the townscape.

The impacts to the visual resources of the area from completion of the proposed project are addressed in Section III-A of this EIR.

## **J. Air Quality**

The air quality of a particular location is determined by the quantity of pollutants emitted and dispersed, and the climatic conditions that may reduce or increase the formation of pollutants. Although located within the Salton Sea Air Basin, the Coachella Valley is regulated by the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD).

In general, the Coachella Valley and the City of Palm Springs have good air quality. However, increased development, traffic congestion, construction activity and other site disturbances in the region have contributed to noticeable air quality deterioration in the past few decades.

Ozone and suspended particulates (PM<sub>10</sub>, and PM<sub>2.5</sub>) are pollutants of great concern in the Coachella Valley; other pollutants are not believed to constitute significant threats to public health. Regional air quality measurements are routinely conducted for ozone, PM<sub>10</sub>, and PM<sub>2.5</sub> at monitoring stations in Indio and the Palm Springs International Airport. The region is classified as a “non-attainment area” for PM<sub>10</sub> since both state and federal standards for PM<sub>10</sub> have been exceeded. In 2000, the EPA issued a statement of non-attainment for the region based upon recent air quality data indicating PM<sub>10</sub> concentrations exceeding both state and federal standards. As of June 2007, the Coachella Valley remained in non-attainment with the EPA. Although a final designation has not been made for the Coachella Valley in regards to PM<sub>2.5</sub>, preliminary data suggests that the EPA will designate the Valley as unclassifiable.

Initial development and long-term use of the project area have the potential to generate emissions of various types in association with demolition of existing structures, operation of construction vehicles, the generation of fugitive dust from site disturbance and grading activities, traffic associated with the new development, and the use of electricity and the consumption of natural gas.

Air quality impacts associated with the proposed project are discussed in Section III-B of this EIR.

## **K. Noise**

Noise is unwanted or undesired sounds. Concerns regarding the potential psychological and physiological impacts of noise pollution have significantly increased in recent years. The ambient noise environment is also of importance because the quieter the ambient environment, the greater the impact of noise on the receptor.

Ambient sound levels in the project area are primarily affected by traffic noise from the surrounding streets. The Downtown area also experiences noise from activities on the streets, including the weekly Street Fair, special events, outdoor dining, and similar activities.

Community noise levels are commonly evaluated using the Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) noise index, which reduces to a single number the combined effect of daily noise

exposure. The value computed by this method is the sum of the decibel values of the sound, weighted for the time of day, and averaged over 24 hours. Weighting factors are used to account for increased sensitivity to noise in the evening and nighttime periods. The City of Palm Springs requires that the community noise equivalent level (CNEL) does not exceed 65 dBA at exterior living areas (rear yards) or 45 dBA within the habitable interior living area for sensitive land uses, including residences and hotels. Commercial land uses are allowed to have noise levels up to 70-75 dBA CNEL, and still be in the acceptable range.

Demolition, site preparation and construction of the project will generate varying levels of vibration and noise at different locations during different periods, as the project will be phased. At build out, the increased intensity of development and increase in street activity and traffic will result in higher ambient noise levels over the long term.

The impacts of noise on the proposed project, and the impacts to surrounding development from noise increases associated with the proposed project, are addressed in Section III-I.

#### **L. Traffic and Circulation**

Primary access to Palm Springs is provided by State Highway 111 and Interstate 10. Highway 111 has been redesignated to travel east on Vista Chino Road, but once included Palm Canyon Drive immediately adjacent to the proposed project. The closest Interstate 10 interchange to the proposed project is the Indian Avenue exit, located approximately 3.5 miles north of the project site.

Regional roadways within the City, and proximate to the proposed project include Ramon Road and Vista Chino Road, both east-west roadways; and Gene Autry Trail and Indian Avenue, both north-south roadways.

The proposed project is located in the center of the City's Downtown, and bordered on all sides by City streets, including Andreas and Arenas Roads, Palm Canyon Drive, Indian Canyon Drive, Tahquitz Canyon Way, Belardo Road, and Museum Drive, among others. These streets all are designated General Plan roads, and are typically constructed to their General Plan build out right-of-way. Palm Canyon and Indian Canyon Drives and Tahquitz Canyon Way are designated "Major Thoroughfare;" and Belardo Road and Museum Drive are designated "Collector" roadways in the General Plan.

As a major resort community, Palm Springs has significant traffic variations over the course of a year, with winter traffic volumes as much as 50% greater than summer traffic volumes.

The build out of the proposed project will result in increased traffic on local streets and changes to the existing levels of service, as well as increased demand for parking. The closure of Belardo Road at the north end of the proposed project, and its reinstallation through the center of the proposed project; as well as the construction of new streets and driveways within the project area will also change the existing circulation pattern in the area. The implementation of the proposed project will also impact streets and intersections not immediately adjacent to the project site.



The impacts of the proposed project on local and regional traffic and circulation are analyzed in Section III-M of this EIR.

## **M. Public Services and Utilities**

### **Police Protection**

The Palm Springs Police Department is located at 200 South Civic Drive, approximately 2 miles east of the Museum Market Plaza project site. The department has 100 sworn police officers, a support staff and a team of volunteers, and it provides response service, criminal investigation, traffic enforcement and preventative patrol throughout the City<sup>4</sup>. The desired response time of the Palm Springs Police Department to emergency calls is 5 minutes, and 30 minutes for non-emergency calls. The Department has mutual-aid agreements with other local law enforcement agencies in the event of a major incident that exceeds the department's resources<sup>5</sup>. In order to provide a community policing service that is specially geared to the needs of the Downtown environment where the project site is located, the Palm Springs Police Department also operates a 'Downtown Experience' facility at 105 South Indian Canyon Drive.

### **Fire Department**

The Palm Springs Fire Department provides fire and emergency medical service to the City. The Department currently operates five fire stations, including:

- Station #1 (441), located at 277 North Indian Canyon Drive, adjacent to the project site.
- Station #2 (442), located at 300 N. El Cielo Road, approximately 2 miles east of the project site.
- Station #3 (443), located at 590 E. Racquet Club Drive, about 3.5 miles from the project site.
- Station #4 (444), located at 1300 Laverne Way, about 4 miles from the project site; and
- Station #5 (445), located at 5800 Bolero Road, about 5 miles away.

The City has established maximum fire response time at five minutes.

### **Schools**

The Palm Springs Unified School District (PSUSD) provides educational services for grades K-12 in the City and there are 4 elementary schools, 1 middle school, 1 high school and 2 alternative schools.

PSUSD receives State and local funding, as well as school facilities fees. The District is authorized to collect school facilities fees as provided for in Government Code Section 53080et. seq. and 65995 et. seq. at an amount of \$3.20 per square foot of residential development and \$0.47 per square foot of commercial development<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Palm Springs Police Department Organizational Chart, July 2007

<sup>5</sup> City of Palm Springs 2007 General Plan.

<sup>6</sup> Palm Springs Unified School District web site, July 2008.

Private vocational education is offered at Maric College in the City of Palm Springs. The College of the Desert, a public community college, plans to open a West Valley Campus in the City.

### **Libraries**

The City of Palm Springs Public Library is located in Sunrise Park, approximately 2 miles east of the project site. It provides comprehensive library and information services, offers internet and computer facilities, provides a passport service and runs a wide range of public educational events and adult literacy programs. The library is administered by a board of trustees and serves an estimated average population of 41,275 within the City of Palm Springs, as well as approximately 10,000 additional people from surrounding communities<sup>7</sup>. The Welwood Murray Memorial Library is located in Downtown Palm Springs, and is currently a privately owned, non-profit library operated by volunteers and open to the public. In early 2009, the City will operate the Library, and it will become a branch of the main Library.

### **Telecommunications**

Telephone and telecommunications services are provided to the project area by AT&T, Verizon California and Time Warner Cable, as well as by a number of smaller, independent operators. A wide variety of basic and state-of-the-art telephone and other services are available throughout the City. The major service providers design their infrastructure to accommodate future growth demands and build out of the proposed project is not expected to impact significantly on telecommunication services.

### **Electricity**

Southern California Edison (SCE) provides electricity within the City of Palm Springs. SCE is a public utility and operates under the jurisdiction of the Public Utilities Commission and federal regulatory agencies. Power is derived from both renewable and non-renewable resources. SCE maintain major transmission lines in the city as part of their normal distribution system. The present supply capacity of SCE is expected to be adequate to provide for increased consumption associated with the build out of the proposed project.

### **Natural Gas**

The Southern California Gas Company (SCG) provides natural gas services to the project area. SCG is a public utility and operates under the jurisdiction of the Public Utilities Commission and federal regulatory agencies. The company offers services and programs responsive to residential and commercial requirements, and integrates energy conservation techniques. The present supply capacity of SCG is expected to be adequate to provide for increased consumption associated with the build out of the proposed project.

### **Solid Waste Management**

Palm Springs Disposal is the authorized, franchised waste collection hauler for the City of Palm Springs. Complete residential, commercial, industrial and roll-off trash services and recycling services are provided.

The Riverside County Landfill site at Edom Hill closed in 2004 and a transfer station was

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<sup>7</sup> Palm Springs Library, 1997

constructed at the same site. Much of the solid waste collected in Palm Springs is transported to The Edom Hill Transfer Station (EHTS), which is owned and operated by Burtec Waste Management. Solid waste from the transfer station is disposed of at one of three landfills: Lambs Canyon (remaining capacity 25,967,000 cubic yards), Badlands Landfill (remaining capacity 15,036,809 cubic yards) or El Sobrante Landfill (remaining capacity 184,930,000 cubic yards). Approximately 35% of collected waste in the City of Palm Springs is recycled<sup>8</sup>.

Detailed analysis of the impacts of the proposed project on public services and utilities is provided in Sections III-K and III-N.

## **N. Hazards and Hazardous Materials**

Proper disposal of hazardous and toxic waste has become an increasingly important issue, primarily due to human health and environmental concerns. Hazardous and toxic “material” refers to substances that have a value or can be used, whereas hazardous “waste” is defined as a waste substance or byproduct of industrial, manufacturing, agricultural, and other uses, which can pose a substantial or potential hazard to human health or the environment when improperly managed. Hazardous waste possesses at least one of these four characteristics: ignitability, corrosivity, reactivity, or toxicity; or appears on special U.S. EPA lists.<sup>9</sup> Specific industries that use hazardous and toxic materials or produce large amounts of hazardous waste do not currently occupy the project site or the vicinity.

The Palm Springs International Airport is located approximately 3 miles east of the project site. The boundaries of the airport’s land use plan do not include the project site. There are no other airstrips in Palm Springs or in the vicinity of the project. Therefore, hazardous materials associated with the airport are not expected to impact the project site.

The project area is currently developed and will require the demolition of older structures, which has the potential to result in the release of asbestos and/or lead. Hazardous and toxic substances have become ubiquitous and are commonly found in homes, institutions, and industries. In order to identify the presence of hazardous materials within existing buildings, a Phase I Environmental assessment has been conducted. No environmentally suspect items were observed during the Phase I Environmental Assessment and the project site is not listed on state or federal databases of contaminated sites. No National Priority Sites (areas that have experienced large-scale releases of hazardous materials) exist within one mile of the project site<sup>10</sup>.

The project area is located in the City’s urban core and is surrounded by urban development. Although the site is located several hundred feet from the foothills of the San Jacinto Mountains, it is not located in a wild land fire area.

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<sup>8</sup> City of Palm Springs 1992 General Plan EIR.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, <http://www.epa.gov/>

<sup>10</sup> “Department of Toxic Substances Control Cortese List,” <http://www.dtsc.ca.gov>, accessed July 15, 2008.

Impacts associated with demolition of the structures within the proposed project, and use of hazardous materials during the life of the proposed project are addressed in Section III-E of this EIR.

#### **O. Recreational Resources**

There are a wide variety of natural and man-made recreational resources within the City of Palm Springs and surrounding areas.

The City has adopted the Park Standards of the National Recreational Park Association, which require 5 acres of parkland per 1,000 persons. There are presently 3 Community Parks, 2 Neighborhood Parks, 3 Specialty Parks and 2 Local Parks in Palm Springs. City owned recreational resources include 156 acres of developed parkland, 160 acres of public golf courses and several miles of developed greenbelts along major thoroughfares.

Many of the City's parks include an array of amenities together with a wide range of sports facilities, and there is an Olympic-sized swimming pool and state-of-the-art Skate Park at Sunrise Plaza.

Landscaped greenbelts or parkways have been developed along a number of major and secondary thoroughfares and include meandering bike paths, walking paths and other amenities such as benches and rest areas. In addition to City owned facilities, there are numerous privately owned golf courses and other sports and recreational facilities that are open to the public.

The City partners with local nonprofit organizations to provide a wide range of recreational programs to meet the diverse needs of all residents and visitors.

In addition to the City's parks, regional recreational resources include the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto National Monument, the Whitewater Wilderness Study Area and the San Jacinto State Park, as well as the Murray, Andreas and Palm Canyon recreation areas which are operated by the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

A review of the need for parks and recreation facilities as they relate to build out of the project is provided in Section III of this document.

#### **P. Socio-Economic Resources**

The City had a population of 42,807 in the year 2000, according to the Bureau of the Census. The Department of Finance further estimates that the City's population has increased to 47,251 by 2008.

There are currently 33,479 housing units in the City, consisting primarily of single-family homes, which represent 56% of the City's residential units. There are 22,285 households in the

City, whose average household size is 2.089 persons. The relatively low number of households when compared to the number of housing units reflects the tourist or second home component of the community, which results in a 33% vacancy rate, but does not represent the true vacancy of residential units in the City, when vacation homes are excluded. The City's net vacancy rate has been about 5 to 6 percent in recent years, typical of most Valley cities.

The City operates as a charter City, and provides a full range of service to residents, including police and fire services, parks and recreation, road construction and maintenance and general government. The development of the proposed project will result in both increased costs and revenues for the City.

The impacts to the City's General and Restricted funds from implementation of the proposed project are analyzed in Section III-O.