



## **HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD STAFF REPORT**

DATE: November 12, 2019

PUBLIC HEARING

SUBJECT: AN APPLICATION BY CATHERINE BODZINER AND DUFF LINDE, OWNERS, FOR CLASS 1 HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION OF "THE SUNMOR MODEL HOME" LOCATED AT 2821 LIVMOR DRIVE, (APN #502-141-006), CASE HSPB #124. (KL).

FROM: Department of Planning Services

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### SUMMARY

The property owners are requesting historic resource designation of a single family residence designed in 1955 by the notable architectural firm of Wexler & Harrison (Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison). The home exemplifies the mid-century Modern architectural period for which Palm Springs has become internationally renowned and retains a high degree of historic integrity.

If designated as a Class 1 resource, the property would be subject to the regulations outlined in Section 8.05 of the Palm Springs Municipal Code.

### RECOMMENDATION:

1. Open the public hearing and receive public testimony.
2. Close the public hearing and adopt Resolution HSPB #119, "A RESOLUTION OF THE HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD OF THE CITY OF PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA, RECOMMENDING THAT THE CITY COUNCIL DESIGNATE "THE SUNMOR MODEL HOME" LOCATED AT 2821 LIVMOR DRIVE AS CLASS 1 HISTORIC RESOURCE HSPB #124, SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS. (APN 502-141-006)"

### BACKGROUND AND SETTING:

A historic resources report prepared by the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation ("PSPF") dated June 2019 ("the report") is the basis of this staff report.

The Sunmor Model Home was built by local builder / developer Robert "Bob" Higgins and developed and marketed by the Sands Realty and Development Company. Sunmor is a neighborhood mostly comprised of mid-century Modern tract homes. The

report explains that only eleven homes in the Sunmor tract were designed and built by Wexler & Harrison and Higgins. Most of the other homes in the tract were designed by William Krisel (Palmer & Krisel Architects) and developed by the Alexander Construction Company. Adjacent to the Sunmor tract and now part of the same neighborhood organization was a two-block subdivision named Alejo Palms Estates which was primarily built out by developer / builder Jack Meiselman with a few scattered speculative homes developed by the firm Smith & Rapport. Most of these homes also share characteristics of the mid-century Modern architectural style.

The Sunmor Model Home is historically significant because it is a highly intact example of a modest tract home designed by the firm Wexler & Harrison in the mid-century Modern style. The Sunmor Model Home is unlike the typical boxy mass-produced single family homes designed and built by “merchant builders” that proliferated much of the United States following World War II. It possesses characteristics found in more expensive, custom-designed and built home such as expansive use of floor-to-ceiling glass and higher-end finishes. It also exhibits a sophistication in design and detailing that was uncommon for tract homes of that period.

The Sunmor Model Home is approximately 1,346 square feet in area. It is comprised of two interlocking volumes, one that has a flat roof which contains the bedrooms and a second with a very low-pitched shed roof that contains the living / dining / kitchen areas and extends westward to create a two-car covered carport. The two volumes distinguish the public / social area of the home from the private / sleeping area and create a dynamic interplay of geometry when viewed from the street. The roof edge profile is kept very thin and is supported by a wood post-and-beam structure that is designed on an 8 foot structural module.

The structure is exposed in the form of deep wood beams which extend beyond the exterior walls of the home to create deep cantilevered eaves that shelter the home from the intense desert sun. The post-and-beam structure is further exposed and expressed in the home’s living room where the 8 foot on-center posts separate large floor to ceiling panels of glass.

The home is clad in sand finished stucco, glass, and wood beams and window trim on the side and rear facades, and vertical “board and batten” wood siding with long clerestory windows placed at the top of the board and batten siding, between the beams of the roof on the front façade. The deep cantilevered beams that allow the roof to extend well past the exterior walls give the home a strong visual horizontal presence. This horizontality is further emphasized by the integration of long narrow clerestory windows that are tucked beneath the deeply cantilevered eaves. The vertical board and batten siding gives a visual balance to the overall design composition.

<i>Related Relevant City Actions by HSPB, Planning, Fire, Building, etc...</i>	
October 2019	Site inspection by members of the HSPB and City Staff.

**Ownership Status**

May, 2019 | Purchase by the current owners. Catherine Bodziner and Duff Linde.

BELOW THE INTERLOCKING VOLUMES OF THE HOME CAN BE SEEN.



**ANALYSIS:**

Historic Preservation activities in Palm Springs are regulated under Municipal Code Section 8.05 (*Historic Preservation*). The purpose of the Historic Preservation Ordinance is:

*“...to stabilize and improve buildings, structures or areas which are considered to be of historical, architectural, archaeological or ecological value, to foster civic beauty, to strengthen the local economy and to promote the use of historic resources for the education and welfare of the citizens.”*

**Standard Conditions that apply to Class 1 Historic Sites or Resources**

The following shall apply to a Class 1 Historic Site or Resource:

1. It shall meet the definition of a Class 1 historic resource as outlined in Municipal Code Section 8.05.020 including the findings outlined in Section 8.05.070 (C).
2. An archival file shall be maintained on the property by the City.
3. It may be qualified as 'historic' at the federal, state, and/or county level.
4. A marker explaining the historic nature of the site may be installed at the site in a location viewable from the public way.
5. Compliance with all rules and regulations for Historic Resources and Historic Districts under Chapter 8.05 of the Municipal Code.
6. If designated, the findings in support of designation shall be stated in a resolution of the City Council that shall be recorded with the County Recorders' office within 90 days of the effective date of the Council's resolution.

*Evaluation of the Application.* Pursuant to Municipal Code Section 8.05.070 (C,1,a), the HSPB shall evaluate the application and make findings in conformance with the following criteria:

*Criteria for the Designation of Class 1 Historic Resources. A site, structure, building or object may be designated as a Class 1 historic resource, provided both of the following findings ("a" and "b") are met:*

*a. The site, structure, building or object exhibits exceptional historic significance and meets one or more of the criteria listed below:*

The Sunmor Model Home exhibits exceptional historic significance as a highly intact example of a tract home designed by architects Wexler and Harrison in the mid-century Modern architectural style.

*(Criterion 1) The resource is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community;*

The report does not identify any events associated with the site, thus the site does not qualify under Criterion 1.

*(Criterion 2) The resource is associated with the lives of persons who made a meaningful contribution to national, state or local history;*

The report does not identify any persons of significance associated with the site who made a meaningful contribution to local, state or national history, thus it does not qualify as a historic resource under Criterion 2.

*(Criterion 3) The resource reflects or exemplifies a particular period of national, state or local history;*

The Sunmor Model Home exemplifies the post-World War II period in the development

of Palm Springs (1945 – 1969) because of its mid-century Modern architectural style. This style, sometimes referred to as “Desert Modern” reflects the tenets of the Modern architectural movement, as adapted to the desert climate, with deep cantilevered roof eaves that shelter and protect the expansive areas of glass from the hot desert sun. Palm Springs has become internationally recognized as having an outstanding collection of buildings from the mid-century period. As such the house qualifies as a historic site under Criterion 3.

*(Criterion 4) The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction;*

The Sunmor Model Home was constructed using wood post-and-beam for its structure. Post and beam construction was often used in mid-twentieth century homes in Palm Springs for its ease of construction and because it lent itself to the “Desert Modern” characteristic of large expanses of glass. With an 8 foot structural module the post-and-beam method of construction also allowed for rapid assembly since it was a structural module based on standard lumber dimensions. This ease of construction allowed the homes to be built quickly and affordably, making them attractive to first-time homebuyers, retirees and those seeking affordable second homes in the desert. For these reasons the Sunmor Model Home qualifies under Criterion 4.

*(Criterion 5) The resource presents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age, or that possesses high artistic value;*

The Sunmor Model Home was designed in 1955 by architects Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison, both of whom have been recognized for the substantial contribution made to the Palm Springs architectural “brand”. Both Wexler and Harrison have been recognized for having inspired a new generation of architects practicing in Palm Springs and who seek to emulate the simple strong Modernist characteristics found in their body of work. As such the Sunmor Model Home qualifies as a historic resource under Criterion 5.

*(Criterion 6) The resource represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction, as used in evaluating applications for designation of historic districts, for parcels on which more than one entity exists; or*

The report does not assert that the Sunmor Model Home qualifies under Criterion 6.

*(Criterion 7) The resource has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to national, state or local history or prehistory.*

No information has been provided in the historic resources report on any pre-historic significance of the site.

*Analysis of Integrity. (PSMC 8.05.070 (C,1,b). The site, structure, building or object retains one or more of the following aspects of integrity, as established in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards: integrity of design, materials, workmanship, location, setting, feeling, or association.*

The application includes an evaluation of the site relative to the seven aspects or qualities of integrity, as recognized by the National Register of Historic Places. The seven aspects or qualities include location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The application concludes that the Sunmor Model Home retains a high degree of integrity. Below is staff's evaluation of the site's integrity.

1. *Location:*

The Sunmor Model Home remains in the same location that it was constructed, thus it retains integrity of location.

2. *Design:*

Aside from some minor additions including a patio cover in the rear yard, a translucent glass privacy wall in the front yard, the home possesses a high degree of design integrity and has been well maintained.

3. *Setting:*

The setting of the Sunmor Model Home, within a tract of similar homes with mid-century Modern design characteristics, remains as it was from the time of its construction; it thus retains integrity of Setting.

4. *Materials:*

As noted above, the Sunmor Model Home has had very few modifications or alterations. Its post-and-beam wood construction is still evident and unaltered. Of particular note are the wood framed windows. The window frames are wood with only a casement window inset where operable windows were desired. The framing at the windows has protruding "stops" that give a visual thinness to the window frame assemblies. Aside from the metal patio cover in the back yard and the frosted glass privacy wall at the front, the home exhibits a high degree of material integrity.

5. *Workmanship:*

The Sunmor Model Home is a structure built of high-quality materials and craftsmanship and thus retains integrity of workmanship.

#### 6. *Feeling:*

The casual informal living style expressed in the Sunmor Model Home with its large expanses of glass that creates a strong visual connection between the inside and outside of the home is still intact as is the open floor plan. The home continues to exude a quiet sense of elegance and a comfortable feeling and thus retains integrity of feeling.

#### 7. *Association:*

The strong association between architects Wexler and Harrison and the Sunmor Model Home has been well documented and thus integrity of Association remains strong.

### DEFINING HISTORIC CHARACTERISTICS

In considering a recommendation for historic resource designation it is important to distinguish those physical elements that are original or from the period of significance that contribute to the resource's historic significance from alterations, additions or features that were added at a later time that may be sympathetic to the original character, but which may create a false sense of historicity. Distinguishing original character-defining features from non-original elements aids the HSPB when it is tasked with evaluating future alterations to the historic resource.

The physical character-defining historic features of this resource include the following:

1. Its mid-century Modern architectural style.
2. The low-profile roofline and thin fascia with deep cantilevered eaves.
3. The wood post and beam structural system.
4. The wood frame window assemblies and large expanses of floor to ceiling glass and clerestory windows.
5. The board and batten vertical siding on the front of the home.
6. The smooth sand finished stucco walls.

The non-contributing features include the following:

1. The patio cover at the rear yard.
2. The translucent glass privacy wall at the front yard.
3. The aluminum wall light sconces.
4. The masonry privacy wall around the back yard.
5. The swimming pool and landscape.

### ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The proposed historic resource designation is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical changes to the environment, directly or indirectly.

### NOTIFICATION

Pursuant to section 8.05.140 of the Municipal Code of Palm Springs, All residents within five hundred (500) feet of the subject property have been notified and notice was made in a newspaper of general circulation.

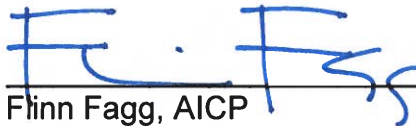
### CONCLUSION:

The Sunmor Model Home meets the definition of a historic resource based on Criteria 3, 4, and 5 and retains a high degree of historic integrity. Staff has concluded that the resource qualifies as a Class 1 historic site.



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Ken Lyon, RA  
Associate Planner,  
Historic Preservation Officer



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Flinn Fagg, AICP  
Director of Planning Services

### Attachments:

1. Vicinity Map
2. Draft Resolution
3. Application, related background materials, photos. (Provided under separate cover.)



RESOLUTION NO. HSPB 124

A RESOLUTION OF THE HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD OF THE CITY OF PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA, RECOMMENDING THAT THE CITY COUNCIL DESIGNATE "THE SUNMOR MODEL HOME" LOCATED AT 2821 LIVMOR DRIVE, A CLASS 1 HISTORIC RESOURCE, (HSPB #124), APN 502-141-006.

THE HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD ("HSPB") FINDS AND DETERMINES AS FOLLOWS:

- A. Chapter 8.05 of the Palm Springs Municipal Code allows for the designation of historic sites and districts.
- B. On August 6, 2019, Catherine Bodziner and Duff Linde, owners and applicant, filed an application with the City pursuant to Article III, Section 8.05.070 (*Procedure for Designation of Historic Sites and Historic Districts*) of the Palm Springs Municipal Code requesting Class 1 historic resource designation for the parcel located at 2821 Livmor Drive (APN #502-141-006). The application included a historic resources report ("the report") prepared by the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, dated June, 2019.
- C. In October, 2019, members of the Historic Site Preservation Board (HSPB) conducted site inspections of the proposed historic resource, accompanied by City staff.
- D. On November 12, 2019, a noticed public hearing of the Palm Springs Historic Site Preservation Board ("HSPB") to consider Case HSPB #124 was held in accordance with applicable law.
- E. The HSPB carefully reviewed and considered all of the evidence presented in connection with the hearing on the project, including, but not limited to, the staff report and all written and oral testimony presented.

THE HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD OF THE CITY OF PALM SPRINGS RESOLVES:

SECTION 1: FINDINGS – PART "A", CRITERIA FOR HISTORIC RESOURCES.

*Evaluation of the Application.* Pursuant to Municipal Code Section 8.05.070 (C), in considering a recommendation to designate the site as a Class 1 or 2 historic resource the HSPB shall evaluate the application and make findings for conformance with the following criteria:

*Criteria for the Designation of Class 1 Historic Resources. A site, structure, building or object may be designated as a Class 1 historic resource, provided both of the following findings are met:*

*a. The site, structure, building or object exhibits exceptional historic significance and meets one or more of the criteria listed below:*

The Sunmor Model Home exhibits exceptional historic significance as a highly intact example of a tract home designed by architects Wexler and Harrison in the mid-century Modern architectural style.

*(Criterion 1) The resource is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community;*

The report does not identify any events associated with the site, thus the site does not qualify under Criterion 1.

*(Criterion 2) The resource is associated with the lives of persons who made a meaningful contribution to national, state or local history;*

The report does not identify any persons of significance associated with the site who made a meaningful contribution to local, state or national history, thus it does not qualify as a historic resource under Criterion 2.

*(Criterion 3) The resource reflects or exemplifies a particular period of national, state or local history;*

The Sunmor Model Home exemplifies the post-World War II period in the development of Palm Springs (1945 – 1969) because of its mid-century Modern architectural style. This style, sometimes referred to as “Desert Modern” reflects the tenets of the Modern architectural movement, as adapted to the desert climate, with deep cantilevered roof eaves that shelter and protect the expansive areas of glass from the hot desert sun. Palm Springs has become internationally recognized as having an outstanding collection of buildings from the mid-century period. As such the house qualifies as a historic site under Criterion 3.

*(Criterion 4) The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction;*

The Sunmor Model Home was constructed using wood post-and-beam for its structure. Post and beam construction was often used in mid-twentieth century homes in Palm Springs for its ease of construction and because it lent itself to the “Desert Modern” characteristic of large expanses of glass. With an 8 foot structural module the post-and-beam method of construction also allowed for rapid assembly since it was a structural module based on standard lumber dimensions. This ease of construction allowed the homes to be built quickly and affordably, making them attractive to first-time homebuyers, retirees and those seeking affordable second homes in the desert. For these reasons the Sunmor Model Home qualifies under Criterion 4.

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*(Criterion 6) The resource represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction, as used in evaluating applications for designation of historic districts, for parcels on which more than one entity exists; or*

The report does not assert that the Sunmor Model Home qualifies under Criterion 6.

*(Criterion 7) The resource has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to national, state or local history or prehistory.*

No information has been provided in the historic resources report on any pre-historic significance of the site.

## SECTION 2: FINDINGS – PART “B” – ANALYSIS OF INTEGRITY.

*b. The site, structure, building or object retains one or more of the following aspects of integrity, as established in the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards: integrity of design, materials, workmanship, location, setting, feeling, or association.*

The application includes an evaluation of the residence relative to the seven aspects or qualities of integrity, as recognized by the National Register of Historic Places. The seven aspects or qualities include location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The application concludes that the residence retains a high degree of integrity despite some modifications. The HSPB made the following findings of the site’s historic Integrity:

### *1. Location:*

The Sunmor Model Home remains in the same location that it was constructed, thus it retains integrity of location.

### *2. Design:*

Aside from some minor additions including a patio cover in the rear yard, a translucent glass privacy wall in the front yard, the home possesses a high degree of design integrity and has been well maintained.

3. *Setting:*

The setting of the Sunmor Model Home, within a tract of similar homes with mid-century Modern design characteristics, remains as it was from the time of its construction; it thus retains integrity of Setting.

4. *Materials:*

As noted above, the Sunmor Model Home has had very few modifications or alterations. Its post-and-beam wood construction is still evident and unaltered. Of particular note are the wood framed windows. The window frames are wood with only a casement window inset where operable windows were desired. The framing at the windows has protruding “stops” that give a visual thinness to the window frame assemblies. Aside from the metal patio cover in the back yard and the frosted glass privacy wall at the front, the home exhibits a high degree of material integrity.

5. *Workmanship:*

The Sunmor Model Home is a structure built of high-quality materials and craftsmanship and thus retains integrity of workmanship.

6. *Feeling:*

The casual informal living style expressed in the Sunmor Model Home with its large expanses of glass that creates a strong visual connection between the inside and outside of the home is still intact as is the open floor plan. The home continues to exude a quiet sense of elegance and a comfortable feeling and thus retains integrity of feeling.

7. *Association:*

The strong association between architects Wexler and Harrison and the Sunmor Model Home has been well documented and thus integrity of Association remains strong.

**SECTION 3: DEFINING HISTORIC CHARACTERISTICS AND NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES.**

In considering a recommendation for historic resource designation it is important to distinguish those physical elements that are original or from the period of significance that contribute to the resource’s historic significance from alterations, additions or features that were added at a later time that may be sympathetic to the original character, but which may create a false sense of historicity. Distinguishing original character-defining features from non-original elements aids the HSPB when it is tasked with evaluating future alterations to the historic resource.

The physical character-defining historic features of this resource include the following:

1. The mid-century Modern architectural style of the home.
2. The low-profile roofline and thin fascia with deep cantilevered eaves.
3. The wood post and beam structural system.
4. The wood frame window assemblies and large expanses of floor to ceiling glass and clerestory windows.
5. The board and batten vertical siding on the front of the home.
6. The smooth sand finished stucco walls.

The non-contributing features include the following:

1. The patio cover at the rear yard.
2. The translucent glass privacy wall at the front yard.
3. The aluminum wall light sconces.
4. The masonry privacy wall around the back yard.
5. The swimming pool and landscape.

#### SECTION 4: ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The proposed historic resource designation is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical changes to the environment, directly or indirectly.

#### SECTION 5: CONDITIONS THAT APPLY TO CLASS 1 HISTORIC SITES.

According to Section 8.05 of the Municipal Code, the following shall apply to a Class 1 Historic Resource:

1. It shall meet the definition of a historic site as outlined in Municipal Code Section 8.05.020.
2. An archival file shall be maintained on the property by the City.
3. It may be qualified as 'historic' at the federal, state, and/or county level.
4. The structure/site may not be modified nor objects removed without following the procedures outlined in Municipal Code Section 8.05.110 "Demolition or Alteration of Class 1 and Class 2 Historic Resources – Certificate of Appropriateness".
5. A marker explaining the historic nature of the site may be installed at the site in a location viewable from the public way.
6. Compliance with all rules and regulations for Historic Sites and Historic Districts under Chapter 8.05 of the Municipal Code shall be required.
7. The site shall not be further subdivided.
8. The City Clerk shall submit the Council Resolution to the County recorder for recordation within 90 days of the effective date of the Council's resolution.

Based upon the foregoing, the Historic Site Preservation Board recommends that the City Council designate the residence at 2821 Livmor Drive “The Sunmor Model Home” a Class 1 Historic Resource (Case HSPB #124).

ADOPTED THIS TWELFTH DAY OF NOVEMBER, 2019.

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAIN:

ATTEST:

CITY OF PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

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Flinn Fagg, AICP  
Director of Planning Services