



STAFF REPORT
5/3/2023

TO: Planning Commission Chair and Commissioners
FROM: Gabriel Perez, Development Services Director
SUBJECT: Historic Preservation Update – City of Coachella

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission receive and file the Historic Preservation Update and provide feedback.

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. The name "Woodspur" derives from wood harvested from mesquite forests that once covered the City of Coachella and was hauled to the rail spur established by Jason L. Rector on the Southern Pacific Railroad for transport to Los Angeles. Woodspur would later be renamed Coachella in 1901 by Woodspur's residents. The Coachella train depot was constructed in 1903, which was a Southern Pacific Combination Type 23 Depot for both passenger and freight services. The town in 1905 was platted by the Coachella Land and Water Company a centered around the railroad in a traditional grid pattern.

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, Yant's Drug Store, Kelly's Pharmacy, the Hotel Date Palm, Bank (now Lopes Hardware), Coachella Market, Dave's Place, blacksmith shop, and Submarine newspaper. 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 should be documented and preserved. Many of the historic buildings identified in the 1928 Sanborn maps still exist and retain their historic integrity. These buildings could be evaluated and qualify for city, state and federal

designation as historic structures or contribute to the establishment of a historic district. Staff also recognizes that the City of Coachella is instrumental place in the life of Cesar E. Chavez, labor leader, and the Farmworker Movement as the location of farmworkers organizing for better working conditions in agricultural industry, which centered around the Pueblo Viejo area. The history of Coachella could be preserved with further study and action of the Planning Commission serving as the City’s historic preservation body.

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 classification of sites and districts are identified in table 1.

Table 1: Classification of sites and districts Chapter 15.48 Coachella Municipal Code	
Class 1	Structure/site qualified for city designation; may be qualified at the federal, state and/or county level. Archival file will be maintained. Structure/site may not be modified nor objects moved without the approval of the city council; usage may be limited by the city council to the extent that it may impair the integrity of the site. Site will be plaqued (intended for use when the structure or site still exists as it did during the historical period or is restorable).
Class 2	Site qualified for city designation; may be qualified at the federal, state and/or county level. Archival file will be maintained. Site is eligible for plaquing (intended for use when the site is not occupied by a modern structure or use which is different than that of the historical period or if structure is unusable, nonconforming, unrestorable or the like).
Class 3	Structure/site was constructed before 1945, or a year to be determined by the city council, or construction date cannot be confirmed. Eligible for a six-month stay of demolition. Action of the historical site preservation board may include recommendation to reclassify. All structures built prior to the subject date would be automatically so classified.
Historic District	Qualified for city designation; may be qualified at the federal, state and/or county level. Archival file will be maintained and shall contain a map delineating contributing and noncontributing structures or sites. Contributing structures/sites shall be subject to class 1 regulations until such time that they may be reclassified. Non-contributing structures/sites shall be subject to review by the historical site preservation board before demolition or construction. A specific plan, containing special regulations pertaining to the subject area, may be adopted by each district.

The Planning Commission may initiate proceedings for designation of a historic site or district or the recommendation of a property for nomination to the national register and hold a public hearing before making a recommendation to the City Council for final action. The Planning Commission can also issue an order by motion for a period of 120 days to stay any proposed demolition or

alteration of a site after proceedings have been initiated for designation as a historic site or district in order to allow for sufficient time for necessary studies, hearings and determination whether such site should be designated as historic. The City conducted a historic resources survey in June 2006 of historic structures in the Pueblo Viejo area to determine the level of historic integrity of its buildings, but never acted to designate buildings as historic structures.

Staff recently contacted the State Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) 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 awards federal grants to cities that are qualified Certified Local Governments (CLG) and cities receive that designation in partnership with the OHP and National Park Service if they comply with five basic requirements:

- Enforce appropriate state and local laws and regulations for the designation and protection of historic properties;
- Establish an historic preservation review commission by local ordinance;
- Maintain a system for the survey and inventory of historic properties;
- Provide for public participation in the local preservation program; and
- Satisfactorily perform responsibilities delegated to it by the state.

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. The 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.

Attachments:

1. Chapter 15.48 Historic Districts and Sites (Coachella Municipal Code)