Initial Study / Mitigated Negative Declaration
Living Desert Expansion Project
Case Nos.: CUP/PP/EA 23-0010

Lead Agency:
City of Palm Desert
73-510 Fred Waring Drive
Palm Desert, CA 92260

Contact:
Carlos Flores
Development Services Department

Prepared for:
City of Palm Desert

Prepared by:
Terra Nova Planning & Research, Inc.
42635 Melanie Place, Suite 101
Palm Desert, CA 92211

June 2024

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CITY OF PALM DESERT
CEQA Environmental Checklist & Environmental Assessment

Project Title: Living Desert Expansion Project **Case No.:** CUP/PP/EA 23-0010	
Lead agency name and address:	City of Palm Desert 73-510 Fred Waring Drive Palm Desert, CA 92260
Contact persons and phone number:	Carlos Flores Development Services Department City of Palm Desert 73-510 Fred Waring Drive Palm Desert, CA 92260 (760) 346-0611 ext. 479
Project location: The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, 47900 Portola Avenue, Palm Desert. Riverside County. **Assessor's Parcel Numbers (APNs)** 630-250-045, 625-300-052	
Project sponsor's name and address:	Prest Vuksic Greenwood Architects 44530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite 200 Palm Desert, CA 92260
General Plan Designation: Public Facility/Institutional District	**Zoning:** Public (P); Drainage, Flood Plains and Watercourse

Introduction

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, herein referred to as "Living Desert," is proposing an expansion project (Project) that includes the addition of an event center, entry pavilion, lion habitat, and associated facilities. The Project is an amendment to the previous entitlement for the Living Desert (PP/CUP 15-370), which included a smaller lion habitat and event center. In addition to the lion habitat and event center, the Project introduces a new entry pavilion on the north side of the existing Chase building. The Project consists of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP), Precise Plan (PP), and Environmental Assessment (EA). The CUP is to allow construction of a "Recreation Facility, Commercial" use in the "Public" zone.

The Living Desert was established in 1970 and is a ±72-acre wildlife park and conservation research center that offers attractions such as wildlife exhibits, gardens, educational programs, and playgrounds. The zoo includes ±32-acres of wildlife exhibits and learning centers, ±15.36-acres of gardens, and ±63,648-square feet of administration and maintenance facilities. The Living Desert provides ±9-acres of parking, including 858 standard parking spaces, 20 ADA spaces, 14 bus spaces, and 45 employee spaces (total of 937 parking spaces) (See Exhibits 1 through 3). Table 1 provides a summary of the existing facilities within the Living Desert. It is important to note that all Project components occur within the existing Zoo footprint, and will not expand the land area of the Living Desert.

Table 1 Existing Facilities Living Desert		
Exhibit/Use	**Land Area (AC)**	**Total Structures (SF)**
Giraffe Conservation	3.1	1,203
Village Watutu	2.5	4,977
Life Underground	4.2	906
Cheetah Habitat	0.7	0
Eastern Africa Gardens	3.1	322
Aloe & Madagascar Gardens	2.2	0
Entry & Administration	2.2	23,389
Bighorn Sheep Exhibit	2.6	0
Train Exhibit	0.7	780
North American Reptiles	0.4	5,585
Australian Adventures	1.5	6,500
Learning and Impact Dept.	1.6	11,975
Tennity Amphitheater	1.1	4,822
Hoover Discovery Center	1.0	5,678
Gecko Park & Carousel	0.7	1,212
Desert Plant Conservation	0.6	795
Sonoran Aviary	0.6	2,326
Chihuahuan Garden	1.2	0
Eagle Canyon	1.8	5,300
Coatis Exhibit	0.6	236
Wildlife Hospital & Conservation Center	2.1	20,180
Coyote Exhibit	0.4	747
Sonoran Pond & Garden	1.3	543
Gardens	7.8	0
Facility Maintenance	22.4	40,259
Future Splash Pad (separate permit)	0.7	8,070
Future Bighorn Café (separate permit)	0.4	8,730
Current Project: Event Center & Lion Habitat	4.1	42,123
Total	**72**	**204,474**

The Living Desert is located within the boundaries of both the City of Palm Desert and the City of Indian Wells. The City of Palm Desert is the lead agency and the original permitting jurisdiction. For CEQA purposes, the City of Indian Wells is a "responsible agency."

Project Description

The ±4.06-acre expansion Project is proposed for the center of the Living Desert immediately northeast of the main entrance (see Exhibit 4). The Project site is currently developed with landscaping and hardscapes that include pathways and an outdoor patio (Lurie Patio). There are no permanent building structures within the proposed site, therefore the Project will not require the demolition of existing structures.

Entry Pavilion: The entry pavilion is a 1,282-square foot entrance/ticketing structure to be located at the north side of the Chase building and will serve as an entrance point for the new event center and for daily school field trips into the Zoo. The entry pavilion is single-story with a maximum height of 23 feet when including architectural details. Improvements include a visitor kiosk, outdoor seating areas and landscaping (see Exhibit 5).

Event Center: The event center includes 13,130-square feet of event space and outdoor patio areas that can accommodate ±500 guests, as well as 20,620 square feet of kitchen and back of house space that will serve the event center and provide support to existing retail food facilities within the Zoo, and a second-story 7,490 square foot administration office with a direct connection to the existing Chase building. The event center structure is two-stories with a maximum height of 31 feet when including mechanical equipment, screening, and architectural details. The event center will be located immediately east of the existing Chase building at the Park's main entrance (see Exhibits 6a-6b).

The event center is projected to host two events per week from November to March, and one event per week April through October. It is anticipated that large programs (<350 attendees), such as weddings, will generally occur on weekends in the evening (including Friday evenings) whereas medium-sized programs (100-350 attendees) would occur on weekends or weekdays in the evening, and small programs (<100 attendees) could occur at any time throughout the day and week. Events such as weddings would last 4-6 hours, banquets 2-4 hours, and smaller events 1-3 hours. Typical events would start with loading/catering/rentals in the afternoon, with the event starting at 5:00 PM – 6:00 PM which coincides with the Zoo's decrease in general admissions in the afternoon. Deliveries would be accommodated through the new service gate at the south Portola entrance or come directly to the event center loading dock which is situated off the main public throughfare.

Lion Habitat: The lion habitat area occupies the eastern half of the Project area and includes three new lion habitats consisting of 36,000 square feet, a 4,451-square-foot lion care facility, and associated structures including open air pavilions, shade/viewing structures, and interactive pathways throughout the exhibit. Structure heights will not exceed 22 feet. The lion care facility includes a keeper work area, 10 dens, and a day room (see Exhibits 7-8). The lion habitat will be accessible to park visitors during normal business hours.

Proposed architecture is consistent with the Park's existing aesthetic, incorporating natural desert colors and materials such as rock boulders, round wood timber, thatched roofs, Corten steel panels, and natural stone veneers (see Exhibits 5-8).

The primary vehicular access to the park is from Portola Avenue. A secondary exit point south of the main entrance, also on Portola Avenue, will be utilized during special events and will be a right-turn exit only (Exhibit 9). The Project does not propose changes to the Park's existing ingress/egress. The proposed expansion requires the removal of 1 ADA parking space for the new entry pavilion, resulting in 19 ADA parking spaces for a new parking total of 936 spaces.

The Project requires the removal of existing hardscape and landscaping. There are approximately 245 mature trees in the project footprint that will be removed, 50 of which will be salvaged. Excess dirt material will be stockpiled at the Living Desert's maintenance yard at the northeast corner of the Zoo.

Surrounding Land Uses
The Project site is located within the Living Desert and is surrounded by zoo exhibits and administrative/maintenance buildings. The Project site is currently developed with landscaping and hardscapes that include pathways and an outdoor patio (Lurie Patio). There are no permanent building structures within the proposed site.

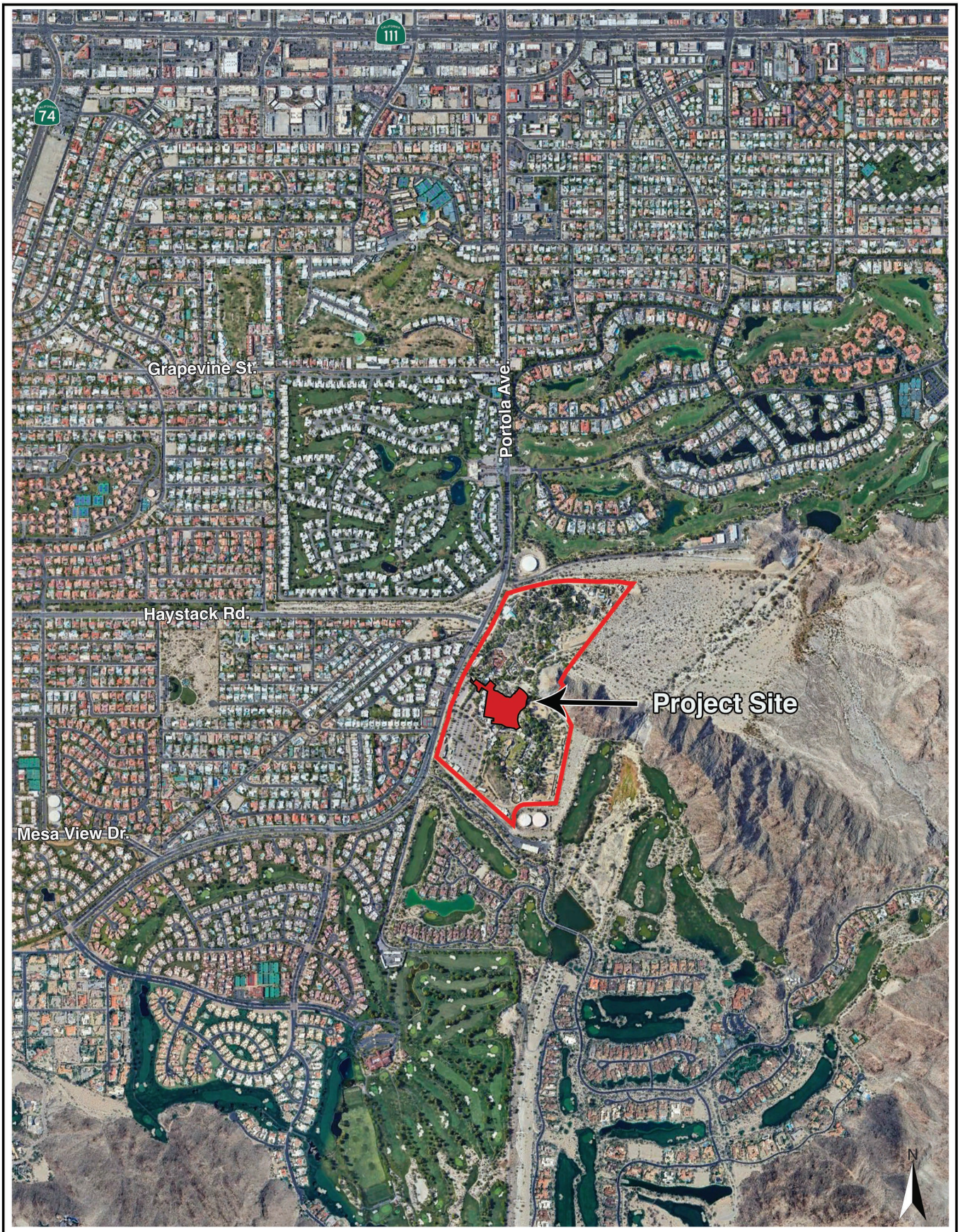
North: Train exhibit, North American Reptiles exhibit, Kookaburra Café. Beyond the Living Desert is open space/dry watercourse.
South: Main Living Desert entrance building, Life Underground exhibit. Beyond the Living Desert is the Reserve Club (residential)
East: Bighorn exhibit, Aloe and Madagascar Gardens. Beyond the Living Desert is the Santa Rosa Mountain foothills
West: Living Desert Chase building, parking. Beyond Living Desert is Portola Avenue and Corsican Villas (residential)

Utilities and Service Providers
The following agencies and companies will provide services to the Project:

1. Sanitary Sewer: Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD)
2. Water: Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD)
3. Electricity: Southern California Edison (SCE)
4. Gas: Southern California Gas Company
5. Telephone/Cable: Frontier Communications/Spectrum
6. Storm Drains: City of Palm Desert, City of Indian Wells
7. Transit Service: SunLine Transit Agency

Other public agencies whose approval is or may be required (e.g., permits, financing approval, or participation agreement.)

City of Indian Wells
Coachella Valley Water District
Regional Water Quality Control Board



Source: Google Earth Imagery date 11.2022.

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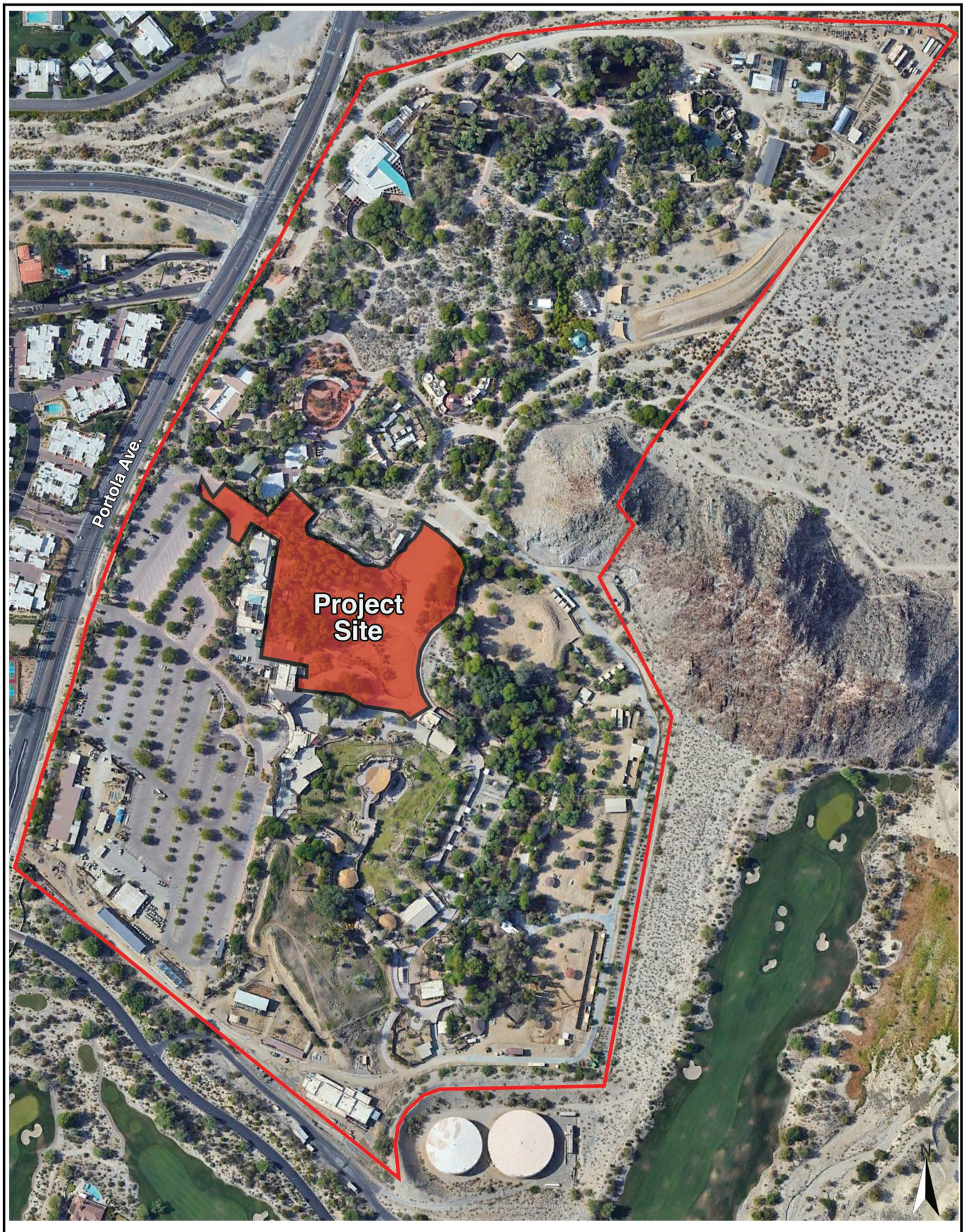
Living Desert Expansion Project
Vicinity Map
Palm Desert, California

Exhibit

1



Source: Prest, Vuksic, Greenwood Architects Interiors.02.2024; Google Earth Imagery date 11.2022.

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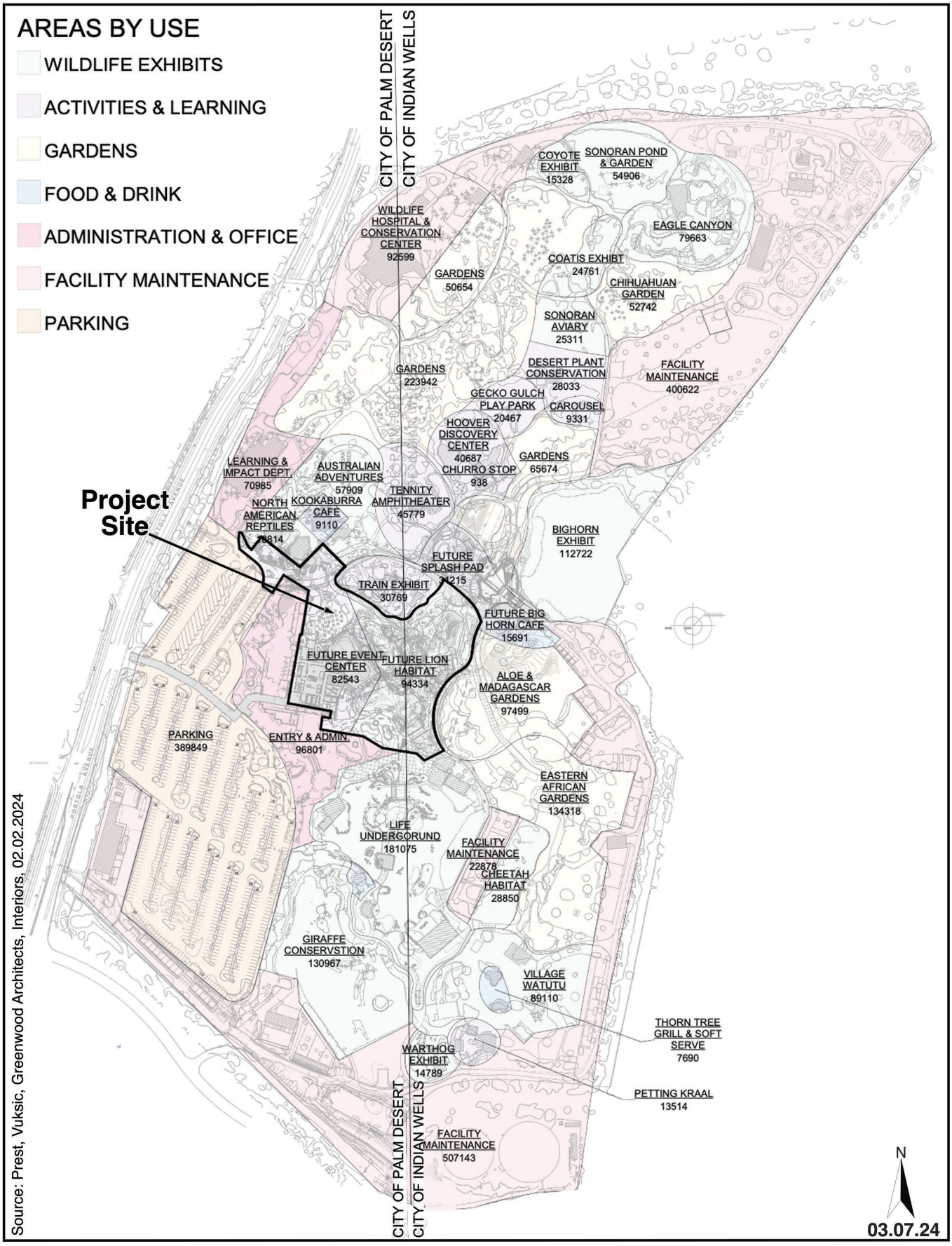
Living Desert Expansion Project
Project Location Map
Palm Desert, California

Exhibit

2



Source: Prest, Vuksic, Greenwood Architects, Interiors, 02.02.2024

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Exhibit 3

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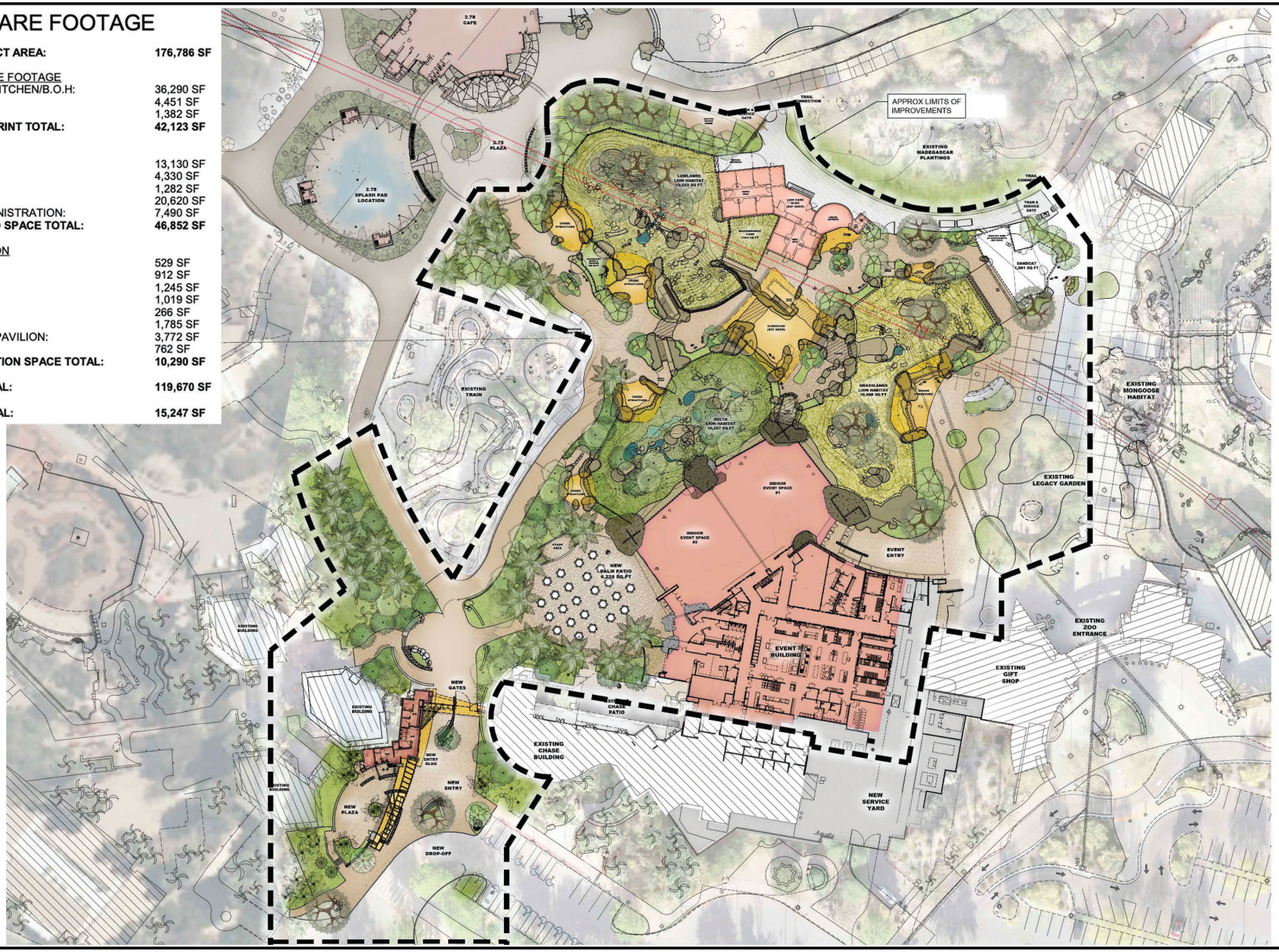
Living Desert Expansion Project
Living Desert Area Use Map
Palm Desert, California

SQUARE FOOTAGE

OVERALL PROJECT AREA:	**176,786 SF**
BUILDING SQUARE FOOTAGE	
EVENT CENTER/KITCHEN/B.O.H:	36,290 SF
LION KEEP:	4,451 SF
NORTH GATE:	1,382 SF
BUILDING FOOTPRINT TOTAL:	**42,123 SF**
INDOOR SPACES	
EVENT CENTER:	13,130 SF
LION KEEP:	4,330 SF
NORTH GATE:	1,282 SF
KITCHEN / B.O.H:	20,620 SF
2ND FLOOR ADMINISTRATION:	7,490 SF
AIR CONDITIONED SPACE TOTAL:	**46,852 SF**
OPEN AIR PAVILION	
STRCUTURE A:	529 SF
STRUCTURE B:	912 SF
STRUCTURE C:	1,245 SF
STRUCTURE D:	1,019 SF
STRUCTURE E:	266 SF
STRUCTURE F:	1,785 SF
THE SURROUND PAVILION:	3,772 SF
NORTH GATE:	762 SF
NON-AIR CONSDITION SPACE TOTAL:	**10,290 SF**
LANDSCAPE TOTAL:	**119,670 SF**
HARDSCAPE TOTAL:	**15,247 SF**



Source: Prest, Vuksic, Greenwood Architects, Interiors, 06.22.2023

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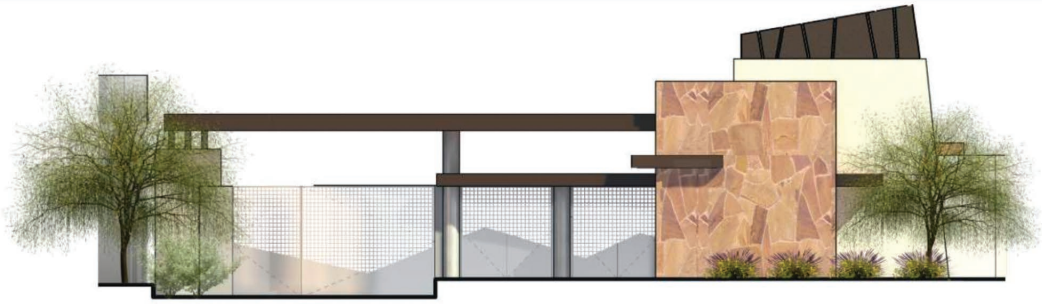
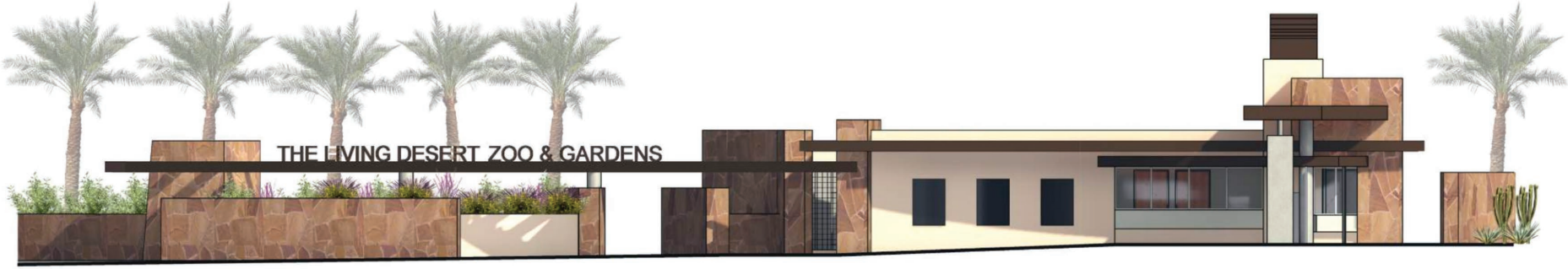
Living Desert Expansion Project
Site Plan
Palm Desert, California

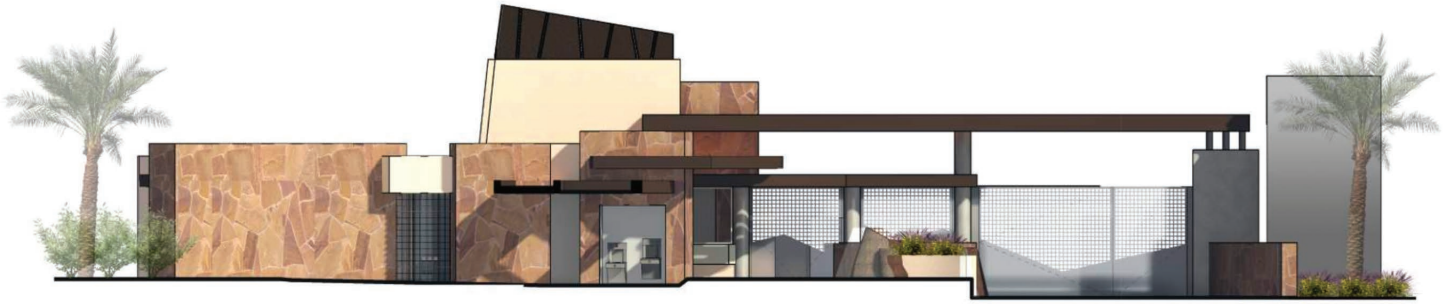
Exhibit
4



A COLORED EAST ELEVATION
3/16" = 1'-0"



B COLORED SOUTH ELEVATION
3/16" = 1'-0"



C COLORED WEST ELEVATION
3/16" = 1'-0"

Source: Prest, Vuksic, Greenwood Architects, Interiors, 06.26.2023

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Living Desert Expansion Project
Entry Pavilion Elevations
Palm Desert, California

Exhibit
5

1 COLORED ELEVATION - EAST
1/8" = 1'-0"

2 COLORED ELEVATION - NORTH
1/8" = 1'-0"

3 COLORED ELEVATION - SOUTH
1/8" = 1'-0"

Source: Prest, Vuksic, Greenwood Architects, Interiors, 06.26.2023

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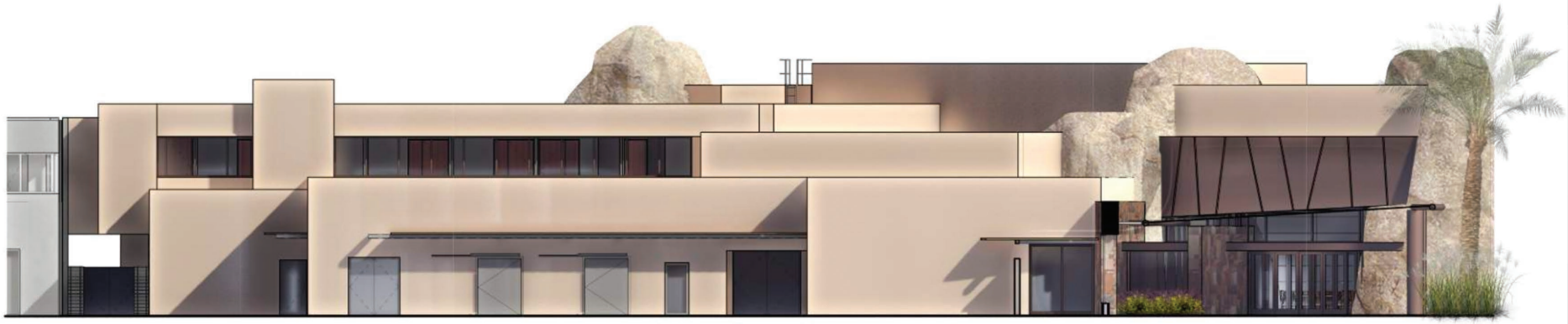
Living Desert Expansion Project
Event Center
Elevations
Palm Desert, California

Exhibit

6a

A COLORED ELEVATION - LURIE PALM PATIO
PRE-FUNCTION
1/8" = 1'-0"

B COLORED ELEVATION - LEGACY GARDEN
PRE-FUNCTION ELEVATION
1/8" = 1'-0"



C COLORED ELEVATION - LOADING DOCK
1/8" = 1'-0"

Source: Prest, Vuksic, Greenwood Architects, Interiors, 06.26.2023

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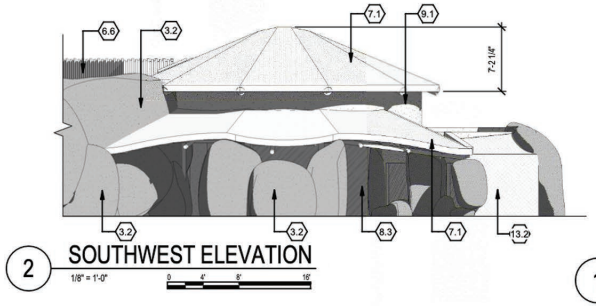
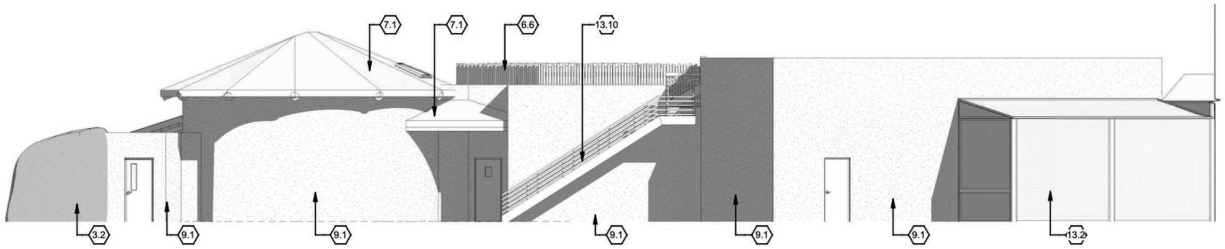
Living Desert Expansion Project
Event Center
Elevations
Palm Desert, California

Exhibit

6b



2 SOUTHWEST ELEVATION
1/8" = 1'-0"



1 EAST ELEVATION (BOH)
1/8" = 1'-0"

4 SOUTHWEST ELEVATION
1/8" = 1'-0"

3 EAST ELEVATION (BOH)
1/8" = 1'-0"

Source: Prest, Vuksic, Greenwood Architects, Interiors, 06.14.2023

03.08.24

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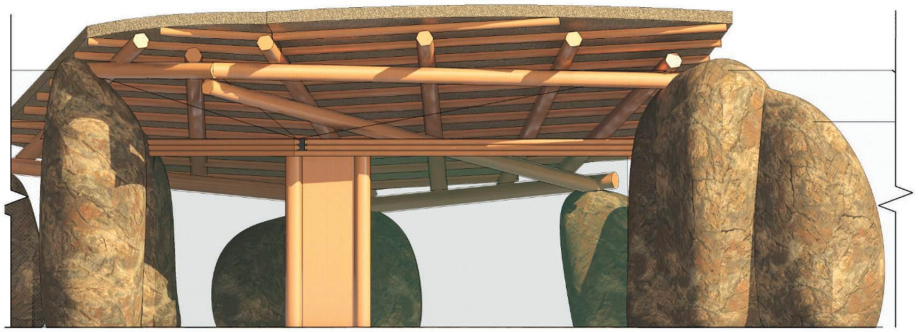
Living Desert Expansion Project
Lion Habitat Care Center
Elevations
Palm Desert, California

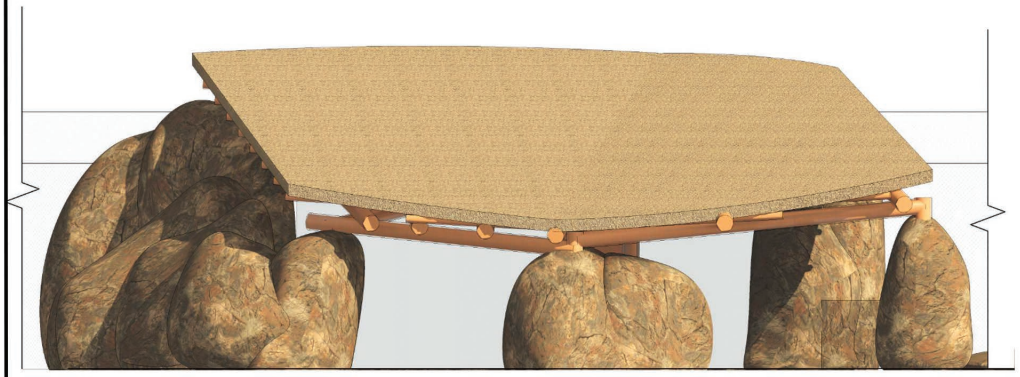
Exhibit

7

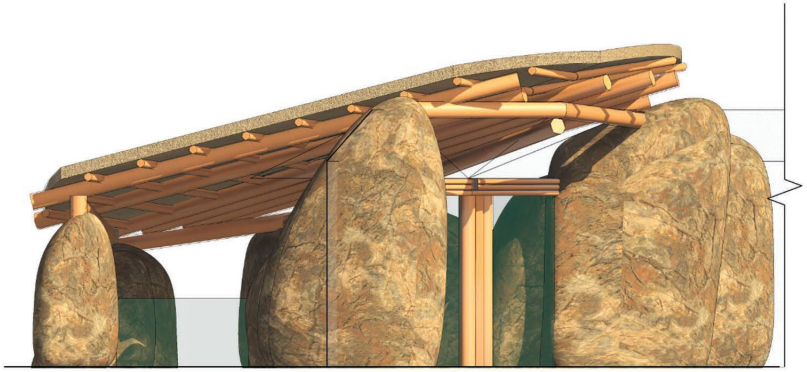


1 NORTHWEST ELEVATION
1/4" = 1'-0"

3 NORTHEAST ELEVATION
1/4" = 1'-0"



2 SOUTHEAST ELEVATION
1/4" = 1'-0"



4 SOUTHWEST ELEVATION
1/4" = 1'-0"

Source: Prest, Vuksic, Greenwood Architects, Interiors, 06.14.2023

03.08.24

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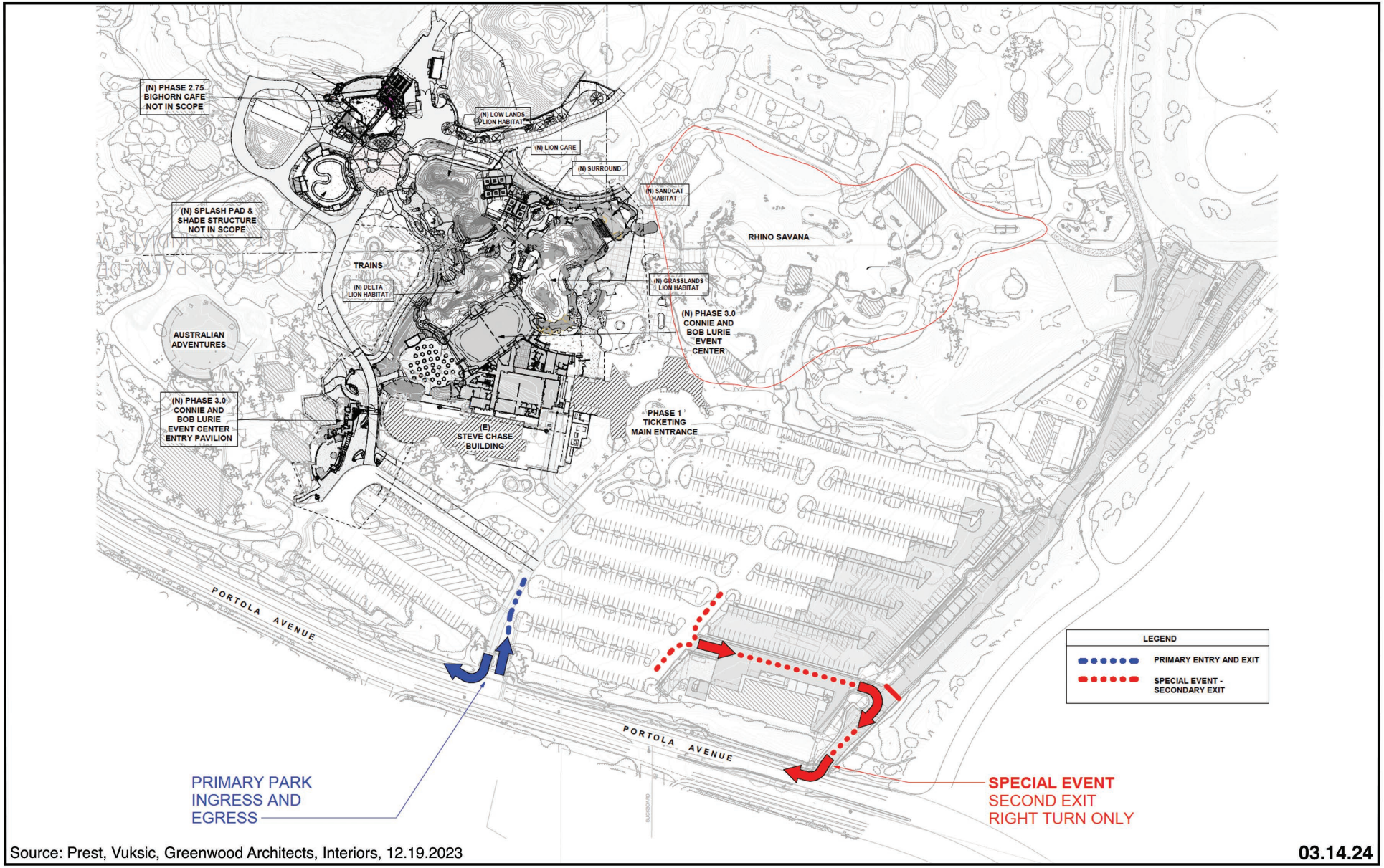
Living Desert Expansion Project
Lion Habitat
Typical Viewing Structure
Palm Desert, California

Exhibit

8



Source: Prest, Vuksic, Greenwood Architects, Interiors, 12.19.2023

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Living Desert Expansion Project
Special Event Secondary Exit
Palm Desert, California

Exhibit
9

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS POTENTIALLY AFFECTED:

The environmental factors checked below would be potentially affected by this project, involving at least one impact that is a "Potentially Significant Impact" as indicated by the checklist on the following pages.

	Aesthetics		Agriculture and Forestry Resources		Air Quality
	Biological Resources		Cultural Resources		Energy
	Geology /Soils		Greenhouse Gas Emissions		Hazards & Hazardous Materials
	Hydrology / Water Quality		Land Use / Planning		Mineral Resources
	Noise		Population / Housing		Public Services
	Recreation		Transportation		Tribal Cultural Resources
	Utilities/Service Systems		Wildfire		Mandatory Findings of Significance

DETERMINATION: (To be completed by the Lead Agency) On the basis of this initial evaluation:

	I find that the proposed project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
✓	I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment there will not be a significant effect in this case because revisions in the project have been made by or agreed to by the project proponent. A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
	I find that the proposed project MAY have a significant effect on the environment, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.
	I find that the proposed project MAY have a "potentially significant impact" or "potentially significant unless mitigated" impact on the environment, but at least one effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and 2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets. An ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.
	I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, because all potentially significant effects (a) have been analyzed adequately in an earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION pursuant to applicable standards, and (b) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION, including revisions or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed project, nothing further is required.

Carlos Flores
City of Palm Desert

6-5-2024
Date

EVALUATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:

1) A brief explanation is required for all answers except "No Impact" answers that are adequately supported by the information sources a lead agency cites in the parentheses following each question. A "No Impact" answer is adequately supported if the referenced information sources show that the impact simply does not apply to projects like the one involved (e.g., the project falls outside a fault rupture zone). A "No Impact" answer should be explained where it is based on project-specific factors as well as general standards (e.g., the project will not expose sensitive receptors to pollutants, based on a project-specific screening analysis).
2) All answers must take account of the whole action involved, including off-site as well as on-site, cumulative as well as project-level, indirect as well as direct, and construction as well as operational impacts.
3) Once the lead agency has determined that a particular physical impact may occur, then the checklist answers must indicate whether the impact is potentially significant, less than significant with mitigation, or less than significant. "Potentially Significant Impact" is appropriate if there is substantial evidence that an effect may be significant. If there are one or more "Potentially Significant Impact" entries when the determination is made, an EIR is required.
4) "Negative Declaration: Less Than Significant With Mitigation Incorporated" applies where the incorporation of mitigation measures has reduced an effect from "Potentially Significant Impact" to a "Less Than Significant Impact." The lead agency must describe the mitigation measures, and briefly explain how they reduce the effect to a less than significant level (mitigation measures from "Earlier Analyses," as described in (5) below, may be cross referenced).
5) Earlier analyses may be used where, pursuant to the tiering, program EIR, or other CEQA process, an effect has been adequately analyzed in an earlier EIR or negative declaration. Section 15063(c)(3)(D). In this case, a brief discussion should identify the following:

    a) Earlier Analysis Used. Identify and state where they are available for review.
    b) Impacts Adequately Addressed. Identify which effects from the above checklist were within the scope of and adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and state whether such effects were addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis.
    c) Mitigation Measures. For effects that are "Less than Significant with Mitigation Measures Incorporated," describe the mitigation measures, which were incorporated or refined from the earlier document and the extent to which they address site specific conditions for the project.

6) Lead agencies are encouraged to incorporate into the checklist references to information sources for potential impacts (e.g., general plans, zoning ordinances). Reference to a previously prepared or outside document should, where appropriate, include a reference to the page or pages where the statement is substantiated.
7) Supporting Information Sources: A source list should be attached, and other sources used or individuals contacted should be cited in the discussion.
8) This is only a suggested form, and lead agencies are free to use different formats; however, lead agencies should normally address the questions from this checklist that are relevant to a project's environmental effects in whatever format is selected.
9) The explanation of each issue should identify:
    a) The significance criteria or threshold, if any, used to evaluate each question; and
    b) The mitigation measure identified, if any, to reduce the impacts to less than significance.

CITY OF PALM DESERT
MONITORING PROGRAM FOR CEQA COMPLIANCE

DATE:	IN PROCESS	**ASSESSORS PARCEL NO.:**	630-250-045, 625-300-052
PROJECT TITLE/ CASE NO.:	Living Desert Expansion Project Case No.: CUP/PP/EA 23-0010	**PROJECT LOCATION:** The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens 47900 Portola Avenue, Palm Desert. Riverside County.	
APPLICANT:	Prest Vuksic Greenwood Architects		
APPROVAL DATE:	In progress		

THE FOLLOWING REPRESENTS THE CITY'S MITIGATION MONITORING PROGRAM IN CONNECTION WITH THE MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION FOR THE ABOVE CASE NUMBER

SUMMARY MITIGATION MEASURES	RESPONSIBLE FOR MONITORING	TIMING	CRITERIA	COMPLIANCE CHECKED BY	DATE
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES					
BIO.1 Migratory Bird Treaty Act If ground disturbance or tree or plant removal is proposed between January 15th and August 31st, a qualified biologist shall conduct a nesting bird survey within 7 to 10 days of initiation of grading onsite. If active nests are reported, then species-specific measures shall be prepared. At a minimum, grading in the vicinity of a nest shall be postponed until the young birds have fledged. For construction that occurs between September 1st and January 31st, no pre-removal nesting bird survey is required. • In the event active nests are found, exclusionary fencing shall be placed around the nests until such time as nestlings have fledged. Avoidance buffers shall be 100 to 300 feet from the nests of unlisted songbirds, and 500 feet from the nests of birds-of-prey and listed species.	Project Biologist, City Engineer, Planning Department	Prior to issuance of any permits that result in ground disturbance	The Project biologist shall supply the City with reports of findings regarding burrowing owls and migratory birds. The reports will be attached to the grading permit for the Project.		
TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES					
CUL-1 Prior to the issuance of any ground disturbing permit on the site, the applicant shall provide the City with a fully executed Monitoring Agreement with ACBCI, providing for a Tribal Monitor's presence during earth moving activities. The Tribal	Project applicant, Tribal monitor, Planning Division, City Engineer.	Agreement to be provided prior to ground disturbance. Monitoring shall	Within 30 days of the completion of monitoring activities on the Project site, a report of findings shall be filed with the		

SUMMARY MITIGATION MEASURES	RESPONSIBLE FOR MONITORING	TIMING	CRITERIA	COMPLIANCE CHECKED BY	DATE
Monitor shall have the authority to temporarily stop construction if buried resource(s) are found, but shall quickly determine the significance of the find, whether a qualified archaeologist must be brought to the site to investigate the find, and how it must be treated. Any resources recovered shall be professionally documented and deposited and curated in a professional depository. The Tribal Monitor shall be responsible for providing the City a report of findings.		occur during earth-moving activities.	City.		
GEOLOGY					
GEO.1 A site-specific Geotechnical Report shall be submitted with grading plans, and report recommendations should be incorporated in Project design and construction.	Project engineer, Project geotechnical consultant, Project applicant.	Prior to issuance of grading permits	Final report submitted to and approved by the City		

I. AESTHETICS Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?			✓	
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?				✓
c) In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?			✓	
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?			✓	

Setting

The City of Palm Desert, including the project site, is located in Coachella Valley which is a desert valley that extends approximately 45 miles in Riverside County, southeast from the San Gorgonio Pass to the northern shore of the Salton Sea. The Coachella Valley is a low desert basin surrounded by dramatic mountainous terrain created by the active geology that is characteristic of Southern California. The overall gradient of the Valley is from northwest to southeast, gently sloping from the San Gorgonio Pass, at approximately 2,600 feet above mean sea level, to the Salton Sea, which has a surface elevation of approximately 228 feet below mean sea level.

The Valley and the Salton Sea are located within the Salton Trough, a fault-controlled valley formed by the San Andreas Fault Zone. The Salton Trough is located within the Colorado Desert Geomorphic Province, which is bounded to the southwest by the Peninsular Ranges province, to the north by the eastern Transverse Ranges province, and to the northeast by the southeastern portion of the Mojave Desert province. These tectonic forces have created the valley's surrounding mountains, including the San Jacinto Mountains, the foothills and slopes of which ascend from the Valley floor and form the westerly boundary of the Coachella Valley. At its peak, Mount San Jacinto rises to an elevation of 10,834 feet above mean sea level. The Santa Rosa Mountains, with Toro Peak at an elevation of 8,715 feet above mean sea level, generally form the southerly boundary of the valley. In the northerly portion of the valley are the Indio Hills, with elevations rising to about 1,600 feet, and the Little San Bernardino Mountains further north, forming the northeasterly boundary of the valley.

The Project site is located within the Living Desert, on the City's southeast boundary abutting the Santa Rosa Mountain foothills. The site is centrally located in the Zoo and is currently developed with landscaping and hardscapes.

Discussion of Impacts

a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** A significant impact may occur if the Project introduces incompatible visual elements within a field of view containing a scenic vista, or substantially blocks views of a scenic vista. Scenic vistas are generally described in two ways: panoramic views (visual access to a large geographic area, for which the field of view can be wide and extend into the distance) and focal views (visual access to a particular object, scene, or feature of interest).

The Project site is centrally located within the Living Desert and is surrounded by wildlife exhibits, administrative and retail buildings, and desert landscaping. The Project site is developed with mature landscaping and hardscapes including pathways and an outdoor patio area. There are no permanent building structures within the Project area. Neither the Project site nor the Living Desert is located in a scenic preservation overlay district.

From the subject site, scenic views of the Santa Rosa foothills are to the east, middle/upper views of the Santa Rosa Mountains are to the south and west, and middle/upper views of the San Bernardino Mountains and Indio Foothills are to the north. The Project site is located approximately 100 feet west, 1.4 miles east, and 1.1 miles north of the Santa Rosa foothills, and 9.9 miles and 14.7 miles south of the Indio Foothills and San Bernardino Mountains, respectively. From the Project site, much of the views of the lower elevations of the foothills in all directions are blocked by intervening landscaping and structures within the Living Desert.

Construction of the Project would require the use of heavy equipment for grading, paving and excavation. Construction activities would be visible from within the Zoo; however, impacts from construction are temporary and would be fenced off from public view.

The Project proposes one- and two-story buildings and structures with a maximum height of 31 feet (event center), which is below the maximum height allowed in the Public/Institutional zone of 35 feet. The proposed structures would be similar in height and style to neighboring exhibit structures, retail buildings, and the Chase building, which is also a two-story building.

Visitors of the Living Desert enjoy views of authentic desert landscaping, wildlife exhibits, and the Santa Rosa Mountain foothills to the east, south and west. Views of the San Bernardino Mountains and Indio foothills to the north are largely obstructed due to intervening development and are further diminished by distance. The Project site is centrally located within the Living Desert and is not directly adjacent to neighboring properties. The Project's mass and scale is consistent with existing uses within the Living Desert, and therefore will not impact views of the scenic vistas from neighboring properties. Impacts are considered less than significant.

b) **No Impact.** A significant impact would occur only if scenic resources would be damaged and/or removed by development of a project along a state scenic highway. Although the Project will require the removal of existing landscaping, including mature trees, they are not located along a state scenic highway. The only designated scenic highway in the city is Highway 74, which is ±1.3 miles west of the Project area. No impact will occur as a result of the Project.

c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Project site is in an urban setting; therefore, a significant impact would occur if the Project conflicts with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality. The Project will be consistent with applicable General Plan policies governing scenic quality, which require preservation of view corridors of the hills and mountains and limited light pollution to maintain darkness for night sky viewing (General Plan Environmental Resources Element Policies 2.1 and 2.5). The Project is consistent with the City's development standards for the Public/Institutional zone. The Project has been designed in accordance with the development standards and design guidelines found elsewhere in the Living Desert, including the use of natural elements such as rock boulders, round wood timber, thatched roofs, corten steel panels, and natural stone veneers. Therefore, the Project will have less than significant impacts to applicable regulations that address scenic quality.

d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** A significant impact may occur if the proposed project introduces new sources of light or glare on or from the project site which would be incompatible with the areas surrounding the project site, or which pose a safety hazard to motorists utilizing adjacent streets or freeways.

The Project will generate light and glare primarily from buildings, landscape lighting, and mobile light sources from vehicles accessing the site during special events at the event center. All Project lighting will comply with the City's lighting standards, and the design of the Living Desert, which requires lighting fixtures to complement the architecture and landscape, be designed and located to avoid spillover onto adjacent lots and be low intensity to preserve the nighttime dark sky and protect sensitive wildlife. The Project will be required to comply with Chapter 24.16 (Outdoor Lighting Requirements) of the Municipal Code, including lighting performance criteria and design guidelines. Landscape and lighting plans will be subject to review by the City. With adherence to City standards and Living Desert requirements, Project-related impacts associated with increased light and glare will be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required.

Sources: Palm Desert Municipal Code; California State Scenic Highway System Map, Caltrans, 2018; Project materials.

II. AGRICULTURE RESOURCES

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Dept. of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment project; and forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?				✓
b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?				✓
c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g))?				✓
d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?				✓
e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?				✓

Setting

Agriculture is a significant part of the Coachella Valley economy; however, agricultural land and operations are located east of Palm Desert. The City is in a desert environment and has no forests or forest production lands. It is predominantly built out with urban uses and does not contain any land designated or zoned for agricultural uses. Neither the General Plan nor the Zoning Ordinance include forestry or forest production designations. While not directly related to agriculture and forest uses, the General Plan includes the potential for golf course reuse that may allow community-scale agricultural uses.

Discussion of Impacts

a-e) No Impact.

Farmland: The California Department of Conservation, Important Farmland Map provides the most recent California Important Farmland data set mapping in which it identifies prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, and unique farmland. According to the Map, the City of Palm Desert is not found on or adjacent to an area identified as significant farmland. No farmland of statewide importance is found in Palm Desert or within the Living Desert's grounds. For this reason, the proposed Project will not alter or change agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses. No impact is expected.

Williamson Act: In the City's General Plan Land Use Designation Map (Figure 3.1), the Living Desert is zoned Public (P). There are no Williamson Act contracts on Living Desert property, or on adjacent properties. The proposed development is an expansion of uses within the Living Desert's existing boundaries and therefore no conflict regarding zoning designations or Williamson Act is anticipated. No impact will occur.

Forest Lands: Palm Desert is characterized by a Southern California desert landscape which does not support forestry or resources including timberland. There are no land use designations in the City related to forestry. No forestry resources will be impacted as a result of the Project.

Overall, the addition of an event center, lion habitat, and associated structures within the existing boundaries of the Living Desert will not convert farmland, agriculture, or forestry lands because the site is currently a developed portion of the Zoo. For this reason, no impacts to farmland and forestry are anticipated.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required

Sources: Palm Desert Municipal Code; California Important Farmland Finder, California Department of Conservation, https://maps.conservation.ca.gov/ agriculture/DataViewer/index.html, accessed March 2024.

III. AIR QUALITY Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations. **Would the project:**	**Potentially Significant Impact**	**Less Than Significant with Mitigation**	**Less Than Significant Impact**	**No Impact**
a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?				✓
b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard			✓	
c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?			✓	
d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors adversely affecting a substantial number of people?			✓	

Setting

The Coachella Valley is in the Salton Sea Air Basin (SSAB), which includes part of Riverside County and all of Imperial County. The SSAB is under the jurisdiction of the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD). All development within the SSAB is subject to the 2022 SCAQMD Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP), and the Coachella Valley region is subject to the 2003 Coachella Valley PM_{10} State Implementation Plan (CV PM_{10} SIP). SCAQMD operates and maintains regional air quality monitoring stations at numerous locations throughout its jurisdiction. The Project site is within Source Receptor Area (SRA) 30, which includes monitoring stations in Palm Springs, Indio, and Mecca.

Criteria air pollutants are contaminants for which state and federal air quality standards have been established. The SSAB exceeds state and federal standards for fugitive dust (PM_{10}) and ozone (O_3), and is in attainment for $PM_{2.5}$, except the City of Calexico. Ambient air quality in the SSAB, including the Project site, does not exceed state and federal standards for carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxides, sulfur dioxide, lead, sulfates, hydrogen sulfide, or vinyl chloride.

Buildout of the proposed Project will result in air quality impacts during construction and operation. The California Emissions Estimator Model (CalEEMod) Version 2022.1 was used to project air quality emissions that will be generated by the Project (Appendix A).

Discussion of Impacts

a) **No Impact**. According to CEQA, a significant air quality impact could occur if the proposed project is not consistent with the applicable Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP) or would obstruct the implementation of the policies or hinder reaching the goals of that plan. The Project site is within the Salton Sea Air Basin (SSAB) and will be subject to SCAQMD's 2022 AQMP

and the 2003 Coachella Valley PM_{10} SIP. The AQMP is a comprehensive plan that establishes control strategies and guidance on regional emission reductions for air pollutants. The AQMP is based, in part, on the land use plans of jurisdictions in the region.

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) adopted the 2020-2045 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (2020 RTP/SCS) to comply with metropolitan planning organization (MPO) requirements under the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act. The RTP/SCS Growth Management chapter forms the basis of land use and transportation controls of the AQMP. Projects that are consistent with SCAG's population forecasts are considered consistent with the AQMP. SCAG forecasts that the City's population will be 64,100 in 2045.

A project is considered to be in conformity with adopted air quality plans if it adheres to the requirements of the SCAQMD Rule Book, AQMP, and adopted and forthcoming control measures, and is consistent with growth forecasts in the applicable plan(s) (or is directly included in the applicable plan). Conformity with growth forecasts can be established by demonstrating that a project is consistent with the land use plan that was used to generate the growth forecast. A non-conforming project would be one that increases the gross number of dwelling units, increases the number of vehicle trips, and/or increases the overall vehicle miles traveled in an affected area relative to the applicable land use plan.

The General Plan was used to develop population forecasts in the above-described RTP/SCS, and the RTP/SCS served as the basis for the AQMP. The Project is part of a planned expansion within the Living Desert to include a new event center, lion habitat exhibit, and north entry pavilion. The Project does not propose residential land uses and would not impact population, as employees of the proposed Project are expected to be residents of the city and region, and current Living Desert employees. The proposed Project would be implemented in accordance with all applicable rules and regulations contained in air quality management plans to meet the applicable air quality standards. Therefore, the Project is consistent with the AQMP and will not conflict with or obstruct implementation of the plan. No conflict will occur.

b) **Less Than Significant Impact**. A project is considered to have significant impacts if there is a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is in non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard. As previously stated, the SSAB is currently a non-attainment area for PM_{10} and ozone. Therefore, if the Project's construction and/or operational emissions exceed SCAQMD thresholds for PM_{10} and ozone precursors, which include carbon monoxide (CO), nitrous oxides (NO_x), and volatile/reactive organic compounds/gases (VOC or ROG), then impacts would be cumulatively considerable and significant.

The California Emissions Estimator Model (CalEEMod) Version 2022.1 was used to project air quality emissions that will be generated by the proposed Project (Appendix A). Criteria air pollutants will be released during both the construction and operational phases of the Project, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 summarizes short-term construction-related emissions, and Table 2 summarizes ongoing emissions generated during operation.

Construction Emissions

Project buildout is anticipated to take 15-months. The construction period includes all aspects of Project development, including site preparation, grading, paving, building construction, and application of architectural coatings. Operational emissions represent the highest vehicle trip generating scenario that include daily operations of the new administration and lion habitat uses, and a large event (500 people) occurring every weekend after Zoo regular hours. The following assumptions were input into CalEEMod:

- Combined administration space (7,490 SF), entry pavilion (1,282 SF) and lion care facility (4,451 SF) totaling 13,223 SF of "general office building" space with a daily trip rate of 122 trips per the trip generation report (Appendix D). The 122 daily trips are applied to weekdays and weekends.
- Combined event space (13,130 SF) and kitchen/B.O.H. space (20,620 SF) totaling 33,750 SF of "quality restaurant" with a daily trip rate of 350 trips per the trip generation report. The 350 daily trips are only applied to weekends.
- 119,670 square feet of landscaping.
- No import of export of materials. Preliminary grading estimates a net import of 4,198 cubic yards, however the material will be sourced from the Living Desert's current stockpile located within 1,000 of the Project area, from inside the park.

As shown in Table 2, emissions generated by construction activities will not exceed SCAQMD thresholds for any criteria pollutant. Applicable standard requirements and best management practices include, but are not limited to, the implementation of a dust control and management plan in conformance with SCAQMD Rules 403 and 403.1, phased application of architectural coatings, the use of low-polluting architectural paint and coatings per SCAQMD Rule 1113, and the use of low water demand landscaping, as required by City and CVWD requirements.

Table 2
Maximum Daily Construction-Related Emissions Summary
(pounds per day)

Construction Emissions[1]	**CO**	**NO_x**	**ROG**	**SO_2**	**PM_{10}**	**$PM_{2.5}$**
Daily Maximum	34.2	36.0	7.96	0.05	9.49	5.47
SCAQMD Thresholds	**550.00**	**100.00**	**75.00**	**150.00**	**150.00**	**55.00**
Exceeds?	**No**	**No**	**No**	**No**	**No**	**No**
Source: CalEEMod Version 2022.1 (output tables provided in Appendix A).						

Given that criteria pollutant thresholds will not be exceeded, and standard best management practices will be applied during construction, impacts will be less than significant.

Operational Emissions

Operational emissions are ongoing emissions that will occur over the life of the Project. They include area source emissions, emissions from energy demand (electricity), and mobile source (vehicle) emissions.

According to the Project traffic trip generation memo (Appendix D), the new administrative space and lion exhibit will generate approximately 122 daily trips, and the event center will generate up to 375 trips during a 500-guest special event (see Section XVII, Transportation). For CalEEMod reporting, it is assumed the 122 trips will occur weekdays and weekends, and the 375 trips would

occur only on weekends. Table 3 summarizes projected emissions during operation of the Project at build out. As shown, operational emissions will not exceed SCAQMD thresholds of significance for any criteria pollutants for operations. Impacts will be less than significant.

Table 3
Maximum Daily Operational-Related Emissions Summary
(pounds per day)

Operational Emissions[1]	**CO**	**NO_x**	**ROG**	**SO_2**	**PM_{10}**	**$PM_{2.5}$**
Daily Maximum	48.9	5.31	4.01	0.13	12.0	3.17
SCAQMD Thresholds	550	55	55	150	150	55
Exceeds?	**No**	**No**	**No**	**No**	**No**	**No**
Source: CalEEMod Version 2022.1 (output tables provided in Appendix A).						

Cumulative Contribution

A significant impact could occur if the Project would make a considerable cumulative contribution to federal or state non-attainment pollutants. The Coachella Valley portion of the SSAB is classified as a "non-attainment" area for PM_{10} and ozone. Cumulative air quality analysis is evaluated on a regional scale (rather than a neighborhood or city scale, for example), given the dispersing nature of pollutant emissions and aggregate impacts from surrounding jurisdictions and air management districts. Any development project or activity resulting in emissions of PM_{10}, ozone, or ozone precursors will contribute, to some degree, to regional non-attainment designations of ozone and PM_{10}.

The SCAQMD does not currently recommend quantified analyses of construction and/or operational emissions from multiple development projects, nor does it provide methodologies or thresholds of significance to be used to assess the significance of cumulative emissions generated by multiple cumulative projects. However, it is recommended that a project's potential contribution to cumulative impacts be assessed utilizing the same significance criteria as those for project-specific impacts. Furthermore, SCAQMD states that if an individual development project generates less than significant construction or operational emissions, then the project would not generate a cumulatively considerable increase in emissions for those pollutants for which the Basin is in nonattainment.

As shown in the tables above, Project-related PM_{10}, CO, NO_x, and ROG emissions are projected to be below established SCAQMD thresholds. Therefore, the proposed Project will result in incremental, but not cumulatively considerable impacts on regional PM_{10} or ozone levels.

Summary

As shown above, both construction and operation of the Project will result in criteria emissions below the SCAQMD significance thresholds, and neither would violate any air quality standard or contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation. Impacts related to construction and operation will be less than significant and are not cumulatively considerable from a non-attainment standpoint.

c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** Sensitive receptors include residences, schools, playgrounds, childcare centers, retirement homes, hospitals, and other land uses occupied by individuals who are potentially more sensitive to pollutants than the average. The Project site is centrally located within the Living Desert which is occupied by visitors daily who walk in proximity to the site.

To determine if a project has the potential to generate significant adverse localized air quality impacts, SCAQMD offers Localized Significance Thresholds (LST) analysis. Analysis of LSTs by a local government is voluntary and is designed for projects that are less than or equal to 5 acres. The maximum area of disturbance associated with buildout of the Project is approximately 4 acres, and it is assumed that buildout will occur over one to two years. the 5-acre Mass Rate Look-Up table is therefore appropriate under the SCAMD's methodology to screen for potential localized air quality impacts.[1]

The Mass Rate Look-Up tables for LSTs were used to determine if the proposed Project would have the potential to generate significant adverse localized air quality impacts during construction. The LST for Source Receptor Area (SRA) 30 (Coachella Valley) was used to determine LST emission thresholds. The distance from the emission source and the maximum daily site disturbance also determine the emission thresholds. For analysis purposes, the scenario of a sensitive receptor being within 25 meters of the Project site was used. Only area source emissions are considered when assessing operational impacts to sensitive receptors because all mobile emissions would occur off-site, and parking will be provided in the existing Living Desert parking lot.

Table 4 shows that LST thresholds are not expected to be exceeded for any criteria pollutant during construction or operation. Impacts to sensitive receptors will be less than significant.

Table 4
Localized Significance Thresholds
25 Meters, 5 Acres
(pounds per day)

	CO	**NO_x**	**PM_{10}**	**$PM_{2.5}$**
Construction Emissions	34.2	36.0	9.49	5.47
LST Threshold	2,292	304	14	8
Operational Emissions	2.86	1.09	0.08	0.08
LST Threshold	2,292	304	4	2
Exceeds Threshold?	**No**	**No**	**No**	**No**
Source of Emission Data: CalEEMod version 2022.1 (output tables provided in Appendix A). Source of LST Threshold: LST Mass Rate Look-up Table, 25 meters, 5 acres, SCAQMD				

Health Impacts

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, construction and operation of the proposed Project will result in criteria emissions that are below the SCAQMD significance thresholds, and neither would violate any air quality standard or contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation.

It is not scientifically possible to calculate the degree to which exposure to various levels of criteria pollutant emissions will impact an individual's health. There are several factors that make predicting a Project-specific numerical impact difficult:

- Not all individuals will be affected equally due to medical history. Some may have medical pre-dispositions, and diet and exercise levels tend to vary across a population.

[1] SCAQMD "Fact Sheet for Applying CalEEMod to Localized Significance Thresholds."

- Due to the dispersing nature of pollutants, it is difficult to locate and identify which group of individuals will be impacted, either directly or indirectly.
- There are currently no approved methodologies or studies to base assumptions on, such as baseline health levels or emission level-to-health risk ratios.

Due to these limitations, the extent to which the Project poses a health risk is uncertain but unavoidable. It is anticipated that the impacts associated with all criteria pollutants will be less than significant overall, and that health effects will also be less than significant.

d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** A significant impact could occur if objectionable odors are generated that would adversely impact sensitive receptors. Odors are typically associated with industrial projects involving the use of chemicals, solvents, petroleum products, and other strong-smelling elements used in manufacturing processes, as well as in sewage treatment facilities and landfills. The Project proposes an event center, entry pavilion, and lion habitat exhibit.

During construction, odors associated with construction activities will be generated. However, any such odors would be short-term and quickly dispersed below detectable levels as distance from the construction site increases. The Project does not propose land uses that cause odor impacts, such as gas stations or industrial uses. During operations, the event center kitchen will generate odors from cooking and there will be odors associated with wildlife. However, these uses and odors are comparable to existing conditions in the Living Desert. In addition, the SCAQMD Rule 402 (Nuisance), and SCAQMD Best Available Control Technology Guidelines would limit potential objectionable odor impacts during the proposed Project's long-term operations phase. Therefore, impacts from objectionable odors will be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required.

Sources: SCAQMD AQMP, 2022; 2020-2045 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS), Demographics and Growth Forecast Technical Report, Southern California Association of Governments, adopted September 3, 2020; "Final Localized Significance Threshold Methodology," prepared by the South Coast Air Quality Management District, Revised, July 2008; "2003 Coachella Valley PM_{10} State Implementation Plan," August 1, 2003; CalEEMod Version 2022.1; Project materials.

IV. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?		✓		
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Game or US Fish and Wildlife Service?				✓
c) Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?				✓
d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?		✓		
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?				✓
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?				✓

Setting

The Coachella Valley is located within the Sonoran Desert, a subdivision of the Colorado Desert. The Sonoran Desert contains a wide range of biological resources that are highly specialized and endemic to the region. The central portion of the valley, in which the Project site is located, is composed of sand dunes and sand fields that are divided into three sub-communities: active sand dunes, active sand fields, and stabilized and partially stabilized desert sand fields.

A wide range of common plant species, such as mesquite, smoke tree, desert holly, creosote bush, and palo verde, are supported by the conditions present in the valley, as are a wide range of wildlife species. Bird species include golden eagle, western burrowing owl, and others. There are also a range of sensitive plant and animal species present in the Coachella Valley, some of which have been listed as threatened or endangered by federal and state agencies.

Within the Coachella Valley region, some plant species that are federally listed as endangered include the Coachella Valley milkvetch and triple-ribbed milkvetch. Threatened or endangered wildlife species include the Peninsular bighorn sheep, Casey's June beetle, Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard, arroyo southwestern toad, and mountain yellow-legged frog. Sensitive bird species include the least Bell's vireo and southwestern flycatcher, both listed as endangered. In addition, there are several species of birds considered "sensitive" by state and federal wildlife resource agencies.

The city is within the boundaries of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP), a comprehensive regional plan encompassing approximately 1.2 million acres in the Coachella Valley that addresses the conservation needs of 27 native flora and fauna species and 27 natural vegetation communities. The City of Palm Desert is a CVMSHCP Permittee and subject to its provisions.

Discussion of Impacts

a) **Less than Significant with Mitigation.** The Project site is centrally located within the Living Desert and surrounding by mature landscaping, wildlife habitat exhibits, and retail/administration buildings. The proposed site is developed with landscaping and hardscapes for pathways and a patio area. There are no permanent building structures within the Project footprint. There are approximately 245 mature trees in the project footprint that will be removed, of which 50 trees will be salvaged. The Project area contains a mix of native and decorative landscaping, and does not contain native vegetation communities. A number of common species are expected to currently occur within the Project area, given the extensive use of landscaped areas and gardens within the Zoo.

The existing vegetation on-site and adjacent to the site has the potential to provide nesting opportunities for birds covered under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). Nesting activities would occur between January and August of any year. Under the provisions of the MBTA, impacts to covered nesting birds would be considered a significant impact. To assure that impacts to bird nests covered under the MBTA are reduced to less than significant levels, a pre-construction survey is required if any activity to remove vegetation is proposed during the nesting season, as provided in Mitigation Measure BIO.1, below. With implementation of this mitigation measure, impacts to birds covered by the MBTA will be less than significant.

Burrowing owl is a state species of special concern that resides in open dry grasslands and desert areas. Since the site is currently developed and centrally located within the Living Desert, the chance of Burrowing owl being present on-site is negligible. Mitigation is not required.

Development of the expansion Project would not significantly change impacts to biological resources, because the site has been previously developed and the existing vegetation is landscaping designed and planted by the Living Desert. Implementation of Mitigation Measure BIO.1, and adherence to existing federal, state, and City regulations will ensure potential impacts to sensitive or special status species are reduced to less than significant levels.

b) **No Impact.** The Project site does not contain any riparian habitat or sensitive natural communities protected by local plans, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The site is centrally located with the Living Desert, and is surrounded by landscaping, hardscapes, and buildings. Onsite soils have been disturbed by previous grading activity, and onsite vegetation is limited to palm trees and other desert landscaping. No Project-related impacts would occur, and no mitigation measures would be required.

c) **No Impact.** The Project site is located inland and does not contain any streams, marshes, protected wetlands, or vernal pools protected by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Project-generated stormwater runoff will be managed onsite and within the Living Desert (see Hydrology below). No Project-related impacts would occur and no mitigation measures would be required.

d) **Less than Significant with Mitigation.** The proposed site is centrally located in the Living Desert. No natural wildlife corridors or biological linkages are located on the Project site. Surrounding lands are developed with urban uses, with the exception of the foothills of the Santa Rosa Mountains to the east, which are separated from the Living Desert by walls and fences. Although it may provide habitat for migratory birds, the Project site is not identified as a nursery site. As described above, the site may offer nesting sites for birds protected by the MBTA. Compliance with pre-construction surveys, described in Mitigation Measures BIO.1 will ensure impacts to nesting birds are reduced to less than significant levels.

e) **No Impact.** There are approximately 245 mature trees in the project footprint that will be removed, of which 50 trees will be salvaged. None of these trees are protected under the Municipal Code. The proposed Project will not conflict with any local ordinances protecting biological species and will be required to comply with the landscaping and other applicable requirements of the Municipal Code and the Living Desert. The Project would also adhere to the City's General Plan Policy 4.3 by incorporating native vegetation materials into the Project landscape. No impact will occur.

f) **No Impact.** The subject property is within the boundaries of the CVMSHCP, and the City of Palm Desert is a Permittee to the CVMSHCP. The Project does not propose a land use designation change that would convert protected or open space lands to urban uses. The CVMSHCP local development mitigation fee to mitigate impacts to covered species was previously paid when the Living Desert was first developed, which included the Project site. Therefore, the Project is not required to pay the development fee. The Project will not conflict with this or any other habitat conservation plan or natural community conservation plan. No impact will occur.

Mitigation Measures:

BIO.1 Migratory Bird Treaty Act

If ground disturbance or tree or plant removal is proposed between January 15th and August 31st, a qualified biologist shall conduct a nesting bird survey within 7 to 10 days of initiation of grading onsite. If active nests are reported, then species-specific measures shall be prepared. At a minimum, grading in the vicinity of a nest shall be postponed until the young birds have fledged. For construction that occurs between September 1st and January 31st, no pre-removal nesting bird survey is required.

- In the event active nests are found, exclusionary fencing shall be placed around the nests until such time as nestlings have fledged. Avoidance buffers shall be 100 to 300 feet from the nests of unlisted songbirds, and 500 feet from the nests of birds-of-prey and listed species.

Monitoring:

BIO.A The Project biologist shall supply the City with reports of findings regarding migratory birds. The reports will be attached to the grading permit for the Project.
Responsible Parties: Project Biologist, City Engineer, Planning Department
Timeline: prior to issuance of any permits that result in ground disturbance

V. CULTURAL RESOURCES Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to § 15064.5?				✓
b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to § 15064.5?				✓
c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries?				✓

Setting

The Cahuilla Indians settled in the Coachella Valley centuries ago. They were a Takic-speaking people that, before European settlement, consisted primarily of hunters and gatherers generally divided into three groups based on geography: the Pass Cahuilla of the San Gorgonio Pass-Palm Springs area; the Mountain Cahuilla of the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains and the Cahuilla Valley; and the Desert Cahuilla of the eastern Coachella Valley.

The first noted European explorations in the Coachella Valley occurred in the 1820's. By the 1870's, non-native settlements expanded across the region as new federal laws opened lands for settlement. The discovery of underground water sources increased farming activities in the early 20th century. After World War II, the Henderson brothers organized the Palm Desert Corporation to promote their new desert town. In 1946, they started constructing streets and commercial buildings which later became known as Palm Desert. The City was incorporated in 1973.

The Living Desert was constructed in 1970. The Project site is currently developed with landscaping and hardscapes include an open-air patio and pathways.

Discussion of Impacts

a) **No Impact.** The City of Palm Desert Resource Preservation Committee has identified a total of ten culturally significant sites within the city and designated them historical landmarks. All of Palm Desert's registered landmarks are listed in Table 5. Of the ten historically significant landmarks, only the OWL House is in the vicinity of the Living Desert, less than 1 mile to the northwest.

Table 5
Palm Desert Register Landmarks

Name	Description	Location
Historical Society of Palm Desert/Palm Desert Fire Station	Ranch Vernacular-style building	72861 El Paseo
Shadow Mountain Golf Club	First golf course in Palm Desert	73800 Ironwood
Portola Community Center	First community library in Palm Desert	45480 Portola Avenue
Sandpiper Condominiums, Circle 5-12	Multi-family residential building	El Paseo
Palm Desert Community Church	City of Palm Desert's first community church	45630 Cabrillo Portola Avenue
Schindler House for Marion Toole	Single-family residences	44870 Cabrillo Avenue
Randall Henderson House	Single-family residence; home of Randall Henderson, one of the founders of Palm Desert	74135 Larrea Street
Miles Bates House	Famous residential home for its wave-like roof	73697 Santa Rosa Way
OWL House	Direct influence of Palm Desert's modern development aesthetic	47869 Sun Corral Trail
Kings Points at Palm Desert	Multi-family residential condominium complex designed by the local architect, Hugh Michael Kaptur	Cactus & Mesquite Ct

Source: City of Palm Desert Geographic Information System, Cultural Resources Map, https://www.palmdesert.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/, Accessed March 2024; Historical Society of Palm Desert, https://michaela169.sg-host.com/?page_id=9, Accessed March 2024.

A significant impact could occur if the proposed Project would disturb historic resources. The Project is centrally located within the Living Desert and is part of a planned expansion of the Zoo. The Project site has been developed for 54 years with landscaping and hardscape improvements. The site is not listed on the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) or the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Development of the Project will not impact the OWL House because the Project is at a distance and Project activities will not occur near it. The OWL House is not visible from the Project. Therefore, the proposed development is not expected to change or disturb the existing view of the OWL House. No adverse impacts resulting from the Project are anticipated.

b) **No Impact**. Currently, the Project site is developed and consists of landscaping and hardscape. During the construction phase, no archeological resources are expected to occur because the area has been disturbed by previous development of the current improvements. Impacts are not expected.

c) **No Impact.** No cemeteries or human remains are known to occur onsite. It is unlikely that human remains will be uncovered during Project development because the site has been previously developed. However, should human remains be uncovered, California law requires that all activity cease and the coroner be notified to determine the nature of the remains and whether Native American consultation is needed. This requirement of law assures that there will be no impact to cemeteries or human remains.

Mitigation Measures: None.

Monitoring: None.

Sources: California Office of Historic Preservation, Built Environment Resource Directory (BERD), accessed March 2024. https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=30338; National Register of Historic Places, National Park Services. Accessed March 2024. https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/database-research.htm.

VI. ENERGY Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, during project construction or operation?			✓	
b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?			✓	

Setting

Primary energy sources include fossil fuels (e.g. oil, coal, and natural gas), nuclear energy, and renewable sources (e.g. wind, solar, geothermal and hydropower). Southern California Edison (SCE) provides electricity to most of the City of Palm Desert, including the Living Desert, and serves approximately 15 million people in a 50,000 square-mile service area.[2] Natural gas is provided by the Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas). It serves approximately 21.1 million customers in a service area covering approximately 24,000 square miles.[3] Both SCE and SoCalGas offer programs and incentives to reduce energy consumption.

The Palm Desert Environmental Sustainability Plan (2010) establishes the City's vision for long-term energy reduction and sustainability. It addresses city-wide energy usage and establishes goals and policy recommendations within six resource areas: building efficiency standards, energy management, materials management, regional air quality, transportation resources, and water management.

Discussion of Impacts

a, b) Less than Significant Impact. The proposed Project will consume energy during both construction and long-term operation. During construction, energy demand will be primarily associated with fossil fuels, and will come from the operation of construction machinery and equipment, manufacturing of construction materials, delivery of building materials, hauling of construction debris, and commuting of workers to and from the Project site. The Project consists of typical structures for a commercial use, and has no characteristics that would result in unusually high use of energy for construction. Construction practices would be subject to current SCAQMD rules and regulations, such as source-specific standards for engines and limits on equipment idling duration. The Project would also adhere to state Low Carbon Fuel Standards for construction equipment and heavy-duty vehicle efficiency standards. These standards would reduce fuel consumption, help maximize fuel efficiency, and reduce pollutant emissions.

[2] Southern California Edison, www.calcities.org/detail-pages/partner/edison, accessed March 2024.
[3] SoCalGas, Company Profile, www.socalgas.com/about-us/company-profile, accessed March 2024.

Long-term operational energy demand will be generated by Project lighting, and heating/ventilation/air conditioning (HVAC) systems. Energy would be consumed during the operation of the facilities, as well as landscape irrigation, the transport and conveyance of water, and solid waste hauling and disposal. However, the Project will result in commercial uses typical of such construction throughout the City and region. Buildings will be constructed in accordance with the state Building Code, Green Building Code, and Energy Code in effect at the time that development occurs, to ensure the most efficient building technologies are used, which will benefit overall building operations, ensure energy efficiency, and reduce wasteful and unnecessary consumption of energy resources. Current building codes require all newly constructed commercial buildings to be solar-ready. The Project will be required to comply with these standards.

The Project will not directly increase the population and will therefore not directly increase vehicle trips and miles traveled (VMT) and long-term fuel demand. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and California Air Resources Board (CARB) set forth vehicle fuel efficiency standards to reduce vehicle emissions. Although the Project will increase vehicle trips, it will not interfere with increased fuel efficiency standards or result in wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of transportation energy resources during operation.

SCE engages in renewable power generation and procurement, administers a variety of energy efficiency programs, and encourages rooftop solar energy. According to the Project-specific CalEEMod analysis (Appendix A), at buildout, the Project is projected to consume approximately 1,345,549 kWh of electricity and approximately 40 therms of natural gas per year. Actual consumption will be offset by energy-efficient appliances and future solar systems. The Project will be required to comply with solar requirements of the California Building Code and will not interfere with any state or local plan that promotes renewable energy or energy efficiency.

Adherence to applicable laws and standards enforced by government agencies, SCE, and SoCalGas will ensure the Project is consistent with current energy standards and conservation goals laid out in the City's General Plan and Environmental Sustainability Plan. Therefore, Project impacts will be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required.

Sources: City of Palm Desert General Plan, 2016; City of Palm Desert Environmental Sustainability Plan, February 11, 2010.

VII. GEOLOGY AND SOILS Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving:				
i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42.				✓
ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?		✓		
iii) Seismic related ground failure, including liquefaction?				✓
iv) Landslides?				✓
b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?			✓	
c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in on-or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse?		✓		
d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial direct or indirect risks to life or property?		✓		
e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative waste water disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of waste water?				✓
f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?				✓

Setting

Geology and Soils

The Project is located in the City of Palm Desert which is part of the Coachella Valley. The geology and seismicity of the Coachella Valley is primarily influenced by the tectonics of the San Andrea and San Jacinto fault systems. The San Andreas Fault is a continental transform fault that extends roughly 750 miles through California. It forms the tectonic boundary between the Pacific Plate and the North American Plate, and its motion is right-lateral strike-slip (horizontal). The San Jacinto Fault Zone (SJFZ) is a major

strike-slip fault zone that runs through San Bernardino, Riverside, San Diego, and Imperial Counties in Southern California. The SJFZ is a component of the larger San Andreas transform system and is considered to be the most seismically active fault zone in the area.

The Coachella Valley is located in the northwestern portion of the Salton Trough which is bounded by the San Bernardino Mountains on the northwest, San Jacinto Mountains on the west, Santa Rosa Mountains on the south, and Little San Bernardino Mountains and Indio Hills on the northeast. Regional soils range from rocky outcrops within the mountains bordering the valley to coarse gravels of mountain canyons and recently laid fine- and medium-grained alluvial (stream deposited) and aeolian (wind deposited) sediments on the central valley floor.

A Geotechnical Investigation report for the Project was prepared by Sladden Engineering January 18, 2024 (see Appendix B). The report evaluated the engineering properties of the subsurface materials to provide engineering recommendations and design criteria for Project development.

Paleontological Resources

Paleontological resources are the fossilized remains of prehistoric animals and plants, created more than 12,000 years ago in the Pleistocene era. Palm Desert General Plan Policy 9.7 requires development to avoid paleontological resources whenever possible. If complete avoidance is not possible, development is required to minimize and fully mitigate impacts to the resource.

Discussion of Impacts

a.i) **No Impact.** There are no Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zones in the City (General Plan Figure 8.1), and the subject property is not located within or adjacent to an Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone. The nearest earthquake fault is the Southern Branch of the San Andreas Fault Zone, approximately 15.2 miles north of the Project site. No fault-related surface rupture would occur on the Project site.

a.ii) **Less than Significant with Mitigation.** The Coachella Valley is a seismically active region. The closest active fault to the City is the San Andreas Fault, 15.2 miles north of the Project site, which has a maximum event magnitude of 7.2 on the Richter scale. The San Bernardino segment of the San Andreas Fault is 27 miles west of the City, and has a maximum event magnitude of 7.5 on the Richter scale. The Project would be exposed to strong ground shaking during a major quake on nearby faults, which could expose people and structures to safety risks. The impacts associated with ground shaking could be significant without mitigation.

The Project will be required to comply with the California Building Code (CBC) in effect at the time that development occurs, which includes seismic safety specifications and requirements. The Geotechnical Investigation recommended several techniques that will minimize seismic impacts and reduce them to less than significant levels, including compaction and foundation design. The Project should be constructed based on parameters for the Site Class D designation. Adherence to the CBC and recommendations from the geotechnical report will reduce potential impacts associated with strong seismic ground shaking to less than significant levels on the subject property (Mitigation Measure GEO.1).

a.iii) **No Impact.** Seismically induced liquefaction is the loss of soil strength caused by a sudden increase in pore water pressure shortly after an earthquake. Liquefaction can occur with a combination of saturated soil or soil below the groundwater table, strong ground shaking, and

susceptible soil types such as loose sands and gravels. Lateral spreading is a form of liquefaction-related hazard.

According to the Geotechnical Investigation, the depth to groundwater in the Project area exceeds 50 feet. Therefore, risks associated with liquefaction are considered "negligible" and there will be no impacts.

a.iv) **No Impact.** The Project site is not susceptible to landslides due to its relatively flat terrain and distance from mountainous slopes and hillsides at risk of landslides (approximately 0.3 miles) (Palm Desert General Plan Figure 8.2). No impact will occur.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** The Project site is in a high wind erodibility zone (Palm Desert General Plan Figure 8.3, Wind Erosion Hazard). Buildout of the Project will result in ground disturbances, including site preparation and grading, that have the potential to increase soil erosion. However, the Project will include new structures, paved surfaces, and landscaping that will stabilize ground surfaces and resist long-term erosion. The Project will be required to submit and implement a site-specific dust control mitigation plan as part of the grading permit process to minimize potential impacts caused by blowing dust and sand during construction. Adherence to this standard requirement will assure that potential wind erosion impacts remain less than significant.

Onsite drainage would be directed to one of two drainage management areas in the Project vicinity via surface and piped flows. According to the Preliminary Hydrology Report, the Project proposes retention basins with a combined capacity of 5,098 cubic yards which is sized adequately to contain the required incremental increase in stormwater runoff, or the implementation of an underground retention system sized to meet the City's requirements. Drainage improvements will be required to implement erosion control Best Management Practices (BMPs) in compliance with City NPDES Permit requirements, which will ensure that the Project will not result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site. These include the preparation of a WQMP and a SWPPP. Impacts will be less than significant.

c) **Less than Significant with Mitigation.**

Subsidence

Subsidence is the settlement or sinking of the land surface that, in the Coachella Valley, has been associated with long-term groundwater withdrawal. Subsidence is considered a regional issue and is being addressed by the water agencies and government agencies through water conservation and supplemental groundwater recharge efforts. The geotechnical investigation found no fissures or other surficial evidence of subsidence during site surveys. Nonetheless, adherence to the recommendations provided in the geotechnical report will assure that impacts regarding subsidence will remain less than significant (Mitigation Measure GEO.1).

Landslide and Rockfall

See Response VII.a.iv, above.

Liquefaction and Dry Sand Settlement

See Response VII.a.iii, above.

Hydrocollapsible Soils

Hydrocollapsible soils are subject to collapse upon the introduction of water. The volume of collapsible soils reduces when the pores in the soil become saturated, causing loss of grain-to-grain contact. Collapsible soils can cause uniform or differential damage to foundations and walls built on this soil type. Adherence to the recommendations of the geotechnical report will assure that Project impacts associated with collapsible soils will remain less than significant (Mitigation Measure GEO.1).

d) **Less than Significant Impact with Mitigation.** The geotechnical investigation determined materials underlaying the site consist of Gravelly Sand (SW/SP) and are considered "non-expansive" soils. Adherence to compaction recommendations of the geotechnical report will assure that Project impacts associated with expansive soils will remain less than significant (Mitigation Measure GEO.1).

e) **No Impact.** The subject property is in an urban area that is served by a community sewer system, and the proposed Project will be connected to the sewer system. The Project will not result in new septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems. No impact will occur.

f) **No Impact.** The soils underlying the Project site have been disturbed by previous development and consist of gravelly sand that typically does not harbor paleontological resources. The Project site is currently developed and does not have unique paleontological or geologic features. No impact will occur.

Mitigation Measures:

GEO.1 The site-specific Geotechnical Investigation report shall be submitted with grading plans, and report recommendations should be incorporated in Project design and construction. Recommendation are made on the following topics:

- Earthwork and Grading: Proper site clearing, preparation of building areas soil compaction, and shrinkage and subsidence control.
- Conventional Shallow Spread Footings;
- Slab-on-Grade uniform foundation supports;
- Retaining wall design;
- Corrosion control;
- Utility trench backfilling;
- Exterior concrete flatwork; and
- Drainage

Monitoring:

GEO.A The applicant shall provide the final grading plan to the Project geotechnical consultant for review and ensure the recommendations are incorporated into the design criteria and Project specifications as deemed appropriate by the consultant.
Responsible parties: Project engineer, Project geotechnical consultant, Project applicant.

Sources: City of Palm Desert General Plan, 2016; City of Palm Desert Zoning Map; Geotechnical Investigation for the Proposed Facilities Expansion – Phase 2.75 and 3.0, The Living Desert," prepared by Sladden Engineering January 18, 2024

VIII. GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?			✓	
b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?			✓	

Setting

Certain gases in the earth's atmosphere, classified as greenhouse gases (GHGs), play a critical role in determining the earth's surface temperature. Prominent GHGs contributing to the greenhouse effect are carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4), nitrous oxide (N_2O), and fluorinated compounds. GHGs are emitted during natural and anthropogenic (human-caused) processes. Anthropogenic emissions of these GHGs in excess of natural ambient concentrations are responsible for intensifying the greenhouse effect and have led to a trend of unnatural warming of the earth's climate, known as global climate change or global warming.

State laws, such as Assembly Bill 32 (AB 32) and Senate Bill 32 (SB 32), require cities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2020. SB 32 is the extension of AB 32 and requires the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. The City of Palm Desert adopted an Environmental Sustainability Plan (2010) that is consistent with the goals of AB 32 and S-3-05, which calls for a statewide GHG emission reduction to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050.

On December 5, 2008, the SCAQMD formally adopted a greenhouse gas significance threshold of 10,000 $MTCO_2e$/yr that only applies to industrial uses' stationary sources where SCAQMD is the lead agency (SCAQMD Resolution No.08-35). This threshold was adopted based upon an October 2008 staff report and draft interim guidance document that also recommended a threshold for all projects using a tiered approach. It was recommended by SCAQMD staff that a project's greenhouse gas emissions would be considered significant if it could not comply with at least one of the following "tiered" tests:

- Tier 1: Is there an applicable exemption?
- Tier 2: Is the project compliant with a greenhouse gas reduction plan that is, at a minimum, consistent with the goals of AB 32?
- Tier 3: Is the project below an absolute threshold (10,000 $MTCO_2e$/year for industrial projects; 3,000 $MTCO_2e$/year for residential and commercial projects)?
- Tier 4: Is the project below a (yet to be set) performance threshold?
- Tier 5: Would the project achieve a screening level with off-site mitigation?

The analysis provided below is based on this tiered approach.

Discussion of Impacts

a, b) Less than Significant Impact. The proposed Project will generate GHG emissions during both construction and operation. As described in Section III (Air Quality), the California Emissions Estimator Model (CalEEMod) Version 2022.1 was used to project the Project's air quality emissions, including greenhouse gas emissions (Appendix A). Applicable standard requirements and best management practices (BMPs) were included in the model, including the implementation of a dust control and management plan in conformance with SCAQMD Rule 403, phased application of architectural coatings, and the use of low-polluting architectural paint and coatings per SCAQMD Rule 1113. Projected short-term construction and annual operational GHG emissions associated with Project buildout are described below and shown in Table 6.

Construction Emissions

Construction activities, including operation of construction equipment, employee commute, and material hauling, will generate short-term GHG emissions. As shown in Table 6, the Project is projected to generate $MTCO_2e$ of GHG emissions during the 15-month construction period. There are currently no construction related GHG emission thresholds for residential projects of this nature. To determine if construction emissions will result in a cumulatively considerable impact, buildout GHG emissions were amortized over a 30-year period and added to annual operational emissions to be compared to applicable GHG thresholds (see Table 6, below).

Operational Emissions

At buildout, there are five emission source categories that will be contributing either directly or indirectly to operational GHG emissions, including energy/electricity usage, water usage, solid waste disposal, area emissions (pavement and architectural coating off-gassing), and mobile sources. Table 6 provides a summary of the projected short-term construction and annual operational GHG generation associated with buildout of the proposed Project.

Table 6
Projected GHG Emissions Summary (metric tons/year)

Phase	CO_2e (MT/YR)
Construction	508
Operational	
Area	0.92
Energy	425
Mobile	759
Waste	12.9
Water	16.3
Refrigerants	8.22
Operational Subtotal	1,222.34
Construction, 30-year amortized[1]	16.93
Total (30-year amortized construction)	1,239.27
SCAQMD Threshold	**3,000.00**

[1] Buildout construction GHG emissions amortized over 30 years. 508/30 = 16.93. Emission Source: CalEEMod Version 2022.1

Consistency with SCAQMD GHG Thresholds

The proposed Project can be evaluated under SCAQMD's Tier 3 commercial threshold of 3,000 $MTCO_2e$/year. As shown in Table 6, the Project will emit a total of 1,239.27 tons per year which includes annual operational emissions and amortized construction emissions and is substantially below the established threshold of 3,000 tons per year. Therefore, the proposed Project would be consistent with local, regional and statewide goals and policies aimed at reducing the generation of GHGs. The proposed Project's GHG emissions would not constitute a cumulatively considerable contribution, or conflict with an applicable plan, policy, or regulation for the purposes of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gasses. Impacts would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required.

Sources: Palm Desert General Plan, 2016; CalEEMod Version 2022.1; City of Palm Desert Environmental Sustainability Plan, February 11, 2010; Palm Desert Greenhouse Gas Inventory, 2008; "California's 2022 Climate Change Scoping Plan," California Air Resources Board, December 2022; Project materials.

IX. HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?			✓	
b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?			✓	
c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?				✓
d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?				✓
e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?				✓
f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?				✓
g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires.			✓	

Setting

The proper management of hazardous materials is a common concern for all communities within the Coachella Valley. Beginning in the 1970s, governments at the federal, state, and local levels became increasingly concerned about the effects of hazardous materials on human health and the environment. Numerous laws and regulations were developed to investigate and mitigate these effects. As a result, the storage, use, generation, transport, and disposal of hazardous materials are highly regulated by federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Hazardous waste generators in the City of Palm Desert generally include "small quantity generators," such as medical clinics, gasoline service stations, vehicle storage yards, and waste haulers. The City is responsible for coordinating with the appropriate agencies in the identification of hazardous material sites and regulation of their timely cleanup.

The Project site is surrounded by the Living Desert attractions and administrative buildings. The site is currently developed with landscaping and hardscapes. No chemical or hazardous waste disposal has been documented on the site. There are no known underground tanks or buried materials on the site.

Discussion of Impacts

a, b) **Less than Significant Impact.** The construction phase of the Project would involve the use of heavy equipment and vehicles, which will use limited quantities of oil and fuels and other potentially flammable substances. During construction, equipment could require refueling and minor maintenance on site that could lead to fuel and oil spills. The contractor will be required to identify a staging area for storing materials and will be subject to standards and laws regarding the handling, storage, and use of hazardous materials during construction.

During long-term operation, the Project will involve the routine transport, use, and storage of cleaning materials for the event center and office use and various chemical products for landscaping and wildlife exhibit maintenance. None of these products will be used in sufficient quantities to pose a foreseeable threat to humans or cause a chemical release into the environment. The use and handling, storage, and disposal of hazardous materials would occur in accordance with applicable federal, state, and local laws, including California Occupational Health and Safety Administration (CalOSHA) requirements. Impacts would be less than significant.

c) **No Impact.** The nearest school is George Washington Charter School on Portola Avenue, approximately 1 mile north of the Project site. The Project site is not within ¼ mile of a school and will not use or emit hazardous materials. Therefore, the Project will have no impact associated with emitting or handling hazardous materials in proximity of a school.

d) **No Impact.** According to the California Department of Toxic Substances Control EnviroStor database and the State Water Resources Control Board GeoTracker database, the Project site is not included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5. Therefore, the proposed Project would not create a significant hazard to the public or the environment. No impact will occur.

e) **No Impact.** The subject property is not within the boundaries of an airport land use plan or within 2 miles of a public or private airstrip. The site is approximately 10.5 miles from the Palm Springs International Airport and 6.1 miles from the Bermuda Dunes Airport. Therefore, the Project will not result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people in the Project area. No impact will occur.

f) **No Impact.** The City's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan was adopted in 2012 and specifies actions for the coordination of operations, management, and resources during emergencies. Key evacuation routes include Monterey Avenue, Portola Avenue, Cook Street, and Washington Street

The Project will not physically interfere with emergency response or evacuation plans. It will take access from Portola Avenue, as the Living Desert does now. The Project will be required to comply

with police and fire department regulations to assure adequate emergency access and vehicle turn-around space. The inclusion of an exit at the southeast corner of the parking lot specifically for special event parking will assist the Zoo in managing emergency evacuation from the site, should it every be necessary. A construction access plan will be required by the City to assure the Project does not interfere with emergency access during construction. No impacts are expected.

g) **Less than Significant Impact.** The City's General Plan Fire Hazard Severity Zones Map designates portions of Palm Desert's southern region as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) based on fuel load, slope, fire weather, and other relevant factors.[4] The Living Desert is in proximity to a high hazard zone and is itself located in a Moderate to High Fire Hazard Zone.

The Project proposes the development of an event center, lion habitat, entry pavilion, and associated structures located at the center of the park. The City's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) assess potential natural hazards, including wildfire, and sets city-specific goals, objectives, and mitigation strategies to reduce the risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires. The construction and design of the Project will remain in compliance with the local and State Building Codes regarding fire safety which is comprised of fire prevention features. In addition, the Project will be inspected prior to operation in order to ensure all fire safety standards are met at a satisfactory level. For these reasons, impacts are expected to be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required.

Sources: City of Palm Desert General Plan, 2016; State Water Resources Control Board, GeoTracker, accessed March 2024; California Department of Toxic Substances Control "EnviroStor" Database, accessed March 2024; City of Palm Desert General Plan.

[4] City of Palm Desert, General Plan, Safety Element, 2016.

X. HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality?			✓	
b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?			✓	
c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would:				
(i) result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site;			✓	
(ii) substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or off-site;			✓	
(iii) create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or			✓	
(iv) impede or redirect flood flows?			✓	
(d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?			✓	
(e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?				✓

Setting

Domestic Water

The Project site is within the Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) service area for domestic water. The District's primary water source is groundwater extracted through a system of wells from the Coachella Valley Groundwater Basin. In addition to groundwater, CVWD relies on imported water that is recharged into the groundwater basin at three facilities: the Whitewater River Groundwater Recharge Facility (GRF), Thomas A. Levy GRF, and Palm Desert GRF. CVWD's domestic water system includes 97 groundwater production wells and 65 enclosed reservoirs. In 2020, it pumped 99,843 acre-feet per year (AFY) of

groundwater from the Indio and Mission Creek Subbasins. CVWD also owns and operates the water distribution system, which is generally located under existing streets in the public right-of-way. There are existing 12- and 30-inch water mains within Portola Avenue in the Project vicinity. The Project will construct 4-inch water lines throughout the site that will connect to the Living Desert's existing utility infrastructure that ultimately connects to Portola Avenue.

CVWD is responsible, under the California Water Code, for analyzing its current and future water supply, and assuring that sufficient supply is available to serve land uses within the District through the preparation of an Urban Water Management Plan (UWMP). CVWD is required to periodically update the UWMP. In 2020, CVWD collaborated with other water purveyors in the Coachella Valley to prepare a regional UWMP.[5]

Wastewater Treatment

CVWD provides sewer service to the City of Palm Desert, including the Project area. CVWD maintains sewer trunk lines ranging from 6 to 36 inches in diameter and 28 lift stations and associated force mains. Effluent from Palm Desert is conveyed to CVWD's Cook Street treatment plant (Water Reclamation Plant No. 10), which has a total capacity of 18 million gallons per day (mgd), including 15 mgd of tertiary treatment capacity. CVWD also implements the requirements of the Regional Water Quality Control Board pertaining to domestic water quality and wastewater discharge.

The Project site is in an urban area where sewer lines are installed under the main roads. The Project will construct 6-inch sewer lines throughout the site that will connect to the Living Desert's existing utility infrastructure that ultimately connects to the existing 15-inch sewer main on Portola Avenue.

Flood Control

Rainfall on the Coachella Valley floor averages 3 inches annually. Several watersheds drain the mountains toward the valley floor. There are five stormwater channels in Palm Desert: Whitewater River Stormwater Channel, Dead Indian Creek, Deep Canyon Channel, Palm Valley System, and East Magnesia Channel. The Project area is subject to City requirements relating to flood control. The City implements standard requirements for the retention of storm flows and participates in the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) to protect surface waters from pollution.

A Preliminary Hydrology Report was prepared by MSA Consulting (June 2023) for the Project and is provided in Appendix C.

Discussion of Impacts

a) **Less than Significant Impact.** The Project site is in the Whitewater River watershed. All water providers in the watershed are required to comply with Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) standards for the protection of water quality, including the preparation of project-specific Water Quality Management Plans (WQMP) for surface waters. CVWD is required to meet water quality requirements in its production and delivery of domestic water, and its discharge of waste water.

The Project will connect to the existing CVWD sewer system which will minimize impacts to regional groundwater quality. Installation of water lines on the Project site will comply with CVWD and RWQCB standards for water conveyance. The Project will be required to prepare a

[5] 2020 Coachella Valley Regional Urban Water Management Plan, Water Systems Consulting, Inc., June 30, 2021.

WQMP per the Colorado River Basin Regional Board. To minimize the pollutant load associated with urban runoff, it will also be required to comply with NPDES regulations, including preparation of a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP). Adherence to conditions of approval and local, state, and federal standard requirements will assure that the Project will not violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or conflict with any water quality control plan or sustainable ground water management plan. Project impacts will be less than significant.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** During construction, water demand will be limited and temporary and used for dust control purposes, including the routine spraying of ground surfaces and construction equipment. During operation, water will be used for administrative offices, the event center kitchen, lion care facility and drought-tolerant landscape irrigation.

The American Water Works Association Research Foundation (AWWARF) has developed demand factors for land use categories including office and restaurant uses. For analysis purposes, the event center kitchen (20,620 SF) water demand was calculated using the restaurant demand factor, and the rest of the event space, lion care facility, and entry pavilion (combined 26,353 SF) water demand was calculated using general office. As shown in the table below, the Project has the potential to generate an indoor water demand of 23.76 acre-feet per year.

Table 7
Indoor Water Demand at the Project Buildout

Proposed Land Use	Unit	Water Consumption Factor	Water Demand (gpd)	Total Water Demand At buildout (AFY)
Event Center Restaurant	20,620	331 gallons/SF/year	18,686.82	20.93
General Office	26,353	35 gallons/SF/year	2,525.32	2.83
			Total	**23.76**

The projected outdoor irrigation water usage is based on the Maximum Applied Water Allowance (MAWA) equation from Appendix D of CVWD's Landscape Ordinance No. 1302.5, which meets the water conservation goals of the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) Model Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELO). The projected outdoor irrigation water demand for the Project is 6.03 AFY as shown in Table 8, below.

Table 8
Outdoor Water Demand at the Project Buildout

Landscaped Area (ft^2)	ETo (in/yr) [1]	ETAF [2]	Conversion Factor (gal/ft^2) [3]	Water Demand (gpd)	Water Demand (AFY)
119,670	58.87	0.45	0.62	5,385.06	6.03

[1] Reference Evapotranspiration (ETo) for ETo Zone 2 from CVWD Landscape Ordinance 1302.5, Appendix C
[2] Evapotranspiration Adjustment Factor (ETAF) from CVWD Landscape Ordinance 1302.5, Appendix D
[3] Conversion Factor from CVWD Landscape Ordinance 1302.5, Appendix D

According to the 2020 Coachella Valley Regional UWMP[6], the projected 2025 regional water supply is 137,061 AFY, and the projected 2045 regional water supply is 164,966 AFY (UWMP Table 4-22). Approximately 90% of water supplies are expected to be groundwater and 10% are

[6] 2020 Coachella Valley Regional Urban Water Management Plan, Water Systems Consulting, Inc., June 30, 2021.

expected to be recycled water. Projections are based on existing water sources and expected future water supply projects or programs. The proposed Project's water demand (29.79 AFY) is 0.02% of projected 2025 regional water supplies and 0.018% of projected 2045 regional water supplies. Therefore, the Project will not substantially decrease local groundwater supplies or interfere with groundwater recharge such that it would impede sustainable management of the basin. The Project includes irrigation requirements, including the use of water-efficient fixtures and drought-tolerant landscape materials, which will help reduce water demand over the long term. Impacts will be less than significant.

c) i-iii) Less than Significant Impact. The Project site is generally flat and slopes to the north with an approximate elevation of 215 feet above sea level. The site is currently developed with landscaping and hardscapes. The native soil throughout the site consists primarily of fine- to coarse-grained gravelly sand (SW) and contains no rivers or streams. On-site soils are categorized as hydrologic soil group A in the National Cooperative Soil Survey and represent well drained to excessively drained sands or gravelly sands with high infiltration rates (low runoff potential) and high rates of water transmission.

On-site flows within the Project site typically flow south to north and generally occur as sheet flow. Mounding on the perimeter of the surrounding areas prevents offsite flows from entering the project area. The existing parking lot west of the Project site uses a combination of permeable pavers and storm drain catch basins to percolate storm flows into the ground or convey them to the existing 66-inch storm drain line running underneath the Project site.

Onsite stormwater runoff will be conveyed via sheet flow and swales to proposed inlets and subsequently to proposed retention basins. The retention basins are sized to retain the incremental increase in storm runoff volume from the 100-year storm event, with further runoff being allowed to continue onto existing or proposed drainage routes within the Living Desert. No new storm drain facilities will be connected directly to the existing 66" storm drain line which runs north under the existing parking lot.

The Project will also be required to comply with conditions of approval pertaining to discharge, standard stormwater management requirements, and project-specific BMPs and a WQMP that are subject to approval by the City Engineer and required by the City's NPDES implementation agreement. Implementation of the WQMP and BMPs will reduce impacts to surface waters by reducing siltation and reducing or eliminating pollutants in storm flows, including pathogens (bacteria/virus) generally associated with human activities but also present in the environment. With the implementation of these measures, impacts associated with surface water pollution will be less than significant.

Adherence to City requirements, including WQMP BMPs, will ensure the Project will not result in erosion or siltation on- or off-site. Implementation of these and other applicable requirements will assure that the Project will not create or contribute water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff.

iv) Less than Significant Impact. The Project will manage storm flows within the existing developed area of the Zoo, and does not propose to modify the topography, or associated storm flows in the area. The subject property is designated Zone X, which represents areas determined to be outside

the 0.2% annual chance floodplain on FEMA's Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM). The site is not located in a 100-year or 500-year FEMA Flood Zone. Implementation of the proposed onsite drainage and retention facilities will further ensure that the Project will have a less than significant impact on impeding or redirecting flood flows.

d) **Less than Significant Impact.** The Project site is inland and not subject to tsunami. It is not in the vicinity of a water body, levee, or dam. According to the General Plan, the City of Palm Desert is within the potential inundation area of the Wide Canyon Flood Control Dam in Fun Valley. However, the dam is managed by the Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District under state laws to ensure dam safety, and General Plan Policy 3.5 calls for disseminating information about potential dam inundation areas. No specific dam inundation risk has been identified for the subject property. The Living Desert is immediately north of two existing water tanks owned and operated by CVWD. The tanks are subject to strict regulation regarding reinforcement of these structures, and occur in a depressed area that is bermed on three sides. The water tanks are reinforced for seismic safety, and do not pose a significant risk of inundation within the Project area. The Project site is not within a 100-year or 500-year floodplain. Impacts associated with Project inundation would be less than significant.

e) **No Impact.** The Project will be required to comply with all applicable water quality standards and implement a WQMP approved by the city and the RWQCB for both construction activities and long-term operation. The Project is consistent with the land use designation assigned to the Project site, and its anticipated water demand is addressed in the 2020 Coachella Valley regional UWMP. Therefore, it will not conflict with a sustainable groundwater management plan. Adherence to the City's standard requirements related to water quality will ensure there will be no impacts to a water quality control plan.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required.

Sources: Preliminary Hydrology Report, The Living Desert Crossroads of Conservation Phase 3, MSA Consulting, Inc, June 23, 2023; 2020 Coachella Valley Regional Urban Water Management Plan, Water Systems Consulting, Inc., June 30, 2021; FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) #06065C2228G, revised May 2, 2013; City of Palm Desert General Plan, 2016; City of Palm Desert General Plan Update & University Neighborhood Specific Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report, 2016 (SCH 2015081020); Project materials.

XI. LAND USE AND PLANNING Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant w/ Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Physically divide an established community?				✓
b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?			✓	

Setting

Palm Desert is located on the central region of the Coachella Valley and covers 44,533± acres of developed and undeveloped lands. Under the City's General Plan, residential, mixed use, commercial, industrial, and public land uses are grouped into three place types including neighborhoods, centers, and districts. Each land use designation imposes use, intensity/density, form and character boundaries to ensure that all new development remains constant with the City's economic and land use strategy.

The Living Desert is designated Public (P) on the City's General Plan land use map. The intended use for public lands is to provide communal spaces consisting of civic centers, libraries, community centers, fire stations, public/private schools, and similar facilities. The Living Desert is a community focused wildlife attraction that hosts special events and shows, consistent with its mission of conserving and showcasing desert wildlife including plant and animal species.

Discussion of Impacts

a) **No Impact.** The proposed site is centrally located within the Living Desert and is developed with landscaping and hardscapes including pathways and a patio. The area surrounding the Project site is fully developed with Living Desert exhibits, administrative and retail buildings, and landscaping. No residential homes or communities are located onsite or within the Living Desert's boundary. The nearest residences (Corsican Villas) are located 350 feet west of the Project area, beyond Portola Avenue. All residential communities operate independently and will not be divided by the Project. The Project will not physically divide an established community. There will be no impact.

b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Project is an amendment to the previous entitlement for the Living Desert (PP/CUP 15-370), which included a smaller version of the proposed lion habitat and event center. In addition to the lion habitat and event center, the Project introduces a new entry pavilion on the north site of the existing Chase building. As part of the Zoo, the Project's operation is intended to service existing activities while also providing additional exhibits and services that remain consistent with the Living Desert's land use and planned expansion. The Project does not propose an increase to overall land use densities or development standards currently allowed in the Public (P) zoning designation.

Among the Project's goals are expanding the educational and recreational services within the Living Desert and ensuring high-quality development. It is also consistent with the following General Plan Land Use Element goals and policies:

Goal 2. Human-Scale Design. A city designed for people, fostering interactions, and safety.

2.3 Landscaping. Require development to incorporate high quality landscaping to extend and enhance the green space network of the City.

2.6 Lighting. Require all new street lights in commercial areas to be pedestrian-oriented and scaled, attractively designed, compatible in design with other street furniture, and to provide adequate visibility and security in accordance with best practices for night-sky protection.

Overall, the Project's land uses, development intensity and architecture is consistent with the originally approved PP/CUP for the property. The planned expansion is consistent with the vision and goals of the Living Desert and is consistent with the General Plan's Land Use Element goals and policies. The Project will not conflict with any land use designation, policy, or regulation previously approved in relation to the Living Desert. Impacts will be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required

Sources: City of Palm Desert General Plan.

XII. MINERAL RESOURCES Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?				✓
b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?				✓

Setting

Located at the center of the Coachella Valley, Palm Desert is geographically bound by the Little San Bernardino Mountains to the north and by the Santa Rosa Mountains to the south. Pursuant to the California Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975 (SMARA), the state Mining and Geology Board designates mineral resource sectors within geographic areas where significant mineral resources of statewide importance and regional significance are located. The City of Palm Desert is in the Palm Springs Production-Consumption Region that covers approximately 631 square miles of the Coachella Valley from near Cabazon to Thermal. The city is in Mineral Resource Zone 3 (MRZ-3), defined as "areas containing known or inferred mineral occurrences of undetermined mineral resource significance."

Discussion of Impacts

a, b) **No Impact.** The Project site is in Mineral Resource Zone 3 (MRZ-3). According to the General Plan EIR, no known mineral sources exist in the city, and the significance of any mineral resource in MRZ-3 is considered speculative because no mining has historically occurred in the area. The Project site is not designated, used, or planned for mineral resource extraction or development.

During the geologist's field investigation specific to the Project, native alluvium sediment was identified. The native soil encountered throughout the site consists primarily of fine-to-coarse - grained gravelly sand.[7] No significant mineral resources were observed during the field investigation. Therefore, the Project would have no impact on mineral resources.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required.

Sources: City of Palm Desert General Plan (2016); California Department of Conservation, Mineral Land Classification Map, https://maps.conservation.ca.gov/cgs/informationwarehouse/; Sladden Engineering, Geotechnical Investigation, (2023).

[7] Sladden Engineering, Geotechnical Investigation, January 2023.

XIII. NOISE Would the project result in:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Generation of substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?			✓	
b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?			✓	
c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?				✓

Setting

The predominant source of noise in Palm Desert is motor vehicle traffic. Other noise generators include light industrial operations, construction activities, commercial activities, and landscaping equipment. Noise-sensitive receptors include housing, schools, libraries, and senior care facilities. The City has established goals, policies, and programs to limit and reduce the effects of noise intrusion on sensitive land uses and to set acceptable noise level standards for various types of land uses.

City Noise Standards

General Plan Table 7.1 (Noise Compatibility Matrix) defines the level of acceptable noise for different land uses in the city. Normally acceptable noise levels for office buildings, business commercial, playgrounds and neighborhood park uses is 70 dBA CNEL. The allowable noise levels do not include construction-related noise levels, as construction activities generate temporary noise. Rather, construction noise is regulated by Municipal Code Section 9.24.070. General Plan standards are further supplemented by Municipal Code Section 9.24.030, Sound Level Limits, which regulate noise levels in different land use zones.

Discussion of Impacts

a) **Less than Significant Impact.** The subject property is centrally located within the Living Desert and contains landscaping and hardscapes such as pathways and an outdoor patio. Noise in the Project area is currently generated from visitors within the park, wildlife exhibits, landscaping equipment, and mechanical equipment from structures on and off the site (such as HVAC units). In addition to typical daytime use, the outdoor patio is utilized for large public and private events such as weddings, dinners, holiday events, and food tasting events. The parking lot is located approximately 150 feet west of the Project area and is separated from the site by the existing two-story Chase building. Therefore, vehicle traffic is not a major source of noise for the site. Outside of the Zoo, the nearest sensitive receptors are residents in multi-family homes approximately 350 feet west of the Project site.

Construction Noise

Project construction will temporarily increase ambient noise levels from the operation of heavy equipment and machinery. Removal of existing hardscapes and landscaping, grading, construction, paving, and other development activities will involve the operation of graders, bulldozers, dump trucks, and similar equipment. Heavy equipment can generate noise levels ranging from 70 to 90 dBA at 50 feet from the source. However, such equipment will be mobile and will not create a source of constant noise at any one location on the site. In addition, noise levels to sensitive receptors off-site will be attenuated by distance and the intervening structures within the Living Desert, including the Chase building and entry pavilion.

Noise from construction activities will be temporary and will cease once the Project is operational. Construction noise is exempt from the noise standards of Section 9.24.030 of the Municipal Code. Instead, it is subject to Municipal Code Section 9.24.070, which limits construction activities to the least sensitive hours of the day, Monday through Saturday, excluding holidays. Adherence to these restrictions will ensure that construction-related impacts are compatible with the Municipal Code and less than significant.

Operational Noise

During long-term operation, the Project will permanently increase ambient noise levels in the Living Desert. Noise will be generated by a marginal increase in visitors, events at the center, the lion habitat, vehicles accessing the parking lot for large evening events, and mechanical equipment (such as HVAC units).

The Project is a planned expansion of the Living Desert and noise levels are expected to be comparable to existing noise levels in the park. During regular daytime business hours, the new administrative offices and lion exhibit are expected to marginally increase park attendance and daily vehicle traffic by 122 trips. The proposed event center would increase the frequency of large weekend events (500 guests), however noise levels are anticipated to be comparable to existing large events hosted on-site, including both private parties and weddings. In addition, the Living Desert currently hosts seasonal large parkwide events that occur after regular business hours, such as Wild Lights and Glow in the Park, that attract more than 500 guests per event. Based on the operations plan submitted for the Project, events at the new event center would not occur concurrent with these large public events, so that noise levels would not cumulatively increase. Finally, the Project is located within the Zoo, and noise emanating from events will be attenuated by distance and the intervening structures, such as the Chase building, and the structures within the event space itself. Noise levels, therefore, are not expected to significantly increase, and are not expected to exceed the City's CNEL or Noise Ordinance standards.

The Project will be required to comply with the noise level limits of Municipal Code Section 9.24.030. Public Institutional noise levels are limited to 55 dBA between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m., and 65 dBA from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. The Project is not expected to permanently increase ambient noise levels such that they exceed the City's standard of 70 dBA CNEL for office buildings, business commercial, playgrounds and neighborhood parks. Therefore, Project operational noise will increase noise levels in the area, but they will not exceed General Plan standards. Impacts will be less than significant.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** Groundborne vibration and/or groundborne noise will be produced by heavy equipment during the construction phase of the Project. Construction activities, such as earth-moving and trenching, could generate temporary and short-term groundborne vibration and/or noise. The highest degree of groundborne vibration is likely to be generated during paving due to the operation of a vibratory roller. Based on Federal Transit Administration (FTA) data, vibration velocities from vibratory rollers are estimated to be approximately 0.1980 inch-per-second PPV at 26 feet from the source of activity. As such, sensitive receptors greater than 26 feet from vibratory roller operations would not experience groundborne vibration above the Caltrans significance thresholds (i.e. 0.3 inch-per-second PPV for structures and 0.2 inch-per-second PPV for human annoyance). The nearest sensitive receptors would be visitors of the park. Due to the transient nature of the visitors, and the intermittent use of construction equipment, sensitive receptors would not be significantly impacted by groundborne vibration and/or noise, and any such impacts would be temporary and would end once construction is complete. Residents on the west side of Portola are too far distant, based on the attenuation standards described above, to be significantly impacted by vibration within the Zoo. No such impacts will occur during long-term Project operation. Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

c) **No Impact.** The subject property is not within two miles of any airport, private or public. It is approximately 10.5 miles from the Palm Springs International Airport and 6.1 miles from the Bermuda Dunes Airport. No impact would occur.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required.

Sources: City of Palm Desert General Plan, 2016; Palm Desert Municipal Code.

XIV. POPULATION AND HOUSING Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?				✓
b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?				✓

Setting

The 2020 U.S. Census counted a total population size of 51,163 for Palm Desert. The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) projects it will grow to 64,100 by 2045. The housing stock includes 36,058 single-family, multi-family, and mobile home units, the majority of which (39.8%) are single-family detached homes.

Discussion of Impacts

a) **No Impact.** The Project proposes the development of a new event center, lion habitat, and entry pavilion within the existing boundaries of the Living Desert. The additional structures are part of a planned expansion of the Zoo's operations and are not intended to house temporary or permanent residents. The Project will not require the expansion of roads or infrastructure, and will rely on existing facilities and services. For this reason, the Project is not expected to increase the regional population size because employees and visitors will consist of the local population and out-of-town guests whose secondary destination is the Zoo. The local population is not expected to increase as a result of the proposed development and subsequent improvements. No impact will occur.

b) **No Impact.** Currently the Project site is developed and located inside the existing footprint of the Living Desert. No housing units are located within the proposed area. Therefore, the Project will not displace people or create the need for replacement housing. No impact is anticipated.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required.

Sources: 2020-2045 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS), Demographics and Growth Forecast Technical Report, Southern California Association of Governments, adopted September 3, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, Palm Desert City, https://data.census.gov/profile/Palm_Desert_City, (Accessed March 2024),

XV. PUBLIC SERVICES **Would the project result in:** Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services:	**Potentially Significant Impact**	**Less Than Significant with Mitigation**	**Less Than Significant Impact**	**No Impact**
Fire protection?			✓	
Police protection?			✓	
Schools?				✓
Parks?				✓
Other public facilities?			✓	

Setting

Fire Protection

The City contracts fire services from the Riverside County Fire Department (RCFD). The Palm Desert Fire Department (PDFD) operates three fire stations: Station 71, 33, and 67. Fire Station 55 is operated by Indian Wells but also maintains a medic unit as part of the Palm Desert's response system. Each fire station (apart from Station 55) provides emergency services including fire suppression, emergency medical services, fire prevention, and natural disaster preparedness services. The Fire Department is authorized 61 full-time positions, per the contract with Riverside County.[8]

Riverside County Fire Station 67 at 73200 Mesa View Drive, approximately 0.75 miles west of the Project site, serves south Palm Desert.

Police Protection

The Palm Desert Police Department (PDPD), under contract with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, provides policing services to a permanent population size of approximately 51,509. Currently, the Police contract consists of 80 sworn deputy sheriff's positions and several non-sworn support positions to assist with the daily operations and field services. The Police Station is located at 73705 Gerald Ford Drive, approximately 5.9 miles north of the Project site.

[8] Matrix Consulting Group, Fire Service Delivery Study, Palm Desert, 2021. https://cityofpalmdesert.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php

Schools
Palm Desert is within the jurisdictions of two school districts: Desert Sands Unified School District (DSUSD) and Palm Springs Unified School District (PSUSD). The Project site is within the boundary of the DSUSD. The nearest elementary school is Washington Charter Elementary School on Portola Avenue, approximately 1 mile north of the Project site.

Parks
The City currently operates and maintains 200 acres of park land in 12 parks. The nearest public park to the Project site is the Ironwood Park located 0.7 miles west of the Project site.

Other Public Facilities
Other public facilities in Palm Desert include the Palm Desert Library, Joslyn Center (senior services), City Hall, and other government facilities.

Discussion of Impacts

Fire Protection:

Less Than Significant Impact. The Project will marginally increase the demand for fire services for the protection of new permanent structures. However, Project development will be in accordance with all state and local (Municipal Code and RCFD) fire standards, including fire sprinklers, to assure adequate fire safety and emergency access. The Project will be required to pay City development impact fees to contribute its fair share of costs for future fire facilities, personnel, and apparatus. Therefore, Project impacts will be less than significant.

Police Protection:

Less Than Significant Impact. The Project is part of a planned expansion of uses within the Living Desert and is not anticipated to increase the demand for police protection services above existing levels. Nonetheless, the Project will be required to comply with all Police Department regulations and procedures, and Project plans will be reviewed by the Police Department to assure adequate emergency access is provided. The Project is not expected to require the construction of new or expanded police services or facilities. Impacts will be less than significant.

Schools:

No Impact. The Project site is within the Desert Sands Unified School District (DSUSD) boundary. The Project is part of a planned facilities expansion within the Living Desert and does not propose uses that would increase the City's population. The Project may be required to pay the standard DSUSD developer fees in place at the time development occurs, which are currently $0.78 per square foot of commercial development.[9] There will be no impact.

Parks/ Other Public Facilities:

No Impact. The Project is not expected to increase the City's population size that would degrade or impact the access to or physical conditions of local parks because potential new employees will primarily consist of the local population. The Project does not warrant the expansion or

[9] Fee Schedule, Palm Springs Unified School District website, www.psusd.us, accessed March 2024.

construction of parks to adequately service the public. No environmental impacts related to development of public parks will occur.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required.

Sources: City of Palm Desert General Plan, 2016; DSUSD Developer Fee Schedule; Project materials.

XVI. RECREATION Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?			✓	
b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?			✓	

Setting

The Palm Desert Parks and Recreational Department oversees the management and operation of more than 200 acres of park land, two community centers, an Aquatic Center, and over 25 miles of multi-purpose hiking trails.[10] These facilities are open and accessible to the public.

The nearest recreational facility is the City of Palm Desert Ironwood Park, located approximately 0.70 miles west of the Living Desert. Palm Desert City Hall, located at 73510 Fred Waring Drive, is ± 2 miles to the northwest. Palm Desert Community Center, located at 43900 San Pablo Avenue, is ± 2.30 mile to the northwest, and the Homestead Trailhead, located on the foothills of San Rosa Mountains along Thrust Road, is 1.50 miles west of the Zoo.

Discussion of Impacts

a, b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Project is not expected to increase the City's population size because potential new employees will primarily consist of the local population. No non-resident is expected to relocate to Palm Desert as a result of the Project construction or long-term operation. The Project in and of itself is an expansion of an existing public attraction that includes recreational facilities. Therefore, the Project will not contribute to the physical deterioration of these facilities, but instead provide improvements and diversify the recreational uses.

The local population will continue to have access to open space and community-oriented facilities without a direct impact from the Project. For this reason, the Project does not warrant the need for the expansion of existing or construction of new recreational facilities outside of the Living Desert to adequately accommodate the public. Impacts are less than significant.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required.

Sources: City of Palm Desert General Plan.

[10] City of Palm Desert, Parks and Recreation, https://www.palmdesert.gov/departments/parks-recreation, Accessed March 2024.

XVII. TRANSPORTATION Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Conflict with a program plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?			✓	
b) Would the project conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?				✓
c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?				✓
d) Result in inadequate emergency access?				✓

Setting

Existing Conditions

The Project site is centrally located within the Living Desert which currently generates traffic from visitors and employees of the Zoo. The Palm Desert General Plan Mobility Element establishes a roadway classification system based on vehicle capacity, number of lanes, and other improvements such as bike lanes, sidewalks, and parkways. Portola Avenue is classified as a Secondary Street adjacent to the Living Desert (General Plan Figure 4.1), consisting of a 4-lane divided roadway with a median and bicycle and pedestrian facilities, but is striped for one lane in each direction at this location. Secondary Streets are designed to accommodate 30,000 vehicles at Level of Service (LOS) C. The General Plan (Figure 4.2) designates Portola Avenue as a Class 2 (on-street striped lane) bicycle and golf cart facility adjacent to the Living Desert.

SunLine Transit Agency provides bus transit services to the Coachella Valley, including Palm Desert. Currently, there are no transit routes or facilities in the immediate Project vicinity. The nearest bus stop is on Portola and Highway 111, approximately 1.4 miles north of the Project site, which can be accessed via existing sidewalks and bike lanes.

Level of Service Threshold

The General Plan does not set forth a LOS threshold for acceptable roadway and intersection operations. Policy 1.3 of the Mobility Element states that the City will "determine appropriate service levels for all modes of transportation and develop guidelines to evaluate impacts to these modes for all related public and private projects." The city has not yet developed new guidelines for an acceptable LOS. The city has adopted the County of Riverside Transportation Analysis Guidelines for Level of Service & Vehicle Miles Traveled (County of Riverside Department of Transportation, December 2020) for transportation analysis.

VMT Analysis

Effective July 1, 2020, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines require lead agencies to adopt Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) as a replacement for automobile delay-based LOS as the measure for identifying transportation impacts for land use projects. The city has adopted the County of Riverside Transportation Analysis Guidelines for Level of Service & Vehicle Miles Traveled (County of Riverside Department of Transportation, December 2020) for Level of Service & Vehicle Miles Traveled."

A Trip and Parking Generation Analysis was prepared for the Project in 2023, and can be found in Appendix D.

Discussion of Impacts

a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The Project is a planned expansion of the Living Desert that includes a 41,240 SF event center and administration building, a 1,282 SF entry pavilion, and lion habitat exhibit with a 4,451 SF lion care facility and associated shade and viewing structures. The Project does not require modifications to the park's access points or additional parking. The Living Desert is currently accessed from one main drive on Portola Avenue. A secondary exit point south of the main entrance, also on Portola Avenue, will be utilized during special events and will be a right-turn exit only. The proposed expansion requires the removal of 1 ADA parking space for the new entry pavilion, resulting in 19 ADA parking spaces for a parking total of 936 spaces.

Table 9 shows the projected trips associated with daily operations of the new administration and lion habitat uses, and trips associated with a large event (500 people). As shown in the table, the Project is forecast to generate approximately 122 additional daily vehicle trips during regular business hours at buildout, including 17 trips during the AM peak hour and 16 trips during the PM peak hour. A large event would generate approximately 375 additional trips per event, including 170 trips for "event inbound" peak hour and 68 trips for "event outbound" peak hour.

Table 9
Project Trip Generation Summary

Trip Generation Rates – Daily[1]									
Land Use	ITE Code	Unit	AM Peak Hour			PM Peak Hour			Daily
			In	Out	Total	In	Out	Total	
Office	710	TSF[2]	1.34	0.18	1.52	0.26	1.18	1.44	10.84
Project Trips Generated									
Land Use	Quantity	Unit	AM Peak Hour			PM Peak Hour			Daily
			In	Out	Total	In	Out	Total	
Office	11,300[3]	TSF	15	2	17	3	13	16	**122**
Trip Generation Rates – Large Special Event (500 Guests)									
Land Use	ITE Code	Unit	Event Inbound Peak Hour			Event Outbound Peak Hour			Daily (Event)
			In	Out	Total	In	Out	Total	
Event Venue	Project-Specific	Guest	0.34	0	0.34	0	0.14	0.14	0.75
Event Trips Generated									
Land Use	Quantity	Unit	Event Inbound Peak Hour			Event Outbound Peak Hour			Daily (Event)
			In	Out	Total	In	Out	Total	
Event Venue	500	Guest	170	0	170	0	68	68	**375**
								Total Daily Plus Large Event	**497**

[1] Source: Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) Trip Generation Manual, 11th edition, 2021.
[2] TSF = thousand square feet
[3] 11,300 SF includes the 2nd floor office space in the event center, entry pavilion and lion habitat.

The two major intersections nearest to the Living Desert are along Portola Avenue at El Paseo and Highway 111, approximately 1.2 and 1.3 miles north of the site, respectively. According to the 2016 General Plan Update EIR[11], both intersections would be operating at an acceptable Level of Service (C) at buildout (2040), which includes operation of the Living Desert. The event space will generate sporadic traffic which will not add to the regular daily peak hour congestion on City streets, because the events will occur during off-peak times, including evenings and weekends.

The Project is part of the planned expansion of the Living Desert that was considered in the 2016 General Plan EIR, and as demonstrated in Table 9 would not significantly increase the number of daily trips in the area. The Project does not propose changes to the existing circulation system. Therefore, the Project would not have a significant impact on the City's circulation system.

A preliminary parking analysis was prepared for the Project demonstrating the Living Desert has adequate parking supply to accommodate planned events, as shown in Table 10. This is assuming no events during special events such as Wild Lights and Glow in the Park, and no events during the Park's peak, which occurs at 11:00 AM, on the 10-15 busiest days of the year. Since parking demand, even on busy days, begins to drop-off after 12:00 PM, minor and medium events (up to 250 guests) could be allowed at/after 1:00 PM, without negatively impacting parking capacity, as shown in the Table.

[11] Table 4.15-23 *Buildout (2040) Intersection Level of Service: Palm Desert*. Palm Desert General Plan Update and University Neighborhood Park Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report. Michael Baker International. August 2016.

Table 10
Project Parking Analysis

Scenario	Parking Demand				Parking
	Zoo/ Gardens	Project Admin/ Lion Care	Project Event	Total	Supply
Typical Day at Zoo Plus Project, 11AM No Event	642	10	0	652	936
Typical Day at Zoo Plus Project, 11 AM Max Event	642	10	275	927	936
Typical Day at Zoo Plus Project, 4:30 PM Max Event	186	10	275	471	936
Busy Day at Zoo Plus Project, 11AM No Event	895	10	0	905	936
Busy Day at Zoo Plus Project, 1 PM Medium Event	691	10	138	839	936
Busy Day at Zoo Plus Project, 4:30 PM Wedding	400	10	275	685	936

Alternative Transportation

The Project is wholly located within the boundaries of the Living Desert. Existing on-street shared bike and golf cart lanes are located on both sides Portola Avenue in proximity to the Living Desert. The Project does not propose modifications to the City's bicycle routes along Portola Avenue.

Transit service in the City is provided by SunLine Transit Agency. The Project site is not currently served by a SunLine route. The nearest bus stop to the Project site is located along Highway 111, approximately 1.3 miles north of the Project site. SunLine periodically reviews and updates its services and facilities based on ridership, budget, and community demand. General Plan Mobility Element Goal 5 and Policies 5.1 through 5.6 promote and encourage public and private transit service and connections to bicycle and pedestrian networks. The Project would have no impact on plans or policies addressing transit facilities.

b) **No Impact.** CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3 sets forth guidelines for implementing Senate Bill 743 (SB 743). SB 743 requires amendments to the CEQA Guidelines (pre-2019) to provide an alternative to LOS for evaluating transportation impacts. Particularly within areas served by transit, those alternative criteria must "promote the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the development of multimodal transportation networks, and a diversity of land uses." (Public Resources Code Section 21099(b)(1).) Measurements of transportation impacts may include "vehicle miles traveled, vehicle miles traveled per capita, automobile trip generation rates, or automobile trips generated."

The CEQA Guidelines have since been updated to allow for lead agency discretion in establishing methodologies and thresholds consistent with the intent of the legislation. The City utilizes the December 2020 County of Riverside Transportation Guidelines for VMT assessments. Per County guidelines, a project would have a less than significant VMT impact if:

- Small projects (less than 110 daily trips);
- Projects near high quality transit;
- Local serving retail;
- Affordable housing;
- Local essential service (day care, police or fire facility, medical/dental office, government office);
- Residential and office projects in an area under VMT thresholds as shown on screening maps (Low VMT Area); and
- Redevelopment projects.

The County Guidelines indicate that "small projects" that generate fewer than 110 daily vehicle trips are presumed to have a less than significant impact absent substantial evidence to the contrary. In addition, "small projects" are anticipated to generate low traffic volumes and as a result assumed to generate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions less than 3,000 MTCO2e per year. While the Project would generate 122 daily trips, which is 12 trips more than the "small project" threshold of 110 trips, the Project would generate less than 3,000 MTCO2e annually. According to Table 6 of this Initial Study, under Section VIII Greenhouse Gas Emissions, the Project is projected to emit 1,239.27 MTCO2e per year which includes annual operational emissions and amortized construction emissions and is substantially below the threshold of 3,000 tons per year. Therefore, the Project is consistent with the intent of the "small projects" definition and will not conflict with or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b).

c) **No Impact.** The Project does not propose changes to the Living Desert's access or circulation except for the removal of 1 ADA parking space for improvements at the proposed north entryway pavilion. No sharp curves, dangerous intersections, or hazardous geometric features are proposed. The Project vehicle mix will be consistent with the existing mix in the Project area. Construction plans will be coordinated with the city so that construction activity does not interfere with traffic on adjacent and nearby roads.

d) **No Impact.** The Project does not propose changes to emergency access. Prior to construction, the Fire and Police Departments will review the site plan to ensure safety measures are addressed, including emergency access and vehicle turnaround space. Construction plans will be coordinated with the city and emergency providers, as needed, to assure that emergency access is maintained throughout all stages of development. No impact will occur.

Mitigation Measures: None.

Monitoring: None.

Sources: City of Palm Desert General Plan, 2016; City of Palm Desert General Plan Update & University Neighborhood Specific Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report, August 2016 (SCH 2015081020); "The Living Desert Phase 3 Project – Preliminary Trip and Parking Generation Analysis," prepared by Walker Consultants. October 25, 2023.

XVIII. TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES a) Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
i) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code section 5020.1(k), or		✓		
ii) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.		✓		

Setting

The Cahuilla people lived in the Coachella Valley for thousands of years. They were Takic-speaking and lived in various groups in the region. Today, Native Americans of Pass or Desert Cahuilla heritage are mostly affiliated with one or more of the Indian reservations in and near the Coachella Valley, including the Cabazon, Augustine, Torres Martinez, Twenty-nine Palms, Agua Caliente, and Morongo. Numerous cultural resources are found throughout the valley which provide important information about the past.

Discussion of Impacts

a. i, ii) Less Than Significant Impact. Assembly Bill 52 (AB 52) requires a lead agency to consult with tribes in the Project area during the CEQA process to allow tribes to be involved in the project development process and to address their concerns about potential impacts to tribal cultural resources. The consultation process requires Palm Desert to provide written notification about a proposed project, as defined by CEQA, to tribes within the project's geographic area. If a tribe chooses to engage in consultation, it must respond to the lead agency within 30 days of receipt of the formal notification, and the lead agency must begin the consultation process within 30 days of receiving the request for consultation. Consultation concludes when the parties agree to measures

to mitigate or avoid a significant effect (if a significant effect exists) on the tribal cultural resources, or when a party, acting in good faith and after reasonable effort, concludes that mutual agreement cannot be reached (Public Resources Code section 21080.3.2 (b)(1) and (2)).

The city initiated the tribal consultation process in conformance with AB 52 requirements. It distributed consultation letters to the tribes who have requested consultation under AB 52. The City received a letter from the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians (ACBCI), requesting consultation. The Tribe also requested copies of cultural resource reports and records, and the presence of a Tribal Monitor during earth moving activities. The City held a telephone consultation meeting with the Tribe, which reiterated that because there was no previous record of cultural surveys on the Project site, a Tribal Monitor would be required to assure that no buried resources are uncovered during grading and excavation. This request is reflected in Mitigation Measure TCR-1 below.

Mitigation Measures:

TCR-1 Prior to the issuance of any ground disturbing permit on the site, the applicant shall provide the City with a fully executed Monitoring Agreement with ACBCI, providing for a Tribal Monitor's presence during earth moving activities. The Tribal Monitor shall have the authority to temporarily stop construction if buried resource(s) are found, but shall quickly determine the significance of the find, whether a qualified archaeologist must be brought to the site to investigate the find, and how it must be treated. Any resources recovered shall be professionally documented and deposited and curated in a professional depository. The Tribal Monitor shall be responsible for providing the City a report of findings.

Monitoring:

TCR-A The applicant shall provide the City with a Monitoring Agreement with ACBCI.
Responsible Party: Applicant, City Planning Department
Timing: Prior to any ground disturbance.

TCR-B The Tribal Monitor and/or archaeologist shall provide the City with a report of findings.
Responsible Party: Tribal Monitor, City Planning Department
Timing: Within 30 days of completion of monitoring activities.

Sources: Consultation letters and responses.

XIX. UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?			✓	
b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?			✓	
c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?			✓	
d) Generate solid waste in excess of State or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?			✓	
e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?			✓	

Setting

Domestic Water

The Project site is within the Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) service area for domestic water. Its primary water source is groundwater extracted through a system of wells from the Whitewater River subbasin. In addition to groundwater, CVWD relies on imported water brought to the region by canals. CVWD's domestic water system includes 97 wells with a total daily pumping capacity of 244 million gallons. CVWD has a total of 64 reservoirs, with an average storage capacity of 153.2 million gallons. CVWD also owns and operates the water distribution system, which is generally located under existing streets in the public right-of-way. There are existing 12- and 30-inch water mains within Portola Avenue in the Project vicinity. The Project will construct 4-inch water lines throughout the site that will connect to the Living Desert's existing utility infrastructure that ultimately connects to Portola Avenue.

CVWD is responsible, under the California Water Code, for analyzing its current and future water supply and assuring that sufficient supply is available to serve land uses within the District, through the preparation of an Urban Water Management Plan (UWMP). CVWD is required to periodically update the Plan.

Wastewater Treatment

The Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) also provides sewer service to the City of Palm Desert, including the Project area. The Project site is in an urban area where the main sewer lines were laid out under the main roads and streets. The Project will construct 6-inch sewer lines throughout the site that will connect to the Living Desert's existing utility infrastructure that ultimately connects to the existing 15-inch sewer main on Portola Avenue.

CVWD maintains sewer trunk lines ranging in size from 4- to 24-inches and five sewer lift stations in City boundaries. Effluent from the City is conveyed to CVWD's Cook Street treatment plant (Water Reclamation Plant No. 10), which has a total capacity of 18 million gallons per day (mgd), including 15 mgd tertiary treatment capacity. CVWD also implements the requirements of the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) pertaining to domestic water quality and wastewater discharge.

Stormwater Management

Several watersheds drain the elevated terrain of the San Jacinto, Santa Rosa, San Bernardino, and Little San Bernardino Mountains towards the valley floor. There are five stormwater channels in Palm Desert: the Whitewater River Stormwater Channel and its tributaries, including Dead Indian Creek, the Deep Canyon Channel, the Palm Valley System, and the East Magnesia Channel. For the proposed Project, management of stormwater is under the jurisdiction of the cities of Palm Desert and Indian Wells.

Electric Power and Natural Gas

Southern California Edison (SCE) provides electrical services to the City of Palm Desert. Natural gas is provided by the Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas). There are underground lines to the west of the Project site.

Solid Waste

Burrtec Waste and Recycling Services, LLC (Burrtec) provides solid waste disposal to the city through a franchise agreement. Non-hazardous household, commercial, and most nonhazardous industrial solid waste collected is taken to the Edom Hill Transfer Station (EHTS) in Cathedral City, which is permitted to receive 3,500 tons of waste per day. From there, solid waste is transported to the Lamb Canyon regional landfill, which is operated by the County of Riverside and had a remaining capacity of 19,242,950 cubic yards as of 2015 (latest available data).

Discussion of Impacts

a-c) Less than Significant Impact.

Water

The subject property is within the jurisdiction of the Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) for domestic water services. The Project proposes 4-inch water mains to connect to existing 4- and 12-inch water mains are already in place and operational in under the Living Desert, with ultimate connection to 12- and 30-inch mains beneath Portola Avenue. No new water infrastructure other than on-site extensions will be required which could result in significant environmental effects.

The 2020 Coachella Valley Regional Urban Water Management Plan (UWMP) demonstrates that CVWD has available, and can supply in the future, sufficient water to serve additional development in its service area. The UWMP calls for a combination of continued groundwater extraction, conservation programs, additional water sources and source substitution, and groundwater recharge opportunities. CVWD anticipates having sufficient water supplies to serve existing and future in the near-term (2025) and long-term (2045). For 2025, projected water supply is 137,061 AFY and retail water demand is 123,461 AFY, resulting in an anticipated surplus of 13,600 AFY. For 2045, projected water supply is 164,966 AFY and retail water demand is 148,166 AFY, resulting in an anticipated surplus of 16,800 AFY (UWMP Tables 4-8 and 4-22). Future demand projections are based on development intensities provided in the General Plans of regional jurisdictions, including the Palm Desert General Plan and University Neighborhood Specific Plan (UNSP). The Project is part of the planned expansion of the Living Desert and proposes an event center, lion habitat exhibit and entry pavilion.

As discussed in Section X (Hydrology and Water Quality) of this Initial Study, the Project's projected annual water demand at buildout is approximately 29.79 acre-feet, which is 0.02% of 2025 projected water supply and 0.018% of 2045 projected water supply. Therefore, CVWD has available, or can supply, sufficient water to serve reasonably foreseeable development, including the proposed Project. Additionally, CVWD has determined that it will be able to meet future urban water demands projected in the regional UWMP in normal, single dry, and multiple dry years (UWMP Tables 4-25, 4-26, 4-27). Project water consumption will be reduced with low-flow appliances, water-efficient irrigation practices, and drought-tolerant landscape materials. Impacts to water supplies will be less than significant.

Wastewater

The subject property is within the jurisdiction of CVWD for wastewater collection and treatment services. Existing sewer infrastructure is already in place and operational in the Project area. The Project will connect to existing 6-inch sewer lines beneath Living Desert and will install new 6-inch sewer lines onsite. Sewage will be conveyed to and treated at Water Reclamation Plant-10 (WRP-10) on Cook Street in Palm Desert. WRP-10 treats wastewater from four cities (Palm Desert, Indian Wells, Rancho Mirage, and portions of Cathedral City) and serves a population of approximately 90,000 people. It has a secondary treatment capacity of 18 million gallons per day (mgd) and currently treats an average daily flow of approximately 9 mgd.[12] WRP-10 also has a tertiary treatment capacity of 15 mgd and supplies tertiary treated water for golf course and landscape irrigation. Therefore, the plant has sufficient capacity to serve additional development, including the proposed Project. Project wastewater discharges will be typical of the Living Desert uses and will not exceed wastewater treatment requirements of the CVWD or Regional Water Quality Control Board. Other than onsite extensions, no new sewer infrastructure will be required which could result in significant environmental effects. Impacts to wastewater services will be less than significant.

[12] 2020 Coachella Valley Regional Urban Water Management Plan, Water Systems Consulting, Inc., June 30, 2021, Table 4-16.

Stormwater Drainage

There is an existing 66" storm drain line which runs north under the existing Living Desert parking lot. The Project site is currently developed with landscaping and impervious surfaces. The proposed Project would result in a comparable mix of impervious surfaces and stormwater flows. Mounding on the perimeter of the Living Desert prevents off-site flows from entering the Zoo and Project area. On-site flows within the Project site typically flow south to north and generally occur as sheet flow. Stormwater runoff will be conveyed via sheet flow and swales to proposed inlets and subsequently to proposed retention basins. The retention basins will be sized to retain the incremental increase in storm runoff volume, with further runoff being allowed to continue onto existing or proposed drainage routes. The Project does not require the construction or expansion of stormwater management facilities that could result in significant environmental impacts. Impacts will be less than significant.

Electricity

The Project will provide local connections to the existing SCE infrastructure in the Project area. SCE has existing facilities underground within Portola Avenue. The Project will not require the addition or expansion of electric power facilities.

Natural Gas

The Project will provide local connections to the existing SoCalGas infrastructure within Portola Avenue. Other than onsite connections, the Project will not require the addition or expansion of natural gas facilities. Impacts will be less than significant.

Telecommunications

The Project will require local connections to the existing Frontier Communications and Spectrum infrastructure in the Project area. Existing underground communications cables are available within Portola Avenue. Other than on-site connections, the Project will not require the addition or expansion of telecommunication facilities. Impacts will be less than significant.

d, e) Less than Significant Impact. Burrtec provides solid waste services to the City of Palm Desert. Solid waste is recycled, reused, or transformed at a waste-to-energy facility[13], or disposed of at County landfills. The Lamb Canyon regional landfill has a remaining capacity of 19,242,950 cubic yards as of 2015 (latest data available).[14]

As shown in the following table, the Project would develop 46,973 square feet of public/institutional space and generate an estimated 30 tons of solid waste per year. This equals 240 cubic yards per year[15], which is approximately 0.0012% of the Lamb Canyon landfill's remaining capacity. Therefore, the Project will not exceed the available capacity of the landfill and Project impacts will be less than significant.

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13 Riverside County Nondisposal Facility Element by Riverside County Department of Waste Resources (2015, amended 2023), https://rcwaste.org/sites/g/files/aldnop376/files/2023-11/2023%20Update%20Non%20Disposal%20Facility%20Element%20NDFE.PDF.

14 CalRecycle SWIS Facility/Site Activity Details. https://www2.calrecycle.ca.gov/SolidWaste/SiteActivity/Details/2246?siteID=2368 , accessed March 2024.

15 Assumes 1 cubic yard of residential uncompacted municipal solid waste equals 250 lbs. "Volume-to-Weight Conversion Factors," US EPA Office of Resource Conversion and Recovery, April 2016.

Table 11
Estimated Solid Waste Disposal at Buildout

Proposed Land Use	Disposal Rate*	Proposed Units (SF)	Solid Waste Disposal (lbs/day)	Projected Solid Waste Disposal (tons/year)
Public/Institutional	0.007 pounds/square feet/day	46,973	328.81	60
			Total (with 50% diversion):	**30**
*Estimated Solid Waste Generation Rates by CalRecycle, https://www2.calrecycle.ca.gov/WasteCharacterization/General/Rates , accessed March 2024.				

Recyclable materials (e.g., paper, plastic, glass, cardboard, aluminum) will be transported to Burrtec's material recovery facilities for recycling and reuse. Burrtec is responsible for maintaining standards that assure that all waste is handled in a manner that meets local, state, and federal standards. These requirements will assure that impacts associated with solid waste disposal remain less than significant.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required.

Sources: Sanitary Sewer Management Plan, CVWD, December 1, 2019; 2020 Coachella Valley Regional Urban Water Management Plan, Water Systems Consulting, Inc., June 30, 2021; Solid Waste Information System, www2.calrecyle.ca.gov, CalRecycle, accessed March 2024; Project materials.

XX. WILDFIRE – If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?				✓
b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to, pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?			✓	
c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?				✓
d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?			✓	

Setting

Wildfires can occur in undeveloped areas and spread to urban areas. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) has mapped areas of significant fire hazards in the state through its Fire and Resources Assessment Program (FRAP). These maps identify fire hazard severity zones (FHSZ) based on a hazard scoring system using subjective criteria for fuels, fire history, terrain influences, housing density, and occurrence of severe weather where urban conflagration could occur.

The City's General Plan Fire Hazard Severity Zones map (Figure 8.5) identifies the site as being in a moderate to high fire hazard zone due to its proximity to the the Santa Rosa Mountains. The Project site is not located in or near a state responsibility area (SRA) or very high fire hazard severity zone (VHFHSZ). According to current (2024) mapping, the nearest VHFHSZ and SRA are 1.5 miles to the south in the Santa Rosa Mountains.

In response to the potential for wildfire and related impacts, the Riverside County MJHMP declares wildfire as a level 4 natural hazard, meaning it can occur at least once a year.[16] To reduce potential impacts, the County's MJHMP grants the Riverside County Fire Department and Cal Fire the authority to oversee and manage the implementation of the following county-wide mitigation actions:

- Removal of vegetation and brush in heavily populated area prone to fire;
- Enact fuel reduction projects throughout the county to reduce fire potential;

[16] County of Riverside Emergency Management Department, Multi-Jurisdictional Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2018.

- Create wildfire protection zones that reduce the risks to citizens and firefighters from fire dangers;
- Strengthen defensible space inspections in fire prone areas;
- Develop and enforce construction and design standards that ensure the development incorporates fire prevention features;
- Conduct and implement long range fire safety planning through code adoption/policies

In addition, the City's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) assess potential natural hazards, including wildfire, and sets city-specific goals, objectives, and mitigation strategy. Some mitigation strategies to combat wildfire are:

- Establish and maintain a database containing maps and other information that identifies and describes the community hazards;
- Maintain and regularly update the City's LHMP as an integrated component of the General Plan, in coordination with Riverside County and other participating jurisdictions to maintain eligibility for maximum grant funding;
- Maintain optimal fire readiness and response service in coordination with Riverside County and other agencies.

Furthermore, the local Building and Ordinance Code establishes standards and regulations which all new developments must comply with in order to receive land use permit approval. In all, the County of Riverside and City of Palm Desert regulatory framework addresses and aims to reduce the potential impact of wildfire to the development environment.

Discussion of Impacts

a) **No Impact.** The Living Desert has a primary entrance used on a daily basis by the general public and a secondary exit point reserved for special events. Both points are located on Portola Avenue. Under the City's Emergency Preparation Plan, Portola Avenue is designated an evacuation route that connects to Highway-111.[17]

During the construction phase, no obstructions or major delays are planned to occur on Portola Avenue which would prevent the access or use of the roadway as an evacuation route. All construction activities will be limited within the Living Desert's boundary. While in operation the Project will not prevent the access to any evacuation route or limit the effectiveness of the Living Desert's or the City's emergency evacuation plan. No impacts are expected.

b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The City's General Plan Fire Hazard Severity Zones Map designates portions of the Palm Desert's southern region as a VHFHSZ based on fuel load, slope, fire weather, and other relevant factors.[18] The Living Desert, located in City's southern portion is in proximity to a high hazard zone and is itself located in a Moderate to High Fire Hazard Zone.

The Project proposes the development of an event center, lion habitat, entry pavilion, and associated structures located at the center of the park, immediately northeast of the main entrance. The construction and design of the Project will remain in compliance with the local and State Building Codes regarding fire safety which includes fire prevention features. The implementation

[17] City of Palm Desert, General Plan, Safety Element, 2016.
[18] City of Palm Desert, General Plan, Safety Element, 2016.

and adoption of these standards will minimize occupants' exposure to pollutant concentration from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire. In addition, the Project will be inspected prior to operation in order to ensure all fire safety standards are met at a satisfactory level. For these reasons, the Project's impacts are expected to be less than significant.

c) **No Impact.** The Project is planned to occur on a developed parcel within the existing footprint of the Living Desert. As a fully operational zoo, the Living Desert has the adequate infrastructure required to service the Project. The construction of infrastructure including roads, fuel breaks, emergency water source, power lines, or other utility is not required, except for onsite connections. Therefore, no environmental impacts related with the development of these utilities will occur. No impacts are expected.

d) **Less Than Significant Impact.** According to the City's General Plan FEMA Flood Zone, 100-year and 500-year flood zones are located to the southeastern corner of the City's boundary. The Living Desert is not on or adjacent to a 100-year or a 500-year flood zone. The risk of a flood hazard impacts on the Living Desert and the Project are low to very low because based on its geographical location, flooding is not a hazard of concern. Impacts are anticipated to be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures: None required.

Monitoring: None required**.**

Sources: City of Palm Desert General Plan, 2016; Project materials; Google Earth; Fire Hazard Severity Map, CalFire, https://egis.fire.ca.gov/FHSZ/, accessed March 2024.

XXI. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?		✓		
b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? ("Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects)?			✓	
c) Does the project have environmental effects, which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?		✓		

a) Less than Significant with Mitigation.

Biological Resources: The Project is not expected to substantially degrade environmental quality or reduce the habitat, population, or range of a fish or wildlife species. However, bird species covered under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) could potentially occur onsite. Implementation of mitigation measure BIO.1 will mitigate impacts to those species. With mitigation, impacts will be less than significant.

Cultural Resources: No cultural resources are known to exist within or adjacent to the fully developed Project site, and no impact is expected. The ACBCI, however, requested the presence of a Tribal Monitor during earth moving activities, to assure that any buried resource would be addressed. Mitigation Measure TCR-1 will reduce impacts to Tribal Cultural Resources to less than significant levels.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** Project impacts will not be cumulatively considerable because the Project is part of a planned expansion within the Living Desert and is consistent with the Zoo's existing uses. The Project would not induce population growth, as employees are expected to be existing employees of the Living Desert or from the local population. Being that it is a facilities expansion project and not a new use, the Project's incremental effects are not considerable when viewed in connection with other projects. Impacts will be less than significant.

c) **Less than Significant with Mitigation.** The Project could cause environmental effects that could cause adverse effects on humans, specifically as it relates to geotechnical impacts. However, the mitigation measures provided in this Initial Study and supporting documentation cited herein will reduce potential impacts to less than significant levels.

Appendix A
CalEEMOD Air Quality and GHG Modeling

(Available on City website)

Appendix B
Geotechnical Investigation

(Available on City website)

Appendix C
Preliminary Hydrology Report

(Available on City website)

Appendix D
Trip and Parking Generation Analysis

(Available on City website)