



STAFF REPORT
1/18/2023

TO: Planning Commission Chair and Commissioners

FROM: Gabriel Perez, Development Services Director

SUBJECT: Lee Anderson's Covalda Date Company – Historical Information

BACKGROUND:

The Planning Commission approved entitlements in 2022 for a mixed-use development at the 2.5-acre parcel at the Northeast corner of Cesar Chavez Street and Bagdad Avenue. A cultural resources report prepared for the project identified that the Covalda Date Company building was once located at the property (previously 51-392 Harrison Street). The name “Covalda” stands for “COachella VAlley DAte”: The building was constructed in 1913 but demolished in 1996. The building served as a date processing facility, food store and gift shop. Dates were packed and shipped from the processing facility. The business was also advertised as “Lee Anderson’s Covalda Date Company.” The facility was advertised as being the most complete health food store in the desert and marketed their dates as organic. Covalda’s products included chopped dates, dehydrated date chips, date almond confections, date pecan logs, and date shakes (Attachment 4). The Covalda business is featured in a photo collection from Frashers Fotos in Pomona, California for postcards taken of small communities in the Southwest from the 1920’s to 1950’s. Date packing workers at the business are featured in a 1941 Frashers Fotos postcard (Attachment 3).

The building was recorded in the Historic Resources Inventory with State of California Department of Parks and Recreation in 1983 as one of the Coachella Valley’s oldest date packing facilities and for retaining much of its original character (Attachment 2). It was considered a highly significant structure due to its importance to the date industry in the region. The building was constructed with stucco siding, double hung windows, three arches under the front facing gable and a flat roof porch with Spanish tile and stuccoes arches. The building also included additions constructed of wood and corrugated sheet metal.

Lee Anderson, owner of Covalda Date Company, was identified as an owner and recognized by the City of Coachella City Council on October 21, 1969 as the oldest active member of the Coachella Chamber of Commerce. He was a resident of Coachella since the 1920s and recognized as an important contributor to the development of the Coachella Valley date industry. He served

as President of the Coachella Valley Water District and Chairman of the Coachella Valley Farm Bureau.

Staff shared the historical information of the Covalda Date Company with Chelsea Investments to help them identify ways to integrate and recognize the historical significance of the business and the Covalda packing employees into the future Tripoli Mixed-Use development project.

Attachments:

1. Cultural Resources Report excerpt – Tripoli Mixed Use Development
2. Historic Resources Inventory – 1983
3. Historic Photos – Covalda Date Company
4. LA Times Article 1994 “Hot Dates: Sampling the Fruits of the Desert”