



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

DATE: November 12, 2019

PUBLIC HEARING

SUBJECT: AN APPLICATION BY WILLIAM AND JENNIFER NELSON FAIN, OWNERS, FOR CLASS 1 HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION OF "THE J. CHENEY WELLS RESIDENCE" 1850 SMOKE TREE LANE, ROCK 12 (APN #510-192-003), CASE HSPB #125. (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 1942 by the notable architectural firm of Clark & Frey (Albert Frey & John Porter Clark). The home is a unique example of a classic ranch style home with Albert Frey's signature Modernist detailing 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:

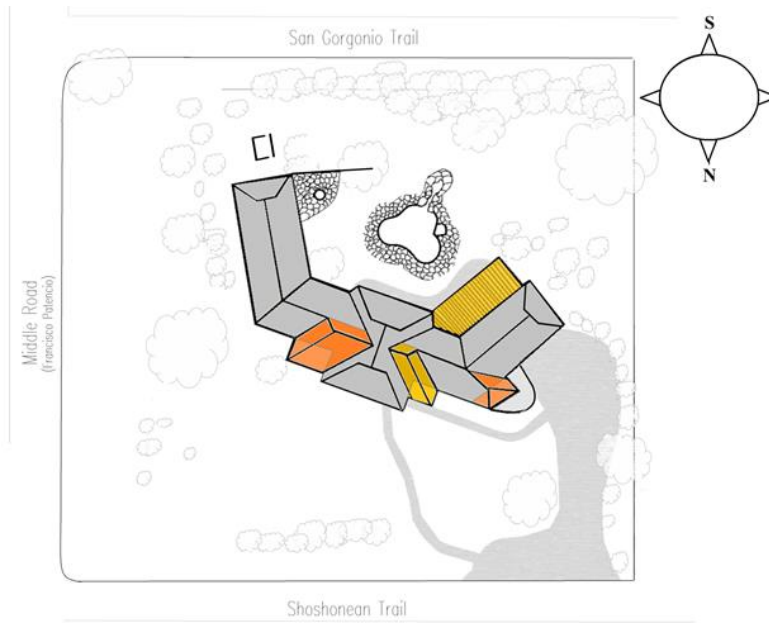
1. Open the public hearing and receive public testimony.
2. Close the public hearing and adopt Resolution HSPB #125, "A RESOLUTION OF THE HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD OF THE CITY OF PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA, RECOMMENDING THAT THE CITY COUNCIL DESIGNATE "THE J. CHENEY WELLS RESIDENCE" LOCATED AT 1850 SMOKE TREE LANE, ROCK 12, AS HISTORIC RESOURCE HSPB #125, SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS. (APN 510-192-003)"

### BACKGROUND AND SETTING:



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

The J. Cheney Wells home was built by local builders Wilson and Sorum.

**BELOW AN AERIAL VIEW OF THE J. CHENEY WELLS RESIDENCE.**



**SITE PLAN FOR  
J. CHENEY WELLS  
RESIDENCE**  
Smoke Tree Ranch  
Palm Springs, California  
Albert Frey, architect  
1942  
Showing additions by Albert Frey

 1968 Frey Additions  
 1974 Frey Additions

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

<i>Ownership Status</i>	
June 2018	Purchase by the current owners.

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 J. Cheney Wells Residence exhibits exceptional historic significance as a highly intact example of a custom designed California Ranch style home by notable architect Albert Frey.

*(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 identifies J. Cheney Wells (1874 – 1960) as a person who made a meaningful contribution to national history because of his association with the American Optical Company and as co-founder and developer of Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, the biggest living history museum in New England. Thus the Wells Residence qualifies as a historic resource under Criterion 2.

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

The Wells Residence reflects the period in the development of Palm Springs between the wars (1919 – 1941) when notable personages from the movie industry and industry mogels such as Wells discovered Palm Springs as a favored vacation destination and built large custom homes here, transforming the small desert village into an internationally known resort destination. It also reflects the period when the private enclave known as Smoke Tree Ranch was first developing under the management of Fred and Maziebelle Markham. Smoketree was one of the few subdivisions to be developed during the Great Depression. As such the Wells Residence 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 Wells Residence is a noteworthy example of a large custom home constructed in the California Ranch style with modernist detailing. The California Ranch style was popularized in the twenties and thirties by architect Cliff May. The Wells Residence possesses qualities of the California Ranch style, notably its long sprawling form, a pitched and/or hipped roof, an asymmetrical floor plan often in the form of a wide “V”, an emphasis on casual indoor / outdoor living, board and batten siding, and exposed rafter

tails.<sup>1</sup> Although the architectural standard for Smoke Tree ranch was the ranch style typology, Frey infused the Wells Residence with many modernist details, such as large expanses of glass, open floor plan, minimalist detailing of the home's interior and "wrap-around" corner windows. For these reasons the Wells Residence 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 Wells Residence was designed by Albert Frey while he was an associate in the firm of John Porter Clark<sup>2</sup>. The report explains that although John Porter Clark's name is listed on the building permit and the title block of the drawings for the home, Frey verified that the design of the home was indeed his creation. As such the J. Cheney Wells Residence 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 Wells Residence 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,

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<sup>1</sup> The home originally had wood shake roof shingles that were removed at some time in the past and replaced with cementitious flat "shingles". The property owner is encouraged to re-install fire retardant wood shake roof shingles to improve the historic integrity of this particular aspect of the residence.

<sup>2</sup> The report asserts that it was Clark's name, not Frey's on the blueprints and associated documents on the house because Frey had not yet been elevated to Partner status within the firm, may not have been licensed at the time to practice architecture at the time of construction of the Wells Residence and it was and is still common practice for the head of an architectural firm to be given the credit for an associates work.

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 Wells Residence remains in the same location that it was constructed, thus it retains integrity of location.

*2. Design:*

The Wells Residence possesses a high degree of design integrity and has been well maintained.

*3. Setting:*

The setting of the Wells Residence, within a tract of similar custom-designed homes within the rustic environment of Smoketree Ranch, remains as it was from the time of its construction; it thus retains integrity of Setting.

*4. Materials:*

The Wells Residence was constructed of high quality materials; stucco, horizontal clapboard siding, and steel casement windows; all of which are intact and in very good condition. The original wood shake roof has been removed and replaced with cementitious flat "shingles" which diminishes the material integrity of the residence. Thus the home exhibits a fair degree of material integrity.

*5. Workmanship:*

The Wells Residence is a structure built of high-quality materials and craftsmanship typical of a custom-built residence and thus retains integrity of workmanship.

*6. Feeling:*

The casual informal living style expressed in the Wells Residence with its large expanses of multi-paned glass that create 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 comfort and thus retains integrity of feeling.

*7. Association:*

The association with J. Cheney Wells is well documented in the report and the home also retains its association visually with architect Albert Frey 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. The low-profile roofline with deep cantilevered eaves with exposed rafter tails.
2. The stucco and horizontal clapboard exterior wall treatments.
3. The steel casement windows, including the large "walls of glass" in the living room.
4. The covered patios and verandas.
5. The additions, the designs of which are specifically credited to Albert Frey, including those from 1947, 1968 and 1974.

The non-contributing features include the following:

1. The 2009 swimming pool and 2014 spa installation.
2. The walkways and driveways.
3. The perimeter garden wall and equipment enclosure wall.
4. The cementitious tile "shingle" roof.

## 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.

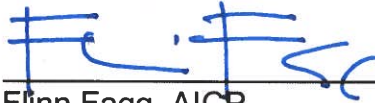
CONCLUSION:

The J. Cheney Wells residence 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

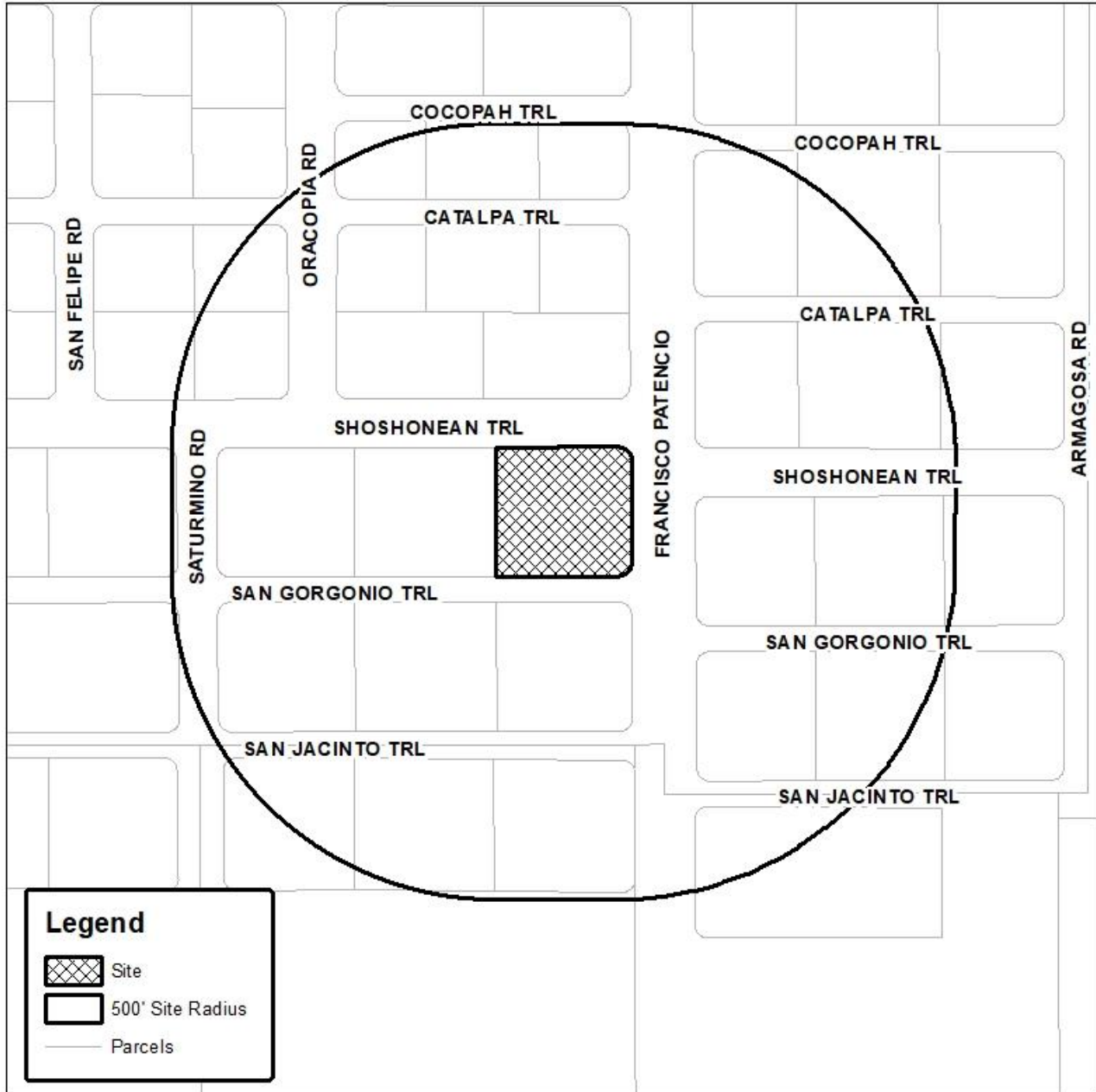
Attachments:

1. Vicinity Map
2. Draft Resolution
3. Application, related background materials, photos.





# Department of Planning Services Notification Radius



CITY OF PALM SPRINGS  
HSPB 125 – 1850 Smoke Tree Lane; Rock 12

RESOLUTION NO. HSPB 125

A RESOLUTION OF THE HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD OF THE CITY OF PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA, RECOMMENDING THAT THE CITY COUNCIL DESIGNATE "THE J. CHENEY WELLS RESIDENCE" LOCATED AT 1850 SMOKETREE LANE ROCK 12, A CLASS 1 HISTORIC RESOURCE, (HSPB #125), APN# 510-192-003.

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 September 19, 2019, William and Jennifer Nelson Fain, 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 1850 Smoketree Lane Rock 12 (APN #510-192-003). The application included a historic resources report ("the report") prepared by the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, dated September, 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 #125 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 J. Cheney Wells Residence exhibits exceptional historic significance as a highly intact example of a custom designed California Ranch style home by notable architect Albert Frey.

*(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 identifies J. Cheney Wells (1874 – 1960) as a person who made a meaningful contribution to national history because of his association with the American Optical Company and as co-founder and developer of Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, the biggest living history museum in New England. Thus the Wells Residence qualifies as a historic resource under Criterion 2.

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

The Wells Residence reflects the period in the development of Palm Springs between the wars (1919 – 1941) when notable personages from the movie industry and industry mogels such as Wells discovered Palm Springs as a favored vacation destination and built large custom homes here, transforming the small desert village into an internationally known resort destination. It also reflects the period when the private enclave known as Smoke Tree Ranch was first developing under the management of Fred and Maziebelle Markham. Smoketree was one of the few subdivisions to be developed during the Great Depression. As such the Wells Residence 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 Wells Residence is a noteworthy example of a large custom home constructed in the California Ranch style with modernist detailing. The California Ranch style was popularized in the twenties and thirties by architect Cliff May. The Wells Residence possesses qualities of the California Ranch style, notably its long sprawling form, a

pitched and/or hipped roof, an asymmetrical floor plan often in the form of a wide “V”, an emphasis on casual indoor / outdoor living, board and batten siding, and exposed rafter tails. Although the architectural standard for Smoke Tree ranch was the ranch style typology, Frey infused the Wells Residence with many modernist details, such as large expanses of glass, open floor plan, minimalist detailing of the home’s interior and “wrap-around” corner windows. For these reasons the Wells Residence 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 Wells Residence was designed by Albert Frey while he was an associate in the firm of John Porter Clark<sup>1</sup>. The report explains that although John Porter Clark’s name is listed on the building permit and the title block of the drawings for the home, Frey verified that the design of the home was indeed his creation. As such the J. Cheney Wells Residence 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 Wells Residence 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,

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<sup>1</sup> The report asserts that it was Clark’s name, not Frey’s on the blueprints and associated documents on the house because Frey had not yet been elevated to Partner status within the firm, may not have been licensed at the time to practice architecture at the time of construction of the Wells Residence and it was and is still common practice for the head of an architectural firm to be given the credit for an associates work.

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 Wells Residence remains in the same location that it was constructed, thus it retains integrity of location.

*2. Design:*

The Wells Residence possesses a high degree of design integrity and has been well maintained.

*3. Setting:*

The setting of the Wells Residence, within a tract of similar custom-designed homes within the rustic environment of Smoketree Ranch, remains as it was from the time of its construction; it thus retains integrity of Setting.

*4. Materials:*

The Wells Residence was constructed of high quality materials; stucco, horizontal clapboard siding, and steel casement windows; all of which are intact and in very good condition. The original wood shake roof has been removed and replaced with cementitious flat "shingles" which diminishes the material integrity of the residence. Thus the home exhibits a fair degree of material integrity.

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*7. Association:*

The association with J. Cheney Wells is well documented in the report and the home also retains its association visually with architect Albert Frey 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 California Ranch architectural style of the home.
2. The low-profile roofline with deep cantilevered eaves, wood shake roof, with exposed rafter tails.
3. The stucco and horizontal clapboard exterior wall treatments.
4. The steel casement windows, including the large "walls of glass" in the living room.
5. The covered patios and verandas.
6. The additions, the designs of which are specifically credited to Albert Frey, including those from 1947, 1968 and 1974.

The non-contributing features include the following:

1. The 2009 swimming pool and 2014 spa installation.
2. The walkways and driveways.
3. The perimeter garden wall and equipment enclosure wall.

### 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 J. Cheney Wells Residence" at 1850 Smoketree Lane, Rock 12, a Class 1 Historic Resource (Case HSPB #125).

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