



STAFF REPORT
5/24/2023

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: Gabriel Perez, Development Services Director

SUBJECT: Initiation of Proactive Historic Preservation Program for the City of Coachella

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the City Council direct staff to pursue a proactive historic preservation program that includes:

- a) Preparation of a Request for Qualifications for On-Call Professional Services Historic Preservation Professionals that can assist the City with their expertise in historic preservation.
- b) Preparation of a Request for Proposals for professional services from Historic Preservation Professionals to assist in a Historic Resources Survey Update and development of a Historic Context Statement for the City of Coachella.
- c) Appropriate \$12,000 from the General Fund and obtain proposals from qualified historic preservation professionals for site-specific historic surveys of the Old Masonic Lodge Building (1696 6th Street) not to exceed \$12,000.

Background:

The City of Coachella is one of the Coachella Valley's first incorporated cities. The first known inhabitants of Coachella are the Cahuilla people and there are several cultural resources that have been identified in the City attributed to the Cahuilla people. The construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad in the late 1800s contributed to the growth of the town of Woodspur founded in 1876 before its renaming to Coachella.

Staff located Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of the City of Coachella from 1928, which identified buildings and businesses in Coachella's early years that were mainly centered easterly on today's 6th Street in Coachella's historic downtown area. The early buildings consisted of the Coachella Valley's first Masonic Lodge, pool halls, bars, the Paramount Theater (demolished), Yant's Drug Store, Kelly's Pharmacy, the Hotel Date Palm, Bank (now Lopes Hardware), Coachella Market, Dave's Place, blacksmith shop, the Submarine newspaper, and the Southern Pacific Combination Type 23 Depot (demolished). Other notable buildings include the Imperial Ice and Development Company Ice Plant and the Imperial Irrigation building at 9th Street. The City of Coachella Fire Station was constructed in 1928 and the midcentury modern-styled City Hall in 1950. Staff believes that Coachella's history is significant and could initiate a program where Coachella's

history is documented and preserved as many of the historic buildings identified in the 1928 Sanborn maps still exist and retain their historic integrity.

Discussion/Analysis:

The Coachella Municipal Code Chapter 15.48, Historic Districts and Sites, designates the Planning Commission as the investigatory and advisory body with respect to preservation of historic districts, sites or structures within the city that reflect elements of Coachella’s cultural, social, economic, political, architectural and archaeological history. The Commission can recommend preliminary surveys and studies as deemed necessary in advance of public hearings that inform the Planning Commission or the City Council. The Planning Commission may request assistance of individuals with knowledge and interest in the cultural, socioeconomic, architectural or archaeological history of the area. The City Council has responsibility of designating historic sites and historic districts for preservation.

Old Masonic Temple (1696 6th Street)

Nicolas Meza is the owner of the Old Masonic Temple building constructed in 1919 and proposes to rehabilitate the building for a new bar and restaurant. The building has been significantly altered during construction by owners of the Libra dispensary, who originally planned to operate a cannabis dispensary at the site. Libra’s plans included plans for a significant alteration of the building where the site would no longer retain much of its historic integrity. Many of the unique elements that contribute to the historic integrity of the building remain. Mr. Meza has submitted initial plans for tenant improvements to the building to staff, which include altering the exterior of the building and no longer retain the building’s historic integrity. Staff believes that the historic preservation of the building would be important as a key building in the early development of Coachella and as the Coachella Valley’s first Masonic Lodge. The building could be eligible for listing in the U.S. National Register of Historic Places and be a contributor to a potential historic district. A historic survey of the building would identify how the building could be preserved and potential incentives such as tax credits that may be available to the owner in the rehabilitation of the building. Staff is supportive of plans to rehabilitate the building from its current condition, but believes this survey is urgent to determine whether the building is eligible for preservation before it is permanently altered.

Historic photo of the Masonic Temple 1696 6th Street



1928 Sanborn Map of 6th Street (then 1st Street) identifying Masonic Lodge



Staff contacted the State Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) in March 2023 with respect to resources that may be available to the City of Coachella to support investigations and studies the Planning Commission and City Council may request for purposes of historic preservation. OHP recommended development of a historical context statement as a foundational document to development of a historic program for the City. Staff recommends engagement of the services of a historic preservation consultant for establishment of a historical context statement for the City of Coachella and an update of the historic resources survey. A historic context statement would describe the patterns of historical development of Coachella that are represented by the physical development and character of the built environment, important associated property types, and establish eligibility criteria and integrity thresholds. Some of the historical development patterns may include Coachella's agricultural history and the life of Cesar Chavez and the Farmworker Movement. A historic resources survey would enable to the City to identify sites and structures the City would like to designate as historic sites and that could contribute to a historic district. Classification of buildings as historic sites or areas as historic districts not only preserve the City's rich history, but also promote economic development and tourism as millions of travelers annually visit U.S. historic places.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Staff anticipates that the initial historic preservation costs would be as follows:

- Historic Survey of the Old Masonic Temple - \$12,000

- Historic context statement for the City of Coachella - \$15,000
- Historic Resources Survey Update - \$35,000

An appropriation of \$12,000 from the General Fund would be necessary for a historic survey of the Old Masonic Temple. Staff will return to the City Council with a request for proposals for the historic context statement and historic resources survey update. Staff anticipates that establishment of a historic preservation program will encourage heritage tourism to the City resulting in increased sales tax revenue from visitors and encourage hotel development.

ALTERNATIVES:

- 1) Pursue a proactive historic preservation program that includes:
 - a) Preparation of a Request for Qualifications for On-Call Professional Services Historic Preservation Professionals that can assist the City with their expertise in historic preservation.
 - b) Preparation of a Request for Proposals for professional services from Historic Preservation Professionals to assist in a Historic Resources Survey Update and development of a Historic Context Statement for the City of Coachella.
 - c) Appropriate \$12,000 from the General Fund and obtain proposals from qualified historic preservation professionals for site-specific historic surveys of the Old Masonic Lodge Building (1696 6th Street) not to exceed \$12,000.
- 2) Pursue a proactive historic preservation program with modifications.
- 3) Not approve a proactive historic preservation program.
- 4) Continue this item and provide staff and the applicant with direction.

RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE(S):

Staff recommends alternative #1. Staff believes establishing a robust historic preservation program will not only preserve the rich history of the City of Coachella, but also contribute to development of heritage tourism and promote economic development.

Attachments:

1. Chapter 15.48 Historic Districts and Sites (Coachella Municipal Code)
2. Newspaper Excerpts related to Coachella Masonic Temple (1918-1919)
3. Existing Conditions of Coachella Masonic Temple building (1696 6th Street)