EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT

DESERT HOT SPRINGS

CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING

COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

LEARN BY DOING

CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING

This document chronicles the intial reseach conducted by Cal Poly students as a part of their Community and Regional Planning Studio course. This information was found through online research, several meetings with city planning officials, and a class site visit in November 2022.

The uncovered information was then divided into the three sections that are the main focuses of the class: land use, transportation, and urban design.

All of the information detailed in this document, as well as information discovered through public outreach will form a basis for the class's knowledge about the existing conditions present in Desert Hot Springs, CA.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LAND USE

Figure 1. View of Little San Bernadino Mountains

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the existing land use and zoning conditions in downtown Desert Hot Springs, provides local and regional policy context regarding planning and development in the City of Desert Hot Springs, and identifies a downtown project area boundary. This chapter also explores important issues relevant to the downtown area such as key economic sectors, adjacent specific plan areas, and housing. This chapter is an initial step to understanding current land use and development patterns within the downtown Desert Hot Springs area which will inform land use recommendations in our final visioning plan for downtown Desert Hot Springs.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

- The downtown project area consists of various land uses from the General Plan including: General Commercial, Visitor-Serving Use, Residential Low and Medium, and Mixed-Use. Land uses along the major corridors of Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard are entirely commercial, while surrounding streets

LAND USE

are primarily designated as mixed-use but are dominated by low-density residential uses.

- There are 9 different zoning designations within the project area. The zoning designations that occupy the most land within the project boundary are Visitor-Serving Mixed Use (VS-M), Downtown Commercial (C-D), and Mixed-Use Neighborhood (MU-N).
- Currently, the downtown project area mostly consists of places of worship, City buildings, liquor stores, cannabis dispensaries, retail shops, restaurants, automotive repair shops, and single-family housing. Additionally, there is a significant number of undeveloped vacant parcels and vacant storefronts within the project area, especially along Pierson Boulevard and Palm Drive.
- Cannabis establishments and visitor-serving spa facilities are economic drivers for the City of Desert Hot Springs as a whole and several cannabis dispensaries and spas are located either within the downtown project area or nearby.
- Housing & Relevant Plans: The Housing Element and regional plans do not have information that is specific to the downtown area. Rather, they provide context on what is being suggested and done citywide and therefore can be used to find key opportunities for the downtown plan.

SITE CONTEXT

Desert Hot Springs is located in the northwestern Coachella Valley in Riverside County, California. It lies beneath the San Bernardino Mountains between Sand to Snow National Monument to the northwest and borders Joshua Tree National Park to the east with a population of approximately 32,000 residents (Figure 1). Desert Hot Springs has a desert climate with sweltering, dry summers frequently exceeding 107 °F and cool, mild winters. The city distinguishes itself from surrounding municipalities in that it is historically known for its spa and wellness industry stemming from natural hot springs beneath the city, hence its namesake. Additionally, Desert Hot Springs is home to a booming cannabis industry, which has spurred significant economic growth within the city and further distinguishes Desert Hot Springs from neighboring cities.

Project Boundary

The City of Desert Hot Springs does not have a specific downtown boundary, and one was created to focus planning efforts on the redevelopment for downtown visioning (Figure 2). The downtown area project boundary represents an area that the City has already established, has higher density through zoning and this area overlaps heavily with the City's Arts and Culture District. This new project boundary area

LAND USE

Figure 2. Map of downtown DHS project boundary

represents a downtown area that can serve the anticipated 90,000 people the City is aiming to have live there in the near future - a significant step up from the 32,000 that currently reside there.

Downtown Desert Hot Springs is centered on the intersection of Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard. The downtown planning area boundary follows this basic t-shape. To the north it is bounded by 8th St, to the east by Mesquite Ave., to the south by Hacienda Ave., and to the west by West Drive. The selected project boundary area was identified as it included existing commercial and higher density areas of the existing Arts and Culture District. It explicitly includes parcels that are vacant or aging, and it explicitly is centered around two basic throughfares, one going north-south, and two going east-west. This boundary cuts through blocks, but sticks to existing zoning separation for a significant portion of it.

CURRENT LAND USE

The total project planning area is approximately 173.54 acres and consists of multiple blocks of mixed-use, commercial, public/institutional and residential land uses along Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard. There are a high percentage of undeveloped or underdeveloped parcels in this area with no buildings or organized landscape installation. While the project area contains a mix of uses, it is dominated by residential land uses, primarily in the form of low density, single-family housing. The majority of non-residential land uses are concentrated along the main streets, Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard. Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard are a mix of commercial, public/institutional land uses, and vacant lots, with establishments ranging from City buildings, restaurants, cannabis dispensaries, churches, spas, retail stores, automotive repair shops, and more.

LAND USE

In addition to the variety of establishments along Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard, there are also a substantial number of vacant lots, which present opportunities for future commercial development.

The mixed-use streets surrounding Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard are dominated by low density residential housing with non-residential land uses located on street corners. The mixed-use land designation in the areas surrounding Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard has allowed additional businesses to expand beyond the commercial zone and into residential areas. The non-residential establishments in these mixed-use areas are mainly automotive repair shops, liquor stores, churches, and restaurants. Similar to the parcels in the commercial zone, there are several vacant lots scattered across the rest of the planning area, which again presents opportunity for future development.

Opportunity Sites and Vacant Lots

In their 2020 General Plan, the City of Desert Hot Springs designated "Opportunity Zones" in the center of the city, which includes the downtown project area (Figure 3). These zones are generally located along Pierson Boulevard, North Indian Canyon, Little Morongo, Palm Drive, Two Bunch Palms Trail, and Hacienda Avenue. Opportunity zones are areas intended to spark economic development and revenue by creating tax benefits for investors as an incentive. Designated opportunity zones are also granted special tax status by the State.

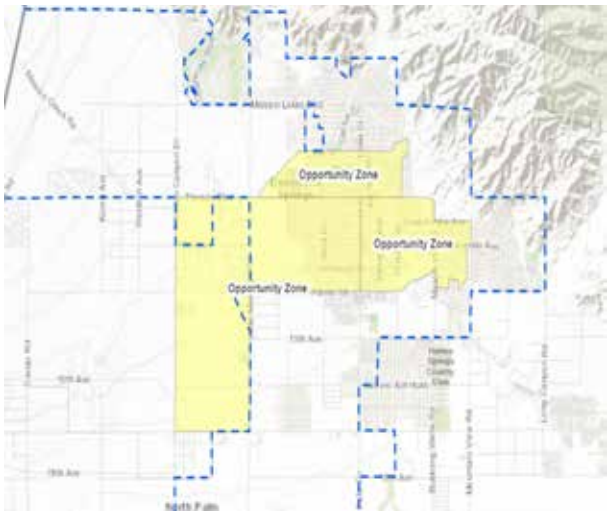


Figure 3. The designated opportunity zones denoted in the yellow map areas are centrally located within the city.

Key Industries - Spas and Cannabis

Known as "California's Spa City," Desert Hot Springs is home to naturally occurring mineral springs. Desert Hot Springs' unique geographic location atop the Desert Hot Springs Aquifer and the Mission Creek Aquifer gives it access to both natural hot and cold mineral spring water. This was the primary basis for the founding of the city in the early 1900s, and now serves as a vital part of the city's tourism economy. There are 19 mineral springs resorts and spas in Desert Hot Springs' city boundaries. Within the downtown project boundary,

LAND USE

there is only one spa located at the center at the Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard intersection. There are 7 resort and spa facilities within a half mile of the project boundary. All spa facilities are within Visitor-Serving and Commercial land use areas throughout the city. These are the only zones in which spa facilities are allowed by right .

Cannabis is another one of Desert Hot Springs' core economic industries. In 2014, the City became the first in Southern California to legalize large-scale cultivation of medical cannabis. Desert Hot Springs has since expanded the cannabis industry and promoted "cannatourism" through permitting of cannabis cultivation facilities, cannabis dispensaries, cannabis entertainment facilities and cannabis hotels.

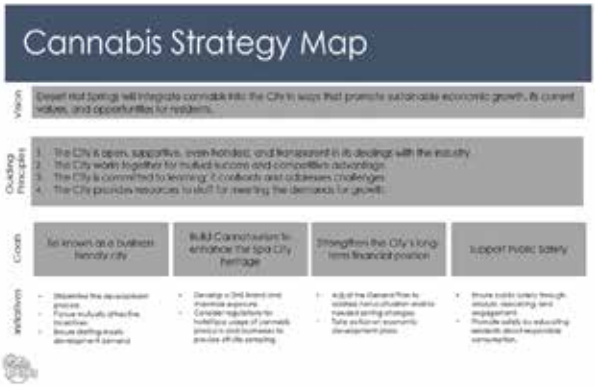


Figure 4. The Cannabis Strategy Map outlines the City's vision, goals, and initiatives for the local cannabis industry.

The growth of the cannabis industry is guided by the city's Cannabis Strategic Plan, which the City Council approved in 2019. Promoting cannatourism to bolster the local economy is one of Desert Hot Springs' main goals of the plan (Figure 4). This aims to attract visitors with the dual appeal of relaxation and recreation through spa resorts and various types of cannabis businesses.

Cannabis businesses take up over 400,000 square feet within city boundaries as of 2022. The City has created a cannabis cultivation zone in the southern part of the city using the light industrial zoning district. Other cannabis facilities for retail or recreation are permitted in commercial, industrial, or mixed-use zoning districts, excluding the downtown-commercial district.

GENERAL PLAN

The City of Desert Hot Springs adopted its current General Plan on May 26, 2020 after a 2-year process which started with outreach. The predominantly residential land use reflects the community's role as a "bedroom" community, providing housing for the Coachella Valley. Much of the land within the western portion of the City and its sphere of influence is generally undeveloped.

LAND USE

The primary goals of the land use element include:

1. Complete neighborhoods that provide access to resources and the ability to walk and bike.
2. Infrastructure services including roads and utilities that service the communities funded by impact fees.
3. Sustainability by promoting site and building design elements in new developments; development design and amenities that support transit, walking, and bicycling; and mixed-use developments that encourage commercial services near residential uses.
4. Land Use and the Conservation Plan, both will work well with each other as land use determines how conservation areas are to be provided and how development will occur within and around conservation areas.
5. Land Use and Equity, the distribution of land uses must be physically balanced to provide long-term fiscal and economic viability, protect established residential neighborhoods, ensure equitable distribution of public resources, conserve natural resources, provide adequate infrastructure and public services, enhance recreation and open space opportunities, and assure environmental justice and a healthful living environment.

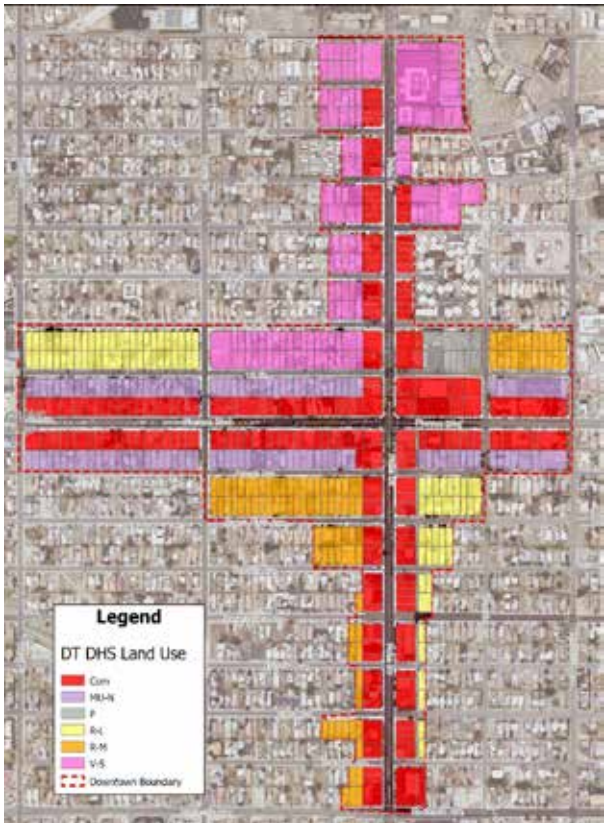


Figure 5. This map shows the general plan land uses in the downtown project area.

This Land Use Plan guides the development, maintenance, and improvement of land and properties in Desert Hot Springs. The Plan will preserve the qualities and characteristics that define the City.

Land Use Framework

The Land Use Framework provides a general overview of the foundational parts that will guide the Land Use Plan. Below are those relevant to downtown:

LAND USE

- Downtown/Arts and Culture District- Downtown is the City's central business district and serves as the key area for local businesses, government functions, and public gatherings. Downtown parallels the Arts and Culture District, where art galleries, studios, and events are concentrated, forming a vibrant core.
- Mixed-Use and Commercial Corridors- Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard are the two key corridors that connect Downtown and the freeways. These roadways allow for commercial businesses and mixed-use districts to create interesting, functional, and useful corridors.

LAND USES IN DOWNTOWN

The primary land uses in the project area are: Commercial (C) along Pierson Blvd. and the upper portion of Palm Dr., Mixed-Use Neighborhood (MU-N) along 1st St. and Acoma Avenue, Mixed-Use Corridor (MU-C) along the lower portion of Palm Dr., and a mix of Visitor Serving (V-S), Residential Low (R-L), Residential Medium (R-M), and Residential High (R-H) in the other areas (Figure 5).

Commercial

The Commercial (C) designation accommodates commercial services, retail, professional and creative offices, restaurants, entertainment, hospitality, and similar uses that support local and regional needs. Businesses should have limited impact on adjacent residential areas, particularly in terms of lighting, signage, traffic, odor, noise, and hours of operation. Commercial development should be designed and intended to accommodate and encourage pedestrian access and connectivity and must be compatible with surrounding development in terms of scale, building design, materials, color, and overall enhanced architecture.

Mixed-Use Neighborhood

Mixed-use refers to an integration of residential and commercial uses as part of a cohesive development plan, with the residential component either in the same building as the commercial (vertical mixed use) or on an adjacent lot with a clear relationship to the commercial use (horizontal mixed use). Mixed-use projects must include a viable neighborhood-serving retail and service component. The Mixed-Use designation is intended to allow for a mix of compatible residential and commercial uses within a single development, with either horizontal or vertical integration. Stand-alone residential uses are also allowed consist with zoning regulations. The design of these developments is integral in establishing their function as places where people can live, work, shop, recreate, and simply enjoy life in a compact district. The design of mixed-use development should encourage

LAND USE

socialization and pedestrian activity, combining the typically opposing types of land uses into a complementary relationship.

Public/Institutional

The Public/Quasi-Public designation applies to public and quasi-public uses such as public schools, colleges, libraries, fire and police stations, community facilities, utility and infrastructure facilities, major drainage facilities, and government service facilities. In addition to the City's facilities, multiple agencies with primarily public-serving administrative and operational uses have facilities in Desert Hot Springs. The building intensity is highly variable and tied to each individual use.

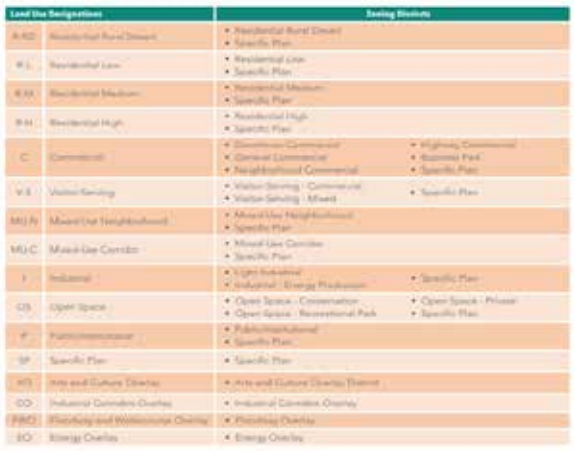


Figure 6. The Arts and Culture Overlay has its own designation and zoning district in the land use plan.

The Residential Low (R-L) designation allows for residential development at densities up to 6.0 dwelling units per acre. This designation is intended to accommodate single-unit residential product types on individual lots. Mobile home park developments may be appropriate within this designation. Clustering of units is encouraged for the preservation of natural open space and the development of active or passive recreation areas and amenities. Proposed developments should be designed to respect adjacent existing or planned land uses and to create aesthetically pleasing architecture that address scale and massing appropriately without obstructing scenic views.

Residential Medium

The Residential Medium (R-M) designation allows for detached and attached residential development approaches of up to 20.0 dwelling units per acre. Attached product types at this level of density, but detached product design is also possible as small-lot subdivisions. Attached developments are restricted to a maximum height of four stories. High quality of design is emphasized for long-term preservation of neighborhood quality.

Visitor-Serving

The Visitor-Serving (V-S) designation applies to areas that overlie the natural hot water aquifer that runs beneath Desert Hot

LAND USE

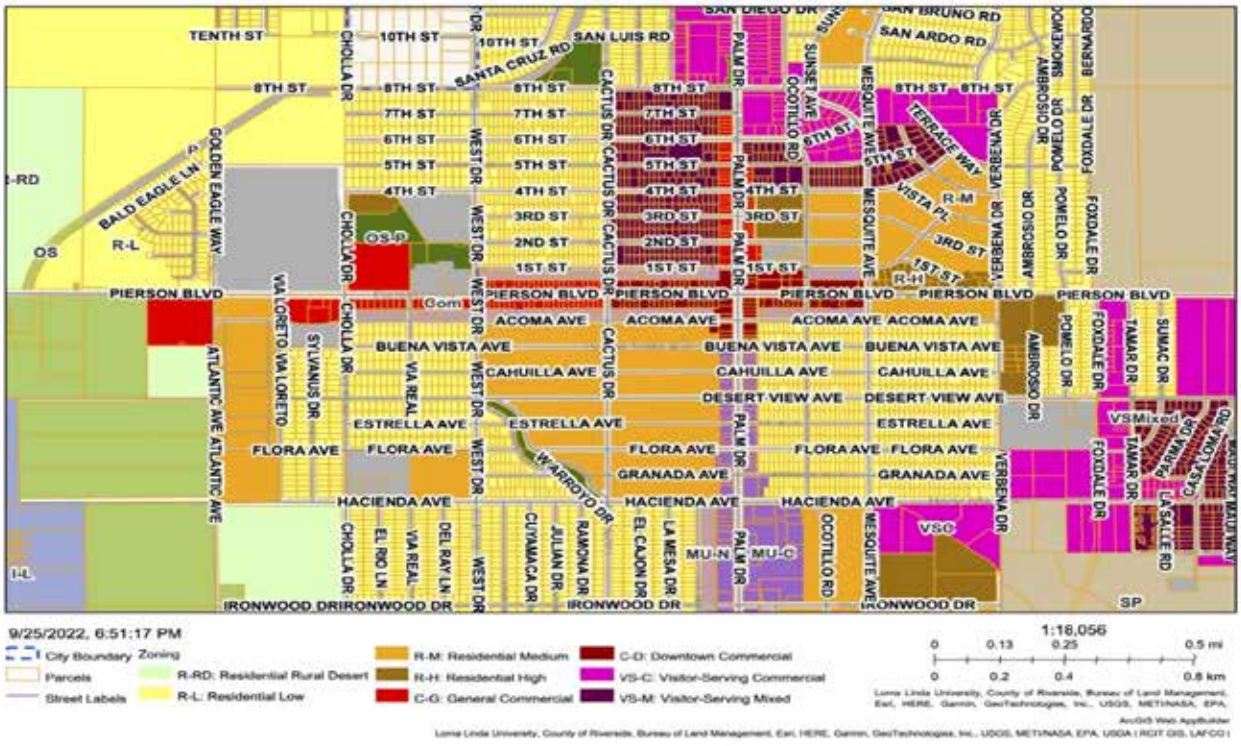


Figure 7. This Map shows the City's Zoning Districts in the project area

Springs. The area should be predominantly developed with spa/resort type uses and residential uses. Spa/Resort uses include hotels, motels, spas, resorts, bathhouses, and similar tourist and hospitality uses. Developments should be focused on tourist oriented uses that respect the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

LAND USE OVERLAY IN DOWNTOWN

Special considerations are necessary to address unique characteristics in certain areas of the City, identified on the Land Use Plan as Overlays (Figure 6). Those special considerations apply in addition to the underlying land use designations. Specific policies have been developed to address the special issues for each overlay district.

LAND USE

Arts and Culture Overlay

The Arts and Culture Overlay is established to promote a district where local art and culture uses thrive. Allowed land uses include art galleries and artist's studios; indoor and outdoor exhibit spaces; arts and craft retail sales; museums; outdoor gathering areas; and complementary commercial services, retail, live entertainment venues, and restaurants. Artists' live/work units are also allowed, combing artist workspace and living quarters. The Arts and Culture Overlay complements and supports commercial businesses in central Desert Hot Springs.

MUNICIPAL ZONING CODE

There are 20 zoning districts described in the Zoning Map of the City of Desert Hot Springs (Figure 7). Nine of those districts are currently in use in the downtown area of the city. The relevant downtown zoning districts are as described below.

R-M (Residential Medium Density) District (8-ac)

This district is established to provide the city with a residential area for its residents to live in. This is intended for medium density developments that serve areas between high density and lower density uses.

MU-N (Mixed-Use Neighborhood)

This district is intended to provide the city with a neighborhood feel area that serves both residential uses combined with commercial uses in the same developments. Commercial uses are calmer, quieter, and more neighborhood-oriented, and the residential uses will be for those who are more oriented to city life.

C-G (Commercial General) District

This district provides the city with specific zoning for general commercial activity. This will be for a wide range of uses, including retail sales, business, dining, personal and professional services, entertainment and lodging.

C-D (Downtown Commerical)

This district provides the city with an area specifically designed around downtown commercial uses. The uses in this area include commercial, entertainment, and office uses. This primarily lies along corridors of the downtown area.

MU-C (Mixed-Use Corridor)

This district is intended to provide the city with mixed uses with more commercial forms and functions. Separate from the MU-N zoning, these uses will be higher intensity and more oriented around commercial retail, professional office, residential, and civic uses. This is intended to be active along corridors.

LAND USE

R-L (Residential Low) District (5-ac)

This district is intended to provide the city with a residential area for its residents to live in. These low density developments serve areas adjacent to medium density and away from downtown commercial uses.

VS-C (Visitor Serving Commercial)

This district is intended to provide the city with commercial uses specifically oriented for those visiting the city. This area is oriented like any other commercial area; however, it prioritizes commercial uses that serve those visiting the city.

VS-M (Visitor Serving Mixed)

This district is intended to provide the city with mixed uses specifically oriented for those visiting the city. This area is oriented like any other mixed-use area, however, it prioritizes accommodations, goods, and services for those who visit the city.

P (Public Use)

This district is intended to provide the city with civic uses that allow the city to function. These uses include institutional uses, including fire stations, schools, post offices, administrative, and public utility facilities.

LAND USE

The table below shows land coverage for the downtown area. This total includes the right-of-way and the space it occupies. The table lists the zoning districts, their area in acres, the percentage of the total downtown area it occupies, and the percentage of the total downtown parcels area that it occupies.

The use that occupies the most space is right of way, with more than a quarter of all uses. This is followed by Residential Medium, Mixed-Use Neighborhood, Downtown Com mercial, and Visitor Serving Mixed, which occupy over 10 percent.

	AREA IN ACRES	*PERCENT OF TOTAL AREA*	*PERCENT OF TOTAL (NON-ROW)*
R-M (Residential Medium Density)	*17.53*	*10.1%*	*13.8%*
MU-N (Mixed-Use Neighborhood)	*18.65*	*10.7%*	*14.7%*
C-G (Commercial General)	*15.76*	*9.1%*	*12.4%*
C-D (Downtown Commercial)	*19.29*	*11.1%*	*15.2%*
MU-C (Mixed-Use Corridor)	*10.76*	*6.2%*	*8.5%*
R-L (Residential Low)	*14.64*	*8.4%*	*11.5%*
VS-C (Visitor Serving Commercial)	*6.12*	*3.5%*	*4.8%*
VS-M (Visitor Serving Mixed)	*21.94*	*12.6%*	*17.3%*
P (Public Use)	*2.51*	*1.4%*	*2.0%*
RoW (Right of Way)	*46.62*	*26.8%*	
Total without RoW	*127.17*	-	*100.0%*
Total with RoW	*173.79*	*100.0%*	-

Table 1. This Table shows how much of the downtown area is occupied by each zoning type.

LAND USE

Land Use Designations		Zoning Districts	
R-L	Residential Low	• Residential Low • Specific Plan	
R-M	Residential Medium	• Residential Medium • Specific Plan	
C	Commercial	• Downtown Commercial • General Commercial • Neighborhood Commercial	• Highway Commercial • Business Park • Specific Plan
V-S	Visitor-Serving	• Visitor-Serving - Commercial • Visitor-Serving - Mixed	• Specific Plan
MU-N	Mixed-Use Neighborhood	• Mixed-Use Neighborhood • Specific Plan	
MU-C	Mixed-Use Corridor	• Mixed-Use Corridor • Specific Plan	
P	Public/Institutional	• Public/Institutional • Specific Plan	

Table 2. This table shows how the City's zoning districts generally correspond with the City's General Plan land use designations.

The table above shows how zoning, as designated in the general plan, correlates to the zoning districts that the city has in its municipal code. The table shows the land use acronym, the title for the land use designation, and the zoning districts that are included within the land use designation. Only the land use designations active in the downtown area are included on this table.

HOUSING ELEMENT - RHNA REQUIREMENTS

The Draft Housing Element (July, 2022) outlines the actions needed to accommodate the RHNA requirements. The city's share of the regional housing needs is 3,873 housing units. This Housing Element outlines the number of housing units required by income category and the percentage out of total housing units. The element also includes the determined housing unit capacity in Desert Hot Springs for lower income housing, moderate income housing, and above moderate-income housing, as described in Table 3. The zoned sites that can be used to accommodate these requirements are also listed.

The City Council conducted public outreach and consultations events when drafting the new Housing Element. Three community workshops provided relevant comments from the public on housing related issues. Some of the top comments included wanting more opportunities for mixed-use development (and allowing mixed-use along major thoroughfares), expanded affordable housing opportunities for all

LAND USE

INCOME CATEGORIES	*PERCENTAGE OF AREA MEDIAN INCOME*	*HOUSING UNITS REQUIRED*	*PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL HOUSING UNITS*	*DHS HOUSING UNIT CAPACITY*	*ZONED SITES*
Extremely Low Income	*0-30%*	*284*	*7.3%*	*1,517*	*R-H & MU-C*
Very Low Income	*30-50%*	*285*	*7.3%*		
Low Income	*50-80%*	*535*	*13.8%*		
Moderate Income	*80-120%*	*688*	*17.8%*	*1,473*	
Above Moderate Income	*120% or more*	*2,081*	*53.8%*	*Between 2,035 and 2,340*	

Table 3. RHNA housing needs for the city of Desert Hot Springs.

economic segments, allowing for higher densities in some residential neighborhoods, repurpose abandoned hotels as housing, and considering the use of the tiny house concept.

EXISTING HOUSING STOCK AND PROJECTED HOUSING NEEDS

The entire existing housing stock is comprised of almost 12,000 housing units. Of these, 63.5% are detached, single-family units, 27.4% are more than two units, and 7.5% are mobile homes. Desert Hot Springs has a 17.7% vacancy rate, compared to the average 9% statewide vacancy rate. At least 320 housing units built before 1980 need rehabilitation, and 6.3% of the housing stock surveyed are "severely" or "moderately" inadequate, due to issues with plumbing, electricity, or upkeep.

The 2020 population is 29,660, with 29,542 living in households and 118 living in group quarters. It is estimated that 10,500 people

could be added to the population if RHNA housing allocation is met by 2029. SCAG's Connect SoCal Demographics and Growth Forecast predicts that 8,700 jobs will be located in Desert Hot Springs by 2045.

Goals, Policies, and Programs

The Housing Element outlines five important goals that would contribute to the success of their housing developments. The goals are as follows: (1) to provide adequate sites for housing development, (2) to meet the housing unit needs of extremely low- and very low-income, (3) to address and remove any potential governmental and nongovernmental constraints to housing production and affordability, (4) to conserve and improve the condition of existing housing stock, and (5) to continue to promote equal housing opportunities in the City's housing market. Several policies and specific programs are listed to support each goal. The Housing Element is city-wide and does not specifically call out the downtown area, however, there are certain policies that may influence our decisions to include housing into the downtown area.

Policies under the first goal are intended to describe certain needs such as the need for a range of residential densities, the need to accommodate specific populations, the need for development that is mixed-use, and the need to facilitate development of lower income housing in moderate resource neighborhoods in the initial years of the 8-year planning period. The second set of policies highlight the facilitation of affordable housing, using subsidies and programs to assist financial feasibility, ADU incentives, senior housing, and strategies to combat homelessness. Five programs that can assist with funding those projects are outlined. Figure 8 provides a more comprehensive analysis of the assessment of special housing needs in Desert Hot Springs, including the number of cost-burdened residents and overcrowded households. The information shows a strong disparity between renters and owners, showing an

Table II-2
City of Desert Hot Springs - Assessment of Housing Need Summary

	# of Renter Households	# of Owner Households
Cost Burden	3,125	1,355
Severe Cost Burden	1,980	625
Overcrowded Households (1.01+ persons per room)	864	203
Overcrowded Households (1.51+ persons per room)	241	99
At-Risk Housing	No existing affordable housing is at risk of conversion to market rate housing in the next 10 year (2031)	
Special Housing Needs		
Elderly	Almost 3,000 elderly households (62+) live in Desert Hot Springs	
	45% of elderly householders 65+ live alone	
	28% of elderly householders 65+ are married couples	
	60% of elderly householders have lower income and a high number and percentage probably experience cost burdens and severe cost burdens	
Frail Elderly	Approximately 450 elderly persons 65+ are estimated to be frail	
	Almost 500 elderly persons 65+ have a propensity to fall multiple times during a year	
Persons with Disabilities	3,720 persons are estimated to be disabled (13% of the total population)	
	2,760 households have one or more disabled member	
	21% of the households with a disabled member live alone	
Persons with Developmental Disabilities	376 persons are served by the Inland Regional Center	
	296 live in a home environment	
	70 live in a care facility	
Large Families	Approximately 400 owner large families live in the City	
	Approximately 700 renter large families live in the City	
Farmworkers	37 persons are employed in the farming, fishing and forestry occupations	
Female Householders	Approximately 5,300 female householders live in the City	
Homeless	The homeless population is estimated to be 68 persons	

Source: Appendix A Assessment of Housing Needs

Figure 8. Assessment of Housing Need Summary retrieved from 2022 Housing Element Draft

opportunity to provide more relief towards renters with the available programs and funds.

The third set of policies focus on residential development standards, the developmental approval process, a timely permit process, and infrastructure needs. Five programs are then listed that could help with achieving this goal. Notably, there is a call for a Zoning Ordinance Update partially funded through the Local Early Action Planning Grant. This update is meant to address the governmental constraints found by City Council to accelerate housing production. The fourth set of policies include code enforcement, property education, and rehabilitation programs. Three programs attempt to support this endeavor, including a housing code enforcement program, averaging about 250 cases per year, as well as a homeowner housing rehabilitation program which provides assistance for one home a year, and an abandoned residential property registration. Lastly, the fifth set of policies outline housing discrimination policies, fair housing laws, and further fair housing policies are outlined as important steps to ensure this goal's success. Nine programs are specified, all of which are at least partly funded by the General Fund. Notably, there is a Bilingual Assistance on Development and Housing Process, which would provide translation services to at least 100 residents annually throughout the planning period.

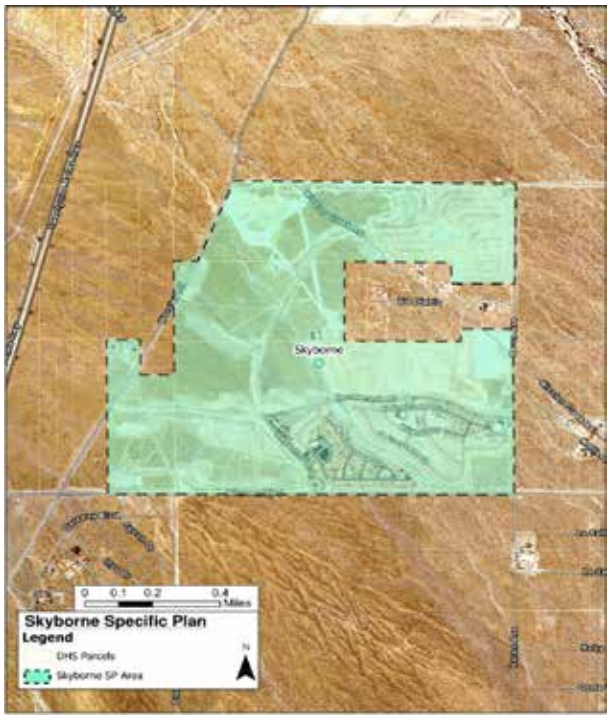


Figure 9. Skyborn Special Plan Area, located off Worsley Road and Pierson Boulevard.

SPECIFIC PLANS

Skyborne Specific Plan

Skyborne is a proposed housing neighborhood with 1,786 total housing units. It's proposed to be a single-family neighborhood and optional active adult residential villages. Standard single family residential lots of varying sizes range from 5,500 to 19,000 square feet. Active adult (ages over 55) neighborhoods include smaller lots ranging in size from 3,400 to 4,500 square feet. It would be located on the far west side of town, 5 kilometers from the center of town (Figure 9).

LAND USE

Figure 10. Tuscan Hills Specific Plan area, located off Foxdale Drive and Pierson Boulevard.

Tuscan Hills Specific Plan

Tuscan Hills is a proposed housing neighborhood of 564 single family residential lots. The housing production will be at market rate, and it is expected that this type of housing will meet the moderate and above moderate housing need. The project will include retail and hospitality uses and lies one kilometer away from the center of town.

SCAG Regional Plan

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) published the Final 2008 Regional Comprehensive Plan. The plan outlines nine challenges and their specific impacts to the Southern California region: land use and housing, open space and habitat, water, energy, air quality, solid waste, transportation, security and emergency preparedness, and economy. There are a few key items outlined in some sections that are relevant to our downtown area. Under Land Use and Housing, SCAG recommends focusing growth in existing and emerging centers and along major transportation corridors while creating significant areas of mixed-use development and walkable, "people-scaled" communities.

In the context of Desert Hot Springs, our team has defined that the designated downtown area may be an optimal area for additional growth in housing, employment, and commercial development along Palm Drive and Pierson Blvd. These land use changes are supported in the SCAG document. Additionally, consistent with public outreach from the Housing Element showed, SCAG recommends increasing the region's first-time home buyer affordability. In the Open Space element, the objective of creating new open spaces that are interconnected, accessible, and provide environmental benefits is relevant because of the vacant lots potentially available for new open spaces. Water and Energy sections are not applicable because Desert Hot Springs already has access to high quality water through their two aquifers, as well as

LAND USE

access to renewable energy sources due to surrounding wind and solar farms. Under the Air Quality element, although Desert Hot Springs suffers from poor air quality, it may be due to a larger regional issue that cannot be addressed at the local level. Under the Solid Waste element, it is noted that all SCAG region jurisdictions should meet a 40% waste disposal rate by 2035. Under the Transportation element, Desert Hot Springs's contribution to reduce the region's vehicle miles traveled from all vehicles and from carbon-based fueled vehicles to 1990 levels by 2020 is not reported.

Riverside County General Plan Land Use Element

Riverside County established a General Plan in 2015. The Plan includes a Land Use section, with the purpose of guiding the pattern of development within the county. There are twenty outlined issues and policies that affect the county, including themes such as land use and design, community and economic development, and environmental impacts. In the scope of the downtown project area , the main takeaways are to develop a balanced and mixed-use design, to promote and market the development of stable employment and businesses, arrange

Figure 11. Map of the Vortex Specific Plan's proposed project boundaries.

LAND USE

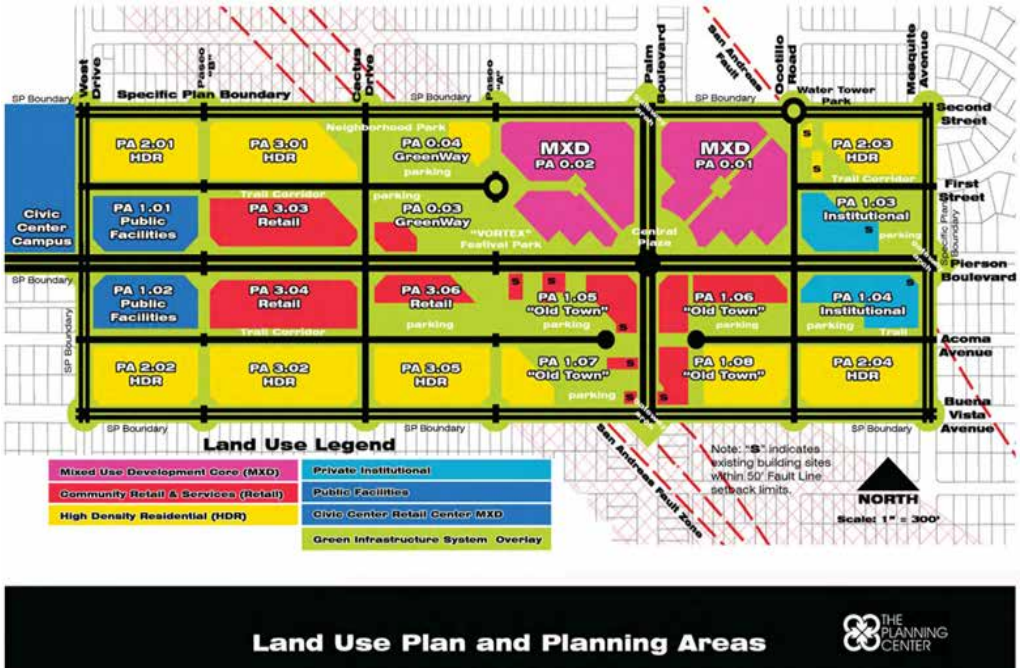


Figure 12. Map of the Vortex Specific Plan's proposed land uses in the planning area (PA). Planning area is noted on the map in acres.

land use to reduce reliance on automobiles and increase active transportation options. The land surrounding Desert Hot Springs is predominantly designated as Open Space Foundation, Rural Foundation, and Community Development Foundation.

Vortex Specific Plan

The City of Desert Hot Springs published the Vortex Downtown Specific Plan in 2008. The Vortex Specific Plan area consists of 151.6-acres in the center of Desert Hot Springs that is bounded by Cholla and West Drives on the west, Mesquite Avenue on the east, Second Street on the north, Buena Vista Avenue on the south, with Pierson Boulevard bisecting the area in the middle (Figure 11). The specific plan site is within the city's historic Old Town area. The plan's primary purpose was to guide development in the core of Desert Hot Springs to foster a mixed-use, cohesive, and regional destination for Coachella Valley that draws both residents and tourists, expands employment opportunities, and provides unique gathering spaces for the community. An important aspect of the plan is emphasizing Downtown Desert Hot Springs' unique "vortex" location, which is at the natural convergence of five energy vortexes. According to the plan, energy vortexes are areas where there is a concentration

of positive energy sources at or near the Earth's surface, referencing the energy of the surrounding natural environment and elements. The five energy vortexes are: the San Andreas/Mission Creek fault lines (seismic); geothermal underground water; alignment of the Little San Bernardino Mountains; wind energy; and solar energy.

The Vortex Specific Plan proposed a mix of land uses in this area consisting of approximately 847,300 square feet of commercial, retail, office, restaurant, civic center, and entertainment uses, as well as up to 504 residential units and 100 hotel/timeshare units. The plan included opportunities and constraints for the plan's development, a land use and phasing plan (Figure 12), and design guidelines. A key tenet of the plan was a proposed "Mixed-Use Development Core" around the central intersection of Pierson Boulevard and Palm Drive, which has the most intensity and compact development of the plan area. The greater intensity of development and mix of uses in the core was intended to produce a unique and walkable destination that combines shopping, working, resort, and living experiences. The City approved the Vortex Specific Plan in 2010, however, the plan has not been fully realized since.

TRANSPORTATION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an analysis of the existing physical and operational conditions of the mobility network within the City of Desert Hot Springs, including streets, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transit, and parking. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the roadway features, network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transit connectivity, and sustainability initiatives in the downtown. The chapter also includes an assessment of the vehicular movement and commute patterns, as well as a traffic safety analysis.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- The City of Desert Hot Springs is a car dominant city, with a high concentration of vehiclular traffic in the downtown area.
- Despite high vehicle volumes, downtown DHS is generally free of traffic congestion throughout the day and during peak hours.
- Speeding is a major safety concern, especially along Pierson Boulevard and Palm Drive.
- Downtown lacks pedestrian facilities, bike infrastructure, and comprehensive transit access.
- For transit, the intersection of West Drive and Pierson Boulevard is a key transfer point for bus services. This location should have special consideration in future planning efforts.

ROADWAY FEATURES AND TYPES

The largest mode share for transportation in Desert Hot Springs is automobiles. Many of the roadways in the city are either residential streets or higher-volume arterials. To understand the existing conditions of transportation in the city, it is essential to understand the roadway features and typologies.

Speeds

In the 2018 City of Desert Hot Springs Engineering and Traffic Survey for speed limits, 36 roadway segments from 11 different roadways were evaluated for speed limit modifications. Five segments required updated speed limits based on the traffic study. Table 5 shows speed limits for all the streets analyzed in the traffic study. Figure 13 shows the speeds of segments within the downtown boundary.

Street or Segment	Speed Limit (MPH)
Desert View Ave	35
Hacienda Ave	40
Indian Canyon Dr	55
Little Morongo Rd	55
Mission Lakes Blvd (Indian Canyon to Little Morongo)	50
Mission Lakes Blvd (Little Morongo to West)	45
Mountain View Rd	35
Palm Dr (Mission Lakes to Two Bunch Palms Trail)	35
Palm Dr (Two Bunch Palms Trail to Camino Campanero	40
Palm Dr (Camino Campanero to Camino Aventura)	45
Palm Dr (Camino Aventura to Dillon)	55
Palm Dr (Dillon to South City Limits)	60
Pierson Blvd (Hwy 62 to Skyborn)	55
Pierson Blvd (Skyborn to Indian Canyon)	55
Pierson Blvd (Indian Canyon to Atlantic/Golden Eagle)	50
Pierson Blvd (Atlantic/Golden Eagle to West)	45
Pierson Blvd (West to Miracle Hill)	35
Two Bunch Palms Trail (West to Palm)	40
Two Bunch Palms Trail (Palm to Miracle Hill)	35
West Dr (Mission Lakes to Pierson)	30
West Dr (Pierson to Two Bunch Palms Trail)	35

Table 5. Speed limits based on the 2018 Engineering and Traffic Study

TRANSPORTATION

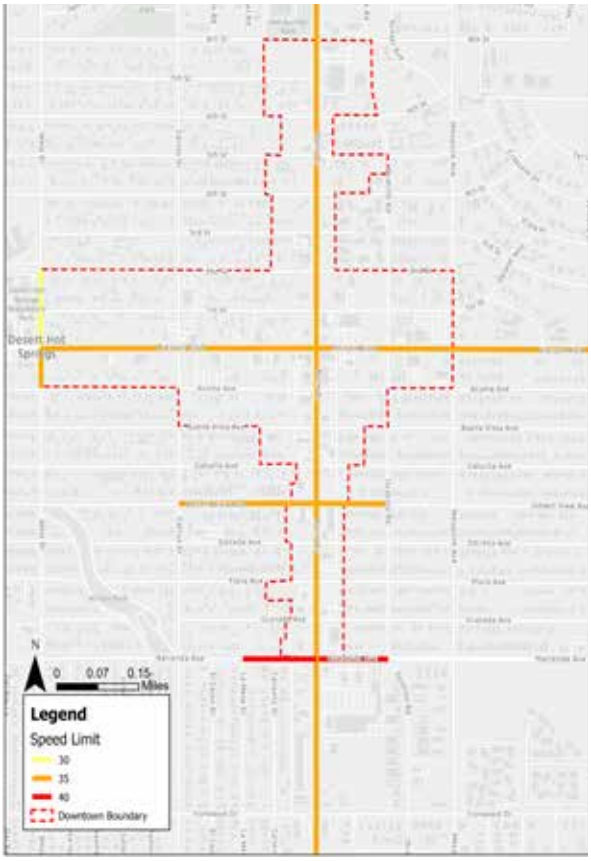


Figure 13. Speed limits in the downtown boundary

Speed limits on Palm Drive and Pierson Blvd increase as traffic moves away from downtown and towards the city limits. The downtown segment of Palm Drive (Mission Lakes to Two Bunch Palms Trail) has a speed limit of 35 mph. Towards the city limits (Dillon to South City Limits), Palm Drive increases to a speed limit of 55 mph (Table 1). Similarly, the downtown segment of Pierson Boulevard (West to Miracle Hill) has a speed limit of 35 mph. The speed limit increases to 55 mph for the outermost segment within the city (Skyborne to Highway 62) (Table 5).

Street Classifications

Street classifications in Desert Hot Springs include Urban Arterial, Primary I and II, Secondary I and II, Collector, Local Collector, and Local. Pierson Boulevard and Palm Drive are the two central streets in the downtown area. Pierson Boulevard is classified as a Primary II street. As a Primary II street, the expected level of service (LOS) is 36,000 vehicles with four divided lanes. The complete streets priorities for Pierson focus on bicycle, transit, and vehicular infrastructure. Palm Drive is divided into two classification segments through the downtown area: Secondary II and Secondary I. For these classification types, the LOS ranges from 26,000 – 36,000 vehicles and four lanes undivided to four lanes divided. For the Secondary II segment (from Mission Lakes Boulevard to Pierson Boulevard), the complete streets priorities focus on pedestrian, bike, and transit infrastructure. For the Secondary I segment (from Pierson Boulevard to Two Palms Bunch Trail), the complete streets priorities include all mode-shares.

Parking

Parking is abundant along neighborhood streets. Parking becomes more limited along the primary, secondary, collector, and arterial streets. Along Pierson Boulevard,

TRANSPORTATION

street parking is mainly located between Cactus Drive to the west and Mesquite Drive to the east. Most businesses along Pierson Blvd supply private parking with off-street parking lots. Palm Street, between Fourth Street and Acoma Ave, offers limited on street parking. South of Acoma Ave, on-street parking is replaced with a Class II bike lane.

VEHICULAR TRAFFIC OPERATIONS

Worker Travel and Commute Patterns

The City of Desert Hot Springs serves as a bedroom community, with most residents working outside of the city limits. Out of 11,937 total workers, 78.5% commute to their place of employment, while 21.5% work from home. As displayed in the job density map in figure 14, residents who work within city limits are primarily located within the core of the city, along Palm Drive. Additionally, while some workers are traveling as far as Riverside and Temecula for work, those working outside the city are primarily located throughout the Coachella Valley in cities such as Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Indio, La Quinta, and Coachella.

The vast majority of workers commut via single occupancy vehicle in the form of a car, truck, or van. Out of 91.5% of workers who commute via single occupancy vehicle, 81.2% drive alone while just 10.3% carpool. About 2.3% of commuters use some form of public transit, while the remaining 6.2%

Figure 14. Job density of where Desert Hot Springs residents work (generated by MCRP students)

TRANSPORTATION

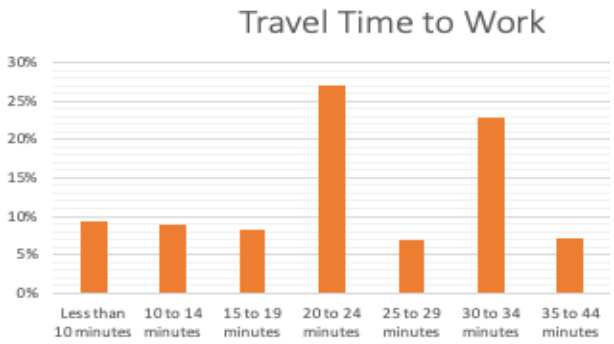


Figure 15. Travel times to work in Desert Hot Springs (generated by MCRP students

either walk, bike, use a motorcycle, or claim to work from home. For all transportation types, the mean commute time is an estimated 27.4 minutes. This aligns with data that shows most residents work outside city boundaries. Average commute times are broken down further in Figure 15. Most workers who commute have a 20-24 minute or 30-to-34-minute travel time to work.

Traffic Operations

Data collected by the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) in February of 2015 provides insight into the level of service (LOS) of downtown Desert Hot Springs roadway segments.

Although Figure 16 shows all segments within Desert Hot Springs, segments of importance for the downtown Desert Hot Springs area and this study includes PD7 (Palm Street, north of Pierson Boulevard), PD6 (Palm Street, south of Pierson Boulevard), PRS3A (Pierson Boulevard, west of Palm Street), and PRS4A (Pierson Boulevard, east of Palm Street). The scope of the Downtown Rehabilitation may be expanded to include other road segments, but the segments listed provide a general overview of the core downtown's traffic operations.

Table 6 details relevant findings from CVAG's LOS study. PD6 (Hacienda Avenue to Pierson Boulevard) saw the highest peak hour volumes, followed by PD7 (Pierson Boulevard to Mission Lakes Boulevard), PRS3B (Cholla Drive to Palm Drive), and PRS4A (Palm Drive to Miracle Hill Road). A VC ratio, based on the segments peak-traffic volume divided by the theoretical hourly traffic capacity was calculated for each segment, at each time period. Based on the V.C, each segment has been granted a grade. PD6 (Hacienda Avenue to Pierson Boulevard, PRS3B (Cholla Drive to Palm Drive), and PRS4A (Palm Drive to Miracle Hill Road) received 'A' grades, meaning that during peak hours traffic was free-flowing/ near free-flowing with light volumes and good mobility. PD7 (Pierson Boulevard to Mission Lakes Boulevard) received a 'B' grade, signifying that at peak times the segment had free to stable flows, with light to moderate volumes. According to the city's 2020 General Plan update, the City is committed to finding ways to ensure their roads operate at optimum level. Where needed and or feasible, the City will repair or retrofit streets when feasible. Due to

TRANSPORTATION

		Peak HOUR VOLUMES						PEAK DIRECTION VC RATIO			CVAG
		AM		MID		PM					
Segement	Segement Description	N/W	S/E	N/W	S/E	N/W	S/E	AM	MID	PM	LOS RATING
PD6	Hacienda Ave to Pierson Blvd	652	845	792	840	967	866	0.48	0.48	0.55	A
PD7	Pierson Blvd to Mission Lakes Blvd	376	462	462	430	610	492	0.47	0.5	0.63	B
PRS3B	Cholla Dr to Palm Dr	269	328	281	238	343	313	0.18	0.16	0.19	A
PRS4A	Palm Dr to Miracle Hill Rd	249	137	216	170	240	211	0.52	0.45	0.51	A

Table 6. LOS Rating for Downtown Desert Hot Springs segments (generated by MCRP student)

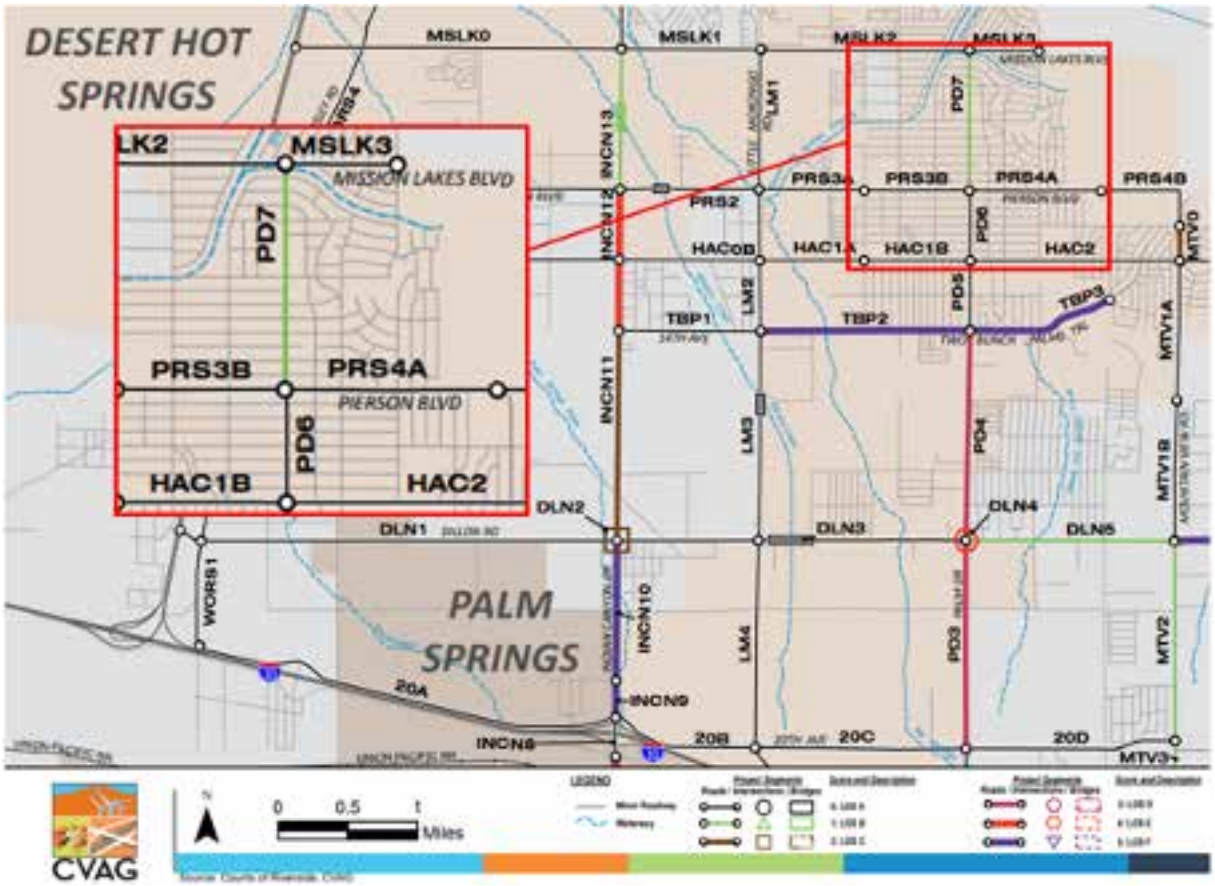


Figure 16. Map of road segments in Desert Hot Springs (CVAG, 2015)

TRANSPORTATION

Location	2010	2011	2013	2015	2017	% Change
Palm Drive, north of Pierson BLVD	10,544	11,872	12,500	13,671	14,748	39.87%
Pierson Blvd, east of Palm Drive	2,266	4,779	3,659	5,387	5,790	155.52%
Pierson Blvd, west of Palm Drive	4,267	6,220	5,528	7,033	7,417	73.82%

Table 7. ADT counts along Desert Hot Springs road segments (generated by MCRP students)

the low congestion and free flow nature of roads making up the downtown region, road diets and/or other means of reducing travel lanes in favor of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure may be explored.

Historic Average Daily Traffic (ADT) counts within the downtown region, collected at areas immediately north, east, and west of the Pierson Boulevard and Palm Drive intersection, were obtained from CVAG. Traffic counts for the years 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2017 are summarized in Table 7. Over the 5 years of traffic count data collection, the Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard intersection has seen an increase in volume, likely due to increases in population and site popularity. The highest corridor volumes occur on Palm Drive, north of Pierson Boulevard, which aligns with the fact the segment is classified as a major collector street. Upon analysis of counts conducted at other roads within the city, it is evident that the downtown area (most notably the intersection of Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard) , sees some of the highest average daily traffic counts in Desert Hot Springs.

Commercial and Goods Movement

The City of Desert Hot Springs has seen increased commercial goods movement within city boundaries due to the increase in population, demand for goods, and exportation of cannabis/wellness products. Semi-trucks stress and damage roads more than the average commuter vehicle. To preserve the condition of and prevent accelerated degradation of roads within city boundaries, commercial truck use has been limited to certain streets. Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard, the two streets at the center of Downtown Hot Springs are included as streets where commercial goods truck movement/access is allowed.

TRANSIT

Transit Service Lines

Desert Hot Springs is served by Sunline Transit Agency (STA) regional transit which provides connections throughout Coachella Valley and to San Bernardino. STA's service options include bus and microtransit options, along with carpool and taxi benefit programs. STA has three primary transit services available within Desert Hot Spring:

TRANSPORTATION

SunBus

SunBus is a fixed-route bus service that includes connections within Desert Hot Springs and to neighboring cities. STA Route 3 circuits throughout the City of Desert Hot Springs and extends to Desert Edge. Routes 2 and 5 connect Desert Hot Springs to Palm Springs and Palm Desert, respectively. Transfers between the local route and intercity bus routes may be made at the West Drive/Pierson Boulevard bus stop.

All buses are fully-air conditioned and 100% accessible to persons with disabilities. Busses are also retrofitted with bike racks to provide connections for cycling travelers. STA's policy requires that bus stops with more than 10 boardings per day must be equipped with a bus shelter. Of the 48 total bus stops in Desert Hot Springs, 26 stops (54%) have more than 10 boardings per day. Currently, 92% of stops with more than 10 boardings per day in Desert Hot Springs are equipped with bus shelters. STA is committed to closing the gap on the remaining bus stops over the next three years.

STA provides additional fixed route bus service during school commuting hours to reduce crowding on regular bus lines. The School Tripper Route 200 connects the Desert Hot Springs High School to Palm Springs High School along a route nearly identical to Sun Bus Route 2.

SunRide

SunRide is a microtransit service that connects riders to the fixed transit routes or to points of interest in a designated zone. SunRide offers on-demand rideshare throughout specified zones in Coachella Valley, including a zone that encompasses Desert Hot Springs and Desert Edge, to provide supplemental transit services for areas with fewer transit connections. STA completed 3,527 SunRide trips in 2021, with the greatest monthly ridership in the Summer and Fall months. More than 25% of those trips were in the Desert Hot Springs area.

SunDial

SunDial is a shared-transit van service for people with disabilities. Rides may be requested in advance for pickup from a home, building, or other designated pickup location. However, SunDial service is only available within ¾ mile of a SunBus route and only during SunBus operational hours.

STA's Route 10 Commuter Link provides fixed route weekday bus service for regional commuters. Route 10 connects Indio to San Bernardino and includes stops at CSU San Bernardino (Palm Desert), Beaumont, CSU San Bernardino Main Campus, and the San Bernardino Transit Center. At the Beaumont stop, passengers can access connecting bus lines from Riverside Transit Agency, Beaumont Transit, and Banning Transit.

TRANSPORTATION

The San Bernardino Transit Center has connections to OmniTrans and MetroLink, which provides connections to the greater Los Angeles region. Commuter Link services are only available on weekdays. Scheduled Park-N-Ride service is available at the CSU San Bernardino (Palm Desert) campus for travelers with a valid Commuter Link ticket.

STA also provides some supplemental services to the main regional transit lines throughout the Coachella Valley. Taxi services are available through Coachella Valley Taxi, Desert City Cab, and Yellow Cab of the Desert. Additionally, STA provides incentives for commuter travel. The SunCommute program offers employers reduced transit passes that may be given to their employees. STA will subsidize vanpool services through the SolVan program, with additional benefits for electrified vanpools. STA is also making efforts to provide sustainable transit options for the region. Over 20% of the SunBus service is zero-emission through electric and hydrogen fuel cell technologies. STA has made a goal to transition the SunBus fleet to 100% zero-emission busses by 2035.

Fares

Single-ride fares on SunBus may cost up to $1.00 per ride or $3.00 for a day pass. A 31-day pass is available for up to $34.00. High school students, as well as CSU San Bernardino, Palm Desert and College of the Desert students, may be qualified for free transportation with the Haul Pass. Seniors (ages 60+) and disabled travelers may be eligible for half-fare benefits on SunBus or qualify for reduced taxi fare through select taxicab services.

Transit Ridership

The 2019 SunLine Transit Rider Survey collected information on regional transit ridership for home based work trips and found that key destinations in the area include Palm Springs, Palm Desert, and La Quinta. The survey also found that the College of the Desert and Palm Springs High School are key destinations for non-work-related trips.

The transit stop at West Drive and Pierson Boulevard is a designated transfer point between bus lines that serve the local area and connect to some of these key destinations. Ridership data collected between March 2021 and February 2022 shows that the West/Pierson stop is the 6th most popular weekday stop in the STA network with an average of 128 riders per day. The same stop is the 8th most popular stop on the weekends at an average of 91 riders per day.

The 2019 survey found that ridership on the STA transit network is primarily made up of regular customers. More than a quarter of fares are from monthly passes. Over 35%

TRANSPORTATION

of SunLine travelers have been using the service for more than 5 years. However, STA ridership may be predominantly made up of transit-dependent riders. Over 90% of travelers earn less than $50,000 per year. Additionally, more than half of travelers do not own a car.

PEDESTRIAN AND BIKE

Existing Bicycle Facilities

The City of Desert Hot Springs does not have an extensive, well-connected bicycle network. The bike facilities are disjointed in nature, facilities start, stop, and alternate between facility classes as shown in Figure 17. Figure 17 is a map of current existing bicycle facilities in Desert Hot Springs. The city currently does not have any Class I bikeways. It has Class II and III bikeways on portions of streets in the city. According to community outreach surveys in the Final Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan from 2016, the biggest issues in the City of Desert Hot Springs are the lack of sidewalks, bike lanes, poor lighting, vehicle speed, and accessibility.

Pedestrian Facilities

The pedestrian network, like the bicycle network, is not complete. Examples of sidewalk conditions in Desert Hot Springs are shown below.

There are existing neighborhoods that have no sidewalks, a painted lane stripe as a sidewalk, missing sidewalks in neighborhoods, and disconnected sidewalks.

SAFETY

The California Office of Traffic Safety posts yearly statistics about crash statistics of the various cities in counties in California.

Figure 17. Existing bicycle facilities

TRANSPORTATION

Typical DHS neighborhood without sidewalks on Granada Avenue

Example of lane striping acting as a sidewalk

Raised sidewalks along rural connector
(Boise, ID - Photo Credit Kostec Planning)

Protected pedestrian lane
(Boone, NC - Photo Credit Jeff Brubaker)

Missing sidewalks along Cahuilla Avenue

Sidewalk on both sides of the street on Desert View Avenue

Disconnected sidewalk network on Second Street

Continuous sidewalks on First Street

Figure 18. Example sidewalk conditions

TRANSPORTATION

Cities are grouped into categories with similar-sized populations so that individual cities can compare their city's traffic safety statistics. The City of Desert Hot Springs is in Group D with a population range of 25,001 to 50,000. The city is stated to have 412,240 daily vehicle miles traveled in the most recent report year of 2019.

According to the table below, there are many collisions that result in injuries, including fatal injuries. The City of Desert Hot Springs is determined to have the 7th highest alcohol involved crashes reported out of the 94 cities in Group D. Other notable crash statistics include a high number of pedestrians aged 65 and older being injured or killed. The City of Desert Hot Springs is ranked 6th highest out of the 94, indicating that compared to other cities, the 4 injuries and/or deaths of elderly pedestrians during 2019 are very concerning. Overall, the crash statistics show that the City of Desert Hot Springs is ranked as having some of the highest collision rates out of the 94 cities in Group D. The only type of collision in which the City of Desert Hot Springs has a fairly good rating is with bicyclist collisions. As the City looks to improve their downtown, roadway characteristics such as speed, lighting, and pedestrian facilities will need to be closely examined.

TYPE OF COLLISION	VICTIMS KILLED & INJURED
Total Fatal and Injury	149
Alcohol Involved	32
Had Been Drinking Driver < 21	0
Had Been Drinking Driver 21 – 34	8
Motorcycles	8
Pedestrians	11
Pedestrians < 15	1
Pedestrians 65+	4
Bicyclists	5
Bicyclists < 15	2
Composite	96

Table 8. Collision statistics for the City of Desert Hot Springs (2019)

Between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2021, a total of 146 crashes were reported in the City of Desert Hot Springs. Of those crashes there were a total of 17 victims killed and 203 injured. Most crashes, 49%, were reported to be injury with only a complaint of pain. Figure 19 brings out a concerning statistic. A broadside collision is a crash that happens when the front of one vehicle slams into the side of another vehicle, usually at a high speed. Broadside collisions typically end in a serious injury. Broadside crashes can happen when vehicles are moving in different directions and cross paths at one point. This high statistic shows that the City of Desert Hot Springs may need to reevaluate signal timings, stop

TRANSPORTATION

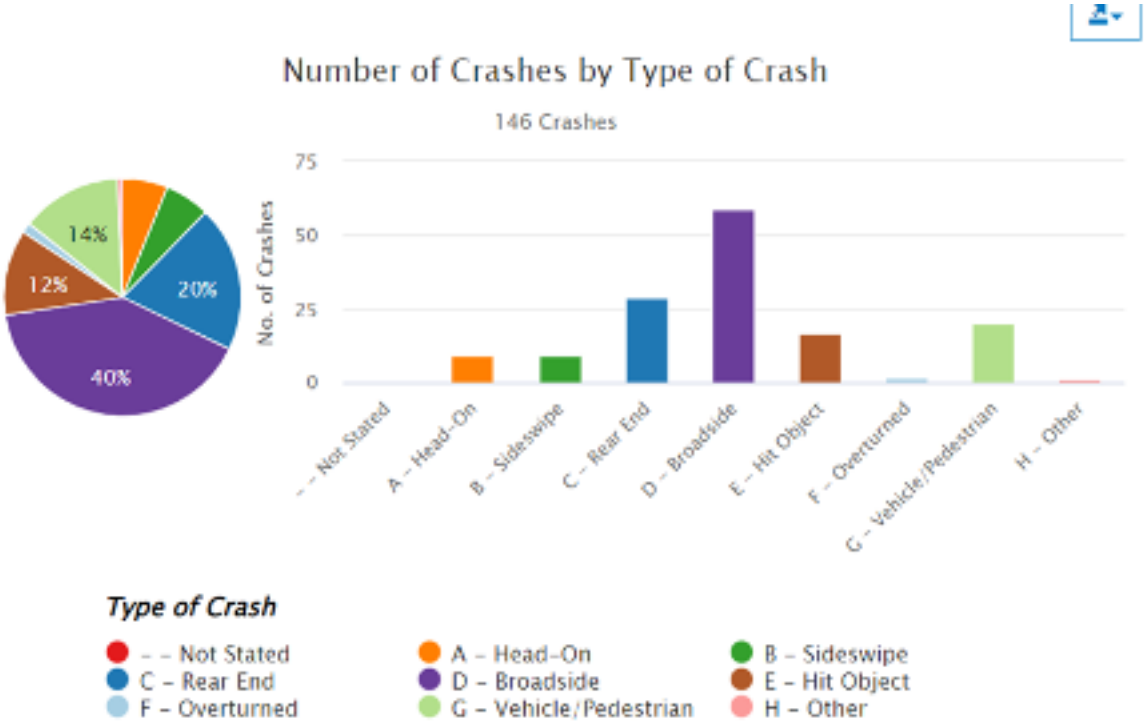


Figure 19. Number of crashes by type of crash

sign placements, and speeds on the roads. The primary crash factor (PCF) is known as one element or driving action in which the on-duty officer described the main cause of the crash. Based on the number of crashes by PCF violation in the City of Desert Hot Springs between the years of 2020 and 2021 speeding is a major issue. The second most prominent number of crashes are those that occur due to traffic signals and signs, as well as automobile right of way. These statistics support the high broadside crashes as this violation would be a direct cause of that type of crash.

Other notable crash statistics in the City of Desert Hot Springs in the most recent report years of 2020 to 2021 is the number of victims by mode. Figure 20 indicates that over half of the crashes that occur in the City of Desert Hot Springs are with drivers. This statistic may be due to the low level of bicycle ridership and pedestrian activity in the city. As stated by the city staff, heat is a major deterrent to using active modes of transportation. The weather also is an important aspect of traffic crashes to analyze, but for the most part, the City of Desert Hot Springs experiences clear weather. This shows that crashes in the

TRANSPORTATION

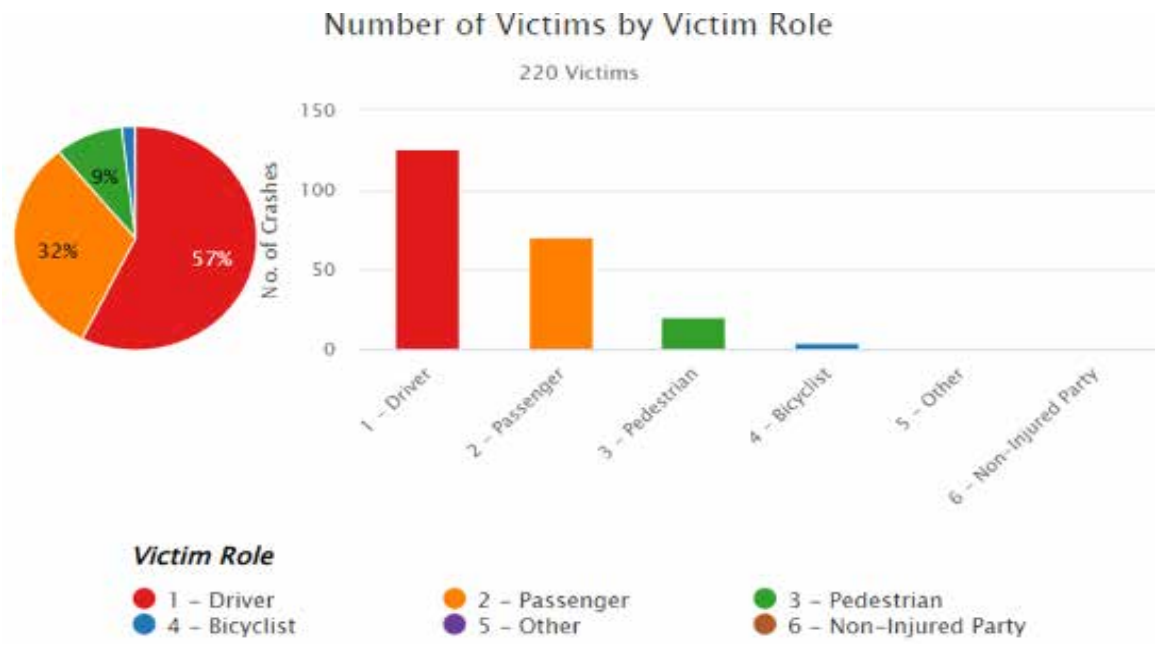
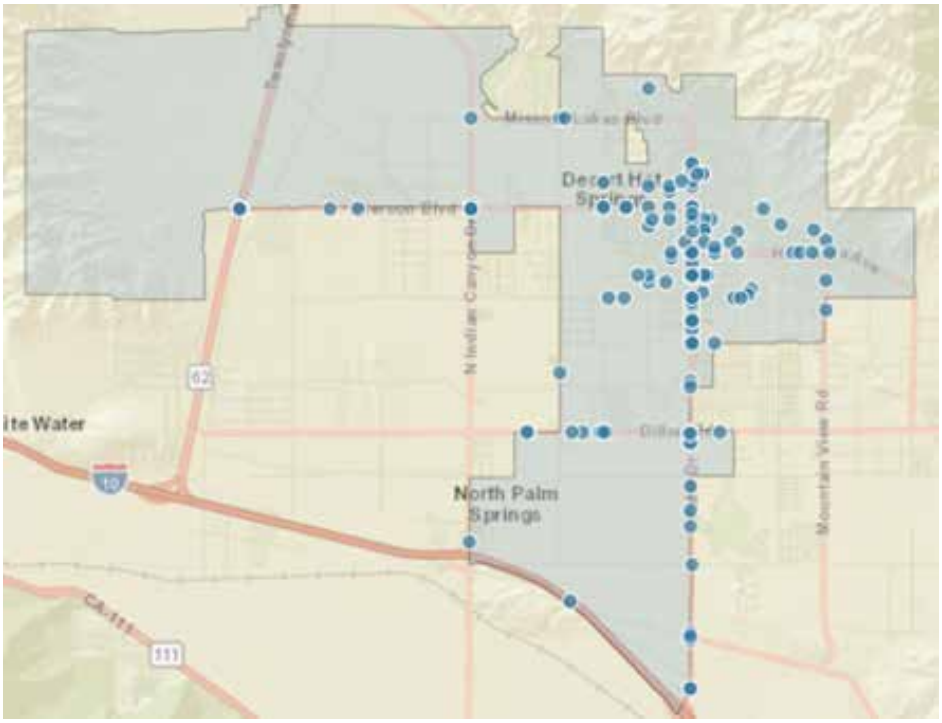


Figure 20. Number of victims by victim role

city are not weather related, and instead the infrastructure is more to blame. This is an important statistic for planners to acknowledge as the streets must be replanned and redesigned with the help from engineers to accomplish Vision Zero. Vision Zero is a multi-national road traffic safety project whose goal is to achieve no fatalities or serious injuries involving road traffic.Figure 21 shows the concentration of downtown crashes compared to the rest of the city. Palm Drive is of special concern due to the number of crashes occurring along the corridor.

Of the pedestrian involved crashes, it was reported that most of them occurred due to pedestrian failure to yield right-of-way to vehicles when crossing outside of a marked or unmarked crosswalk. This means that most pedestrian crashes occur in the road, including the shoulder. Between the years 2017-2021, there was a total of 47 pedestrian crashes, 34% of which were fatal or severe injury. Between the same years, there was a total of 10 bicycle involved crashes, 20% of them being fatal or severe injury. Most occur in the vicinity to the downtown area, notably on Palm Drive.

TRANSPORTATION



(To left)
Figure 21. Downtown crash locations

(Above) Figure 22. Vehicular and pedestrian involved crashes in the downtown - red dots indicate vehicular crashes and yellow dots indicate pedestrian involved crashes

TRANSPORTATION

KEY TERMS

Level of Service (LOS): Rating system that defines how well vehicle traffic flows along a street or road and is usually based on an A-F rating scale

Average Daily Traffic (ADT): Volume of traffic passing a point or segment in both directions, during a specific point in time

Bicycle facilities: Any type of accomodation designed primarily for the use of people riding bikes

Class I bikeway: Shared use paths are facilities with exclusive right of way for bicyclists and pedestrians away from the roadway

Class III bikeway: Bike lanes established along streets and defined by pavement striping and signage. Typically, one way facilities are adjacenet to motor traffic on either side of the road.

Roadway classifications: Based on street widths, number of lanes, and vehicular volumes. Classifications include “primary, secondary, arterial, and collector” with subcategories for each

Vision Zero: “A strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all.”

URBAN DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

The Vortex Specific Plan was adopted in 2008 and proposes a vision for Desert Hot Springs to be a contemporary unique lifestyle center, in which residents and visitors can find integrated living options with shopping, recreation, and destination resort amenities. The plan embraces the term "vortex" to inspire the development of a central hub of energy in the town while also acknowledging the greater natural forces surrounding the area including the San Andreas/Mission Creek fault lines, geothermal underground water, Little San Bernardino Mountains, wind energy, and solar energy.

The Vortex Specific Plan focuses on downtown Desert Hot Springs, defined as the area within West Drive, Second Street, Mesquite Avenue, Cholla Drive, and Buena Vista Avenue. It proposes a break from the fragmented low-scale resort and retail land use pattern of the past, and suggests creating a high density town center (847,300 sq. ft. total) with a civic center, entertainment options, restaurants, and destination resort among the commercial, retail, office, and residential land uses.

In addition to increasing the diversity of land uses within the downtown area, effective urban design would enhance the experience for residents and visitors alike. Urban design would evoke the character of the city through smaller features, such as vegetation, seating options, and lighting. Urban design features are an effective tool to quickly and dramatically alter the feel of the streetscape to more closely align with the city's vision.

The following chapter covers all aspects of existing urban design features in the built environment of Desert Hot Springs. First, the historical, cultural and natural setting of the city, the look, style and character of buildings, and the streetscape are explored. Then, civic identity and wayfinding, uniformity and trends in the built environment and their purpose, civic identity, and wayfinding are discussed. Lastly, key terms pertinent to this chapter are presented.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- The City has a picturesque desert background with vegetation ranging from a mixture of shrubs, succulents, herbs, grasses and palm trees.
- The City of Desert Hot Springs is one of the few places in the world with naturally occurring hot and cold mineral springs, this is attributed to the Mission Creek Branch of the San Andreas Fault.
- The General Plan has policies that promote attractive street furniture to help create an appealing street scene.

URBAN DESIGN

- Streetlighting represents an important element for providing pedestrians with a comfortable and safe walking experience.
- Public art installations have been an increased focus for the entire city and downtown area, including sculptures such as those made by Simi Dabah, and the many painted utility and traffic control boxes and murals completed primarily by local artists.
- Buildings downtown are an eclectic mix of mostly resident-serving businesses, prominent features (in terms of color, materiality, and articulation) tend to be representative of activities taking place inside.
- There is recent development of non-traditional, modular designs that repurpose shipping containers and portable buildings.

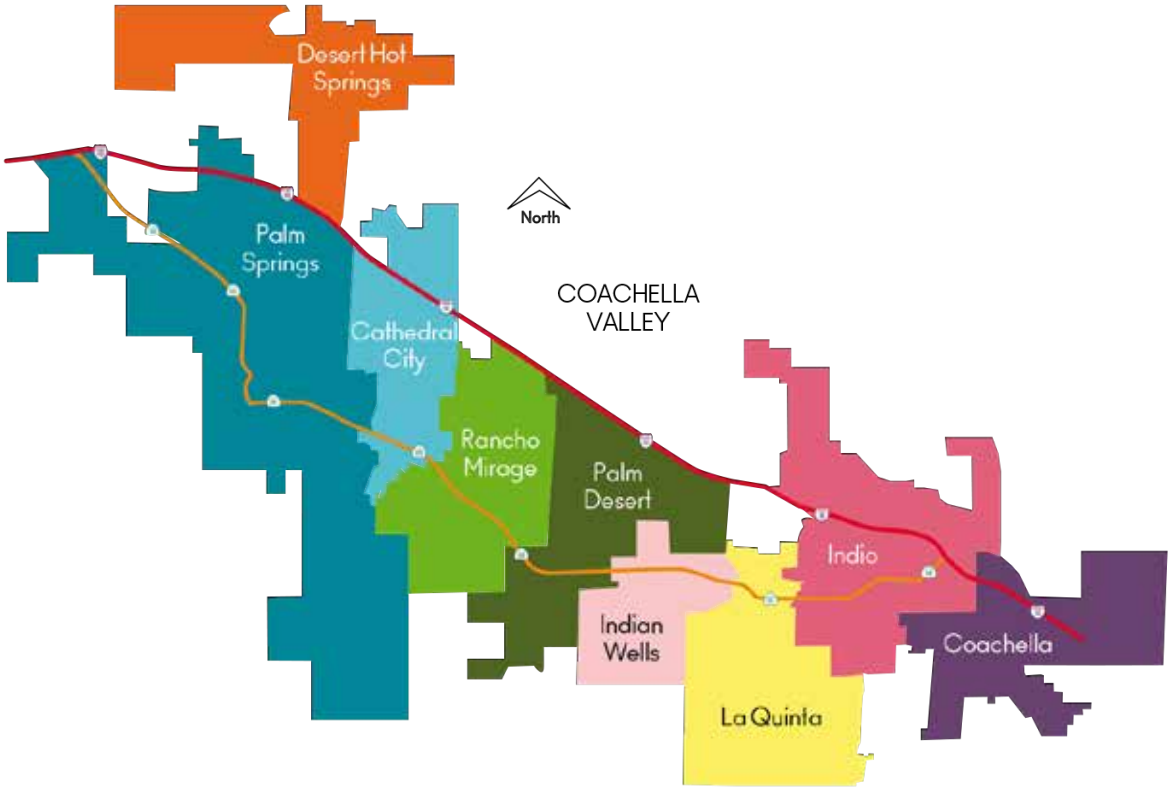


Figure 23. Map of the Coachella Valley (Photo courtesy of Munselle Group)

URBAN DESIGN

HISTORICAL, CULTURAL, AND NATURAL SETTING

Situated in the Coachella Valley, the City of Desert Hot Springs is part of Riverside County. Although Desert Hot Springs was only incorporated in 1963, it has a rich history.

Figure 24. Historic photos (Source: Desert Hot Springs Historical Society and Cabot's Pueblo Museum)

Native Tribes

The Cahuilla People are the first known people to reside in the Coachella Valley. The word "Cahuilla" has been interpreted to mean the master, the powerful one, or the one who rules. The tall mountains, deep valleys, rocky canyons, passes, and desert land created a home for the Cahuilla People. The Cahuilla People can be divided into three groups based on their geographical region: Desert Cahuilla, Mountain Cahuilla and Western Cahuilla. Today there are about 3,000 individuals enrolled as members of the Cahuilla Nations.

Homestead Act

Enacted during the Civil War, the Homestead Act (1862) accelerated the settlement of western territory by granting people 160 acres of surveyed public land in exchange for a minimal filing fee. After five years of living on and improving the land, the original filer was entitled to the property. Union soldiers could deduct the time they served from the residency requirements.

Desert Hot Springs had its first set of settlers arrive in the early 1900's. Cabot Yerxa arrived in the Coachella Valley in 1913 and began his homesteading journey in what is now known as Desert Hot Springs. Yerxa is credited with the finding of the hot and cold water springs the city is known for. In need of water for the settlement, Yerxa dug two wells near his home. To his surprise,

one well held natural hot water and the other had cold water. In awe of his finding, Yerxa named his homestead Miracle Hill.

Hot Springs

In the early 1930's Yerxa introduced the developer, L.W. Coffee, to the hot mineral water. By 1941 Coffee had successfully built the first public bath house in Miracle Hill. To promote the bath house, Coffee began laying out streets for a town he recorded and named Desert Hot Springs. Within the same time frame Dr. Robert Bingham began treating children with Polio with the found warm mineral water. This led to the establishment of Angel View Crippled Children's Hospital.

Desert Hot Springs is one of the few places in the world with naturally occurring hot and cold mineral springs. The Mission Creek Branch of the San Andreas Fault bisects the area and on one side is the cold-water aquifer and on the other, is the hot-water aquifer. The natural hot mineral waters originate from the Desert Hot Springs Aquifer and are heated by geothermal forces thousands of feet below the Earth's surface. The Mission Creek Aquifer holds the award winning cold mineral waters. This water is ranked among the nation's best water for taste and was awarded the International Water Tasting Competition at Berkeley Springs, West Virginia.
At its peak Desert Hot Springs had over 200 operational spas earning the city the title of spa Capital of the world. The hottest mineral aquifer can be found in a 4-block area and by default, most of the resort spas are within this boundary today.

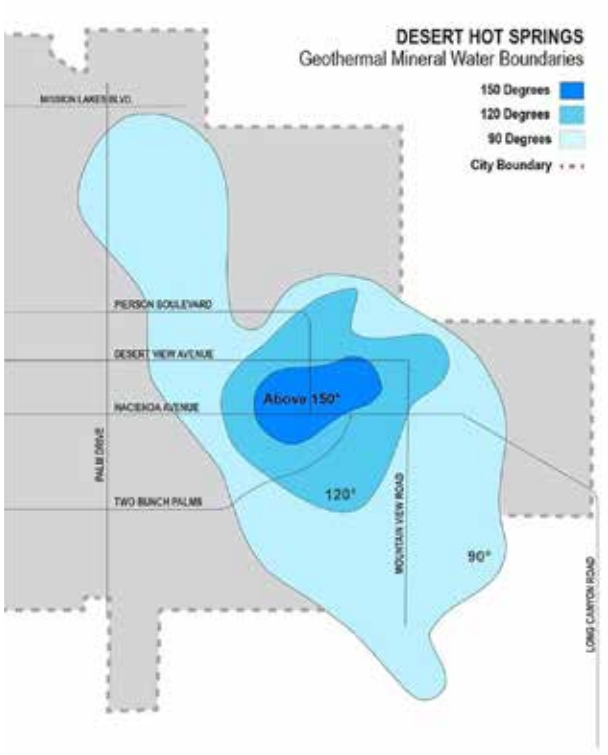


Figure 25. Desert Hot Springs Geothermal Mineral Water Map
(Map courtesy of Palm Springs Hot Springs)

URBAN DESIGN

Figure 26. Photo of the Pueblo Museum (Photo courtesy of Cabot's Pueblo Museum)

Historical Properties

In 1941 Yerxa's began building The Pueblo and worked on it until his death in 1965. Yerxa's pueblo style home is now a museum and part of the national register of historic places. The property is 5,000 square feet, has four stories, and includes 35 rooms, 150 windows, 30 rooflines, and 65 doors. Yerxa drew his inspiration from Hopi architecture and built the structure from reclaimed and found materials across the Coachella Valley.

The Pueblo Museum has been open to the public since 1950 and displays Native American art and artifacts as well as materials from Yerxa's life.

URBAN DESIGN

Desert Landscape

Desert Hot Springs has a picturesque desert background. The city boundaries attempt to soften the built environment by incorporating a variety of landscaping elements such as drought tolerant plants. Plants include palm trees, mesquites, honey locusts, succulents, and desert shrubs. In addition, Desert Hot Springs includes a large variety of "desert scrub", several desert plant communities occurring usually at elevations below 4,000 feet. These habitats are areas of hot summers, mild winters, and low (nine inches or less) and irregular rainfall. The vegetation is a mixture of shrubs, succulents, herbs, and a few grasses, some of which are absent until above-normal rainfall makes many bloom.

Figure 27. Downtown Desert Hot Springs Pierson Boulevard

URBAN DESIGN

BUILDINGS

From the intersection of Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard, the prevailing archetype is single-story, single-use buildings constructed from timber or concrete masonry block, typically finished with stucco. The buildings feature western and/or adobe-style motifs in muted earth and pastel tones. For example, City Hall features a trapezoidal, mansard roof, earth-toned shingles, stucco siding, and native plants for landscaping. Setback areas are typically reserved for parking or ornamental landscaping.

Figure 28. Desert Hot Springs City Hall (Image Credit: City of Desert Hot Springs)

Arcades and recessed entries are incorporated into some building designs, providing shaded space on some street frontages. Sidewalk activity hosted by businesses is dedicated to signage oriented towards passing motorists. The use of street furnishings, shade structures, and outdoor seating is limited. Several undeveloped lots and parcels with large setbacks also contribute to a lack of streetscape continuity. Strip-retail developments downtown have low floor-area ratios that are car-oriented, with substantial portions dedicated to parking and landscaping features that can exacerbate extreme daytime temperatures and limit opportunities for outdoor uses. Cannabis businesses are permitted within the downtown, including cultivation facilities. However, security features like dark window tints and bars present a defensive posture to the street that can also limit continuity.

Figre 29. Shipping Container Concept Image (Image Credit: Jay Calderon, The Desert Sun)

The Coachella Valley is internationally renowned for its mid-century modernist architecture. Within the city limits of Desert Hot Springs there are several boutique and luxury resort hotels built in this style. Buildings downtown are non-descript, small retail storefronts with mostly resident-servicing businesses. Prominent

URBAN DESIGN

Figure 30. Pueblo Museum (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

features (signage, street furniture and displays, materiality and color) are typically reflective of uses taking place inside. Several buildings feature murals and artwork on building facades that are adjacent to vacant lots. There is also development of several non-traditional structures – repurposing shipping containers and portable buildings for example – contributing to the downtown's eclecticism. Nearby and of historical note is Cabot's Pueblo Museum, hand-built in the pueblo style in 1941. This property is on the National Register of Historic Places and is credited with the discovery of the area's natural mineral water. Beyond the city limits, the B-Bar-H-Ranch is built in the ranch style and attracted an exclusive clientele. The ranch holds cultural significance to the area's history.

PUBLIC STREET INFRASTRUCTURE

Crosswalks

The City of Desert Hot Springs General Plan contains policies about streetscape design and infrastructure. Under the "Streetscapes" section on page LU-27, the goal is for street crossings to be enhanced for both bicyclists and pedestrians, including dedicated bike lanes where feasible.

Sidewalks

As detailed further under Streetscape Character below, sidewalks are planned to be comfortable and showcase greenery, specifically tree canopy, along pedestrian/bicycle paths. These shade trees will improve pedestrian experience and reduce heat island effects.

The goal for walkable streets (in MI-4) is to create safe, accessible, and comfortable paths for pedestrians. Sidewalks are optimized to be safe so that people are protected from vehicle collisions and crime. Sidewalks are convenient, meaning with good lighting, direct access to buildings, and clear destinations.

The city understands that many residential neighborhoods lack sidewalks, so all new residential development will require sidewalks, which will include planting of drought-tolerant trees, except in rural areas. Additionally, existing sidewalks will be upgraded to include shade trees and

curb cuts to accommodate wheelchairs and strollers where such improvements do not exist.

Alleys

Alleys will abide by general vision to improve pedestrian experience, connectivity, and circulation. These are also spaces where the municipal waste bins can be hidden from public sight (as expressed in the Vortex Specific Plan).

Streetscape Character

The city goals for streetscapes include streets with sidewalks that provide a comfortable pedestrian experience (LU-27). Streetscape is defined through sidewalk design, planted parkways, and medians. Street trees are considered an element for streetscape because they provide shading for pedestrians during intense heat temperatures. In the general plan, the following streetscape elements were mentioned: plantings, pavement designs, historical markers, public art, wayfinding signage (LU-28). The vision of a "Complete neighborhood", which incorporates streetscape design to help address pedestrian safety (LU-12). Crosswalks designs are implored to use streetscape by the city (MI-17). The 2016 CVAG Active Transportation Report also discusses how design standards should be used as a guide for aesthetically pleasing streetscape designs.

Figure 31. Palm Drive Median (Photo courtesy of City of Desert Hot Spring General Plan)

Streetlighting

Streetlights are an important element for safe pedestrian routes to the park and sidewalks (MI-18). The Vortex Specific Plan discusses the use of "themed streetlighting" as a defining feature for pedestrian crosswalks.

Street Trees

Policy OS 7.4 encourages new public street trees in established neighborhoods and climate appropriate street trees for all new developments. Public Improvements Measure D-5 is a street tree plan that identifies various drought tolerant and climate adaptable shade trees that can improve streetscape design.

URBAN DESIGN

Site Furnishings

LU-29 describes the goal of creating an appealing street scene with attractive street furniture. Street furniture is discussed in the "Downtown and Commercial and Mixed-Use District Safe Streets" section of MI-8. The 2016 CVAG Active Transportation Report discusses downtown as one of the activity centers that should have furnishings.

Paseos

The open space designation can be applied to city-owned paseos (LU-20). The Vortex Specific Plan discusses the use of paseos in resource efficient communities.

CIVIC IDENTITY AND WAYFINDING

Gateway Monuments

The City of Desert Hot Springs has several gateway monuments that lead into the city and its downtown areas. These monuments help communicate to locals and visitors which distinct area of the city they are in, as well as convey civic identity. One gateway monument is Hot Springs Park. Surrounded by palm trees and native species, it features a fountain that is built using warm colored tiles which are reminiscent of desert colors and Desert Hot Springs' spa history. Other gateway monuments showcase sculptures from local artist Simi Dabah, which is described in more detail in the "Public Art" section of this document.

Figure 32. Photos of welcome signs into the city

URBAN DESIGN

Wayfinding

The City of Desert Hot Springs recently added additional wayfinding signs along Palm Drive as a part of efforts to meet goals from their Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan from 2016. While not a major element of the plan, the additional wayfinding signs featured in figure 33 were placed on center medians along Palm Drive in 2020.These signs help direct visitors to main points of interest throughout the city and downtown area. Points of interest highlighted by these signs include City Hall, Cabot's Pueblo Museum, the police department, parks, and spa and resort locations. Their notable design is reminiscent of the 360° views of the scenic mountain vistas surrounding the city.

Figure 33. Photos of wayfinding signs

PUBLIC SPACES

Parks

Desert Hot Springs has eight total parks, including two with skateparks and two with dog parks. Amenities found throughout these total parks include greenspaces, playgrounds, seating, public art structures, and many sports fields, including baseball, basketball, and tennis. According to Trust for Public Land, only 34.6% of all Desert Hot Springs Residents live within a 10-minute walk to a park, which is lower than the national average of 55% and the California state average of 76%.

There are three parks in the area close to downtown Desert Hot Springs. Desert Hot Springs Skatepark and Constitution Park are adjacent to one another and are 0.6 miles away from the intersection of Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard. The skatepark is small but does offer one shade structure. Constitution Park is also small and includes a seating area with trees, shade, and various plants. Guy J Tedesco Park is 0.8 miles away from the intersection of Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard and is much larger than the other two parks close to downtown. Guy J Tedesco Park is a thin, uniquely shaped park featuring a skatepark, greenspace, a playground fully covered by a shade structure, basketball courts, and a dog park. This park is known for its 360° views of nearby mountains and has plenty of trees and shade.

URBAN DESIGN

Trails

There are 6 hiking trails within or adjacent to city limits. The closest trail to the downtown, Swiss Canyon, is 1.2 miles away from the intersection of Palm Drive and Pierson Boulevard. Another hike, Long Canyon, is within Joshua Tree National Park but can be accessed right outside of the city boundary.
Public Library

Desert Hot Springs recently built a new public library building in June 2021. The old library building, located at 11691 West Drive and built in 1972, did not meet the needs of the city's rapidly growing population. The new library building is 15,500 square feet and is a branch of the Riverside County Library System. The library was built through a public-private partnership between the county and Omni West Group Inc., a real estate developer, with all construction costs paid by Omni West Group. The county now leases the land and library building from Omni West Group.

Signage

All signs in Desert Hot Springs must adhere to ordinance section 17.44, Sign Regulations, including sections 17.44.160, 17.44.170, and 17.44.180 that go over design guidelines for various types of signs. Generally, the ordinance states that signs should be easy to read with a timeless font that uses subtle colors. Pylon signs are not allowed. Sign aesthetic and placement must be compatible with the visual character of the surrounding area and the building design. Freestanding signs should be placed in raised planters if possible and within a planted, landscaped area. The use of natural stone or concrete is encouraged by the city.

Public art

Various forms of public art installations are featured throughout the city in the form of painted utility and traffic control boxes, murals, and sculptures. Artists can apply to complete all these art forms on public city land through an Art in Public Places Application, which can be found on the city of Desert Hot Springs' website. All these art initiatives and existing art pieces are aiding the city in creating a downtown arts district.

For utility and traffic control boxes, preference of artist choice is given to art designs that relate to the history, character, or cultural identity of Desert Hot Springs. Artists are financially compensated for their work. Public art of utility and traffic control boxes is an easy way to quickly add art to the city, and it has been largely successful with residents generally liking the vibrance it brings to the downtown and other areas. Murals follow a similar criteria for consideration by the city; murals designs must have significance to the artist and should aim to benefit the city. Additionally, there is an "Art in Public Places" initiative

URBAN DESIGN

created by the city for developers to either add public art to their residential or commercial developments, or to pay an in-lieu fee to fund other public art projects in the city.

Major existing artworks around the city include 8 sculptures by Simi Dabah, an artist local to the Joshua Tree area. His rusted metal sculptures can be found on medians and at parks such as Veterans' Memorial Park. Some of the sculptures located on medians also double as gateway monuments into the city.

Finally, a non-profit, Art Foundation of Desert Hot Springs exists to promote artistic placemaking to promote community planning and development. Their goals include increasing awareness of the benefits of public art, bringing interesting contemporary art into the community, and to make art more accessible to everyone.

Figure 34. Scultpure by Simi Dabah

URBAN DESIGN

Key Terms and Definitions

Gateway monument: a freestanding structure or sign, typically near a street entering an urban area, which communicates the name of the place (city, county, etc.)

Greenspace: an area characterized as containing vegetation for the purpose of recreational or relaxation purposes in an urban environment

In-lieu fee: a fee paid by developers in place of completion of a requirement that might not be realistic of possible for a particular development

Paseo: a plaza or walkway that prioritizes pedestrians, typically between buildings
Streetscape: The design or view of a street.

Vortex: a mass of swirling water; in the case of Desert Hot Springs, the underground water vortex includes two aquifers, one of which contains cold water and another which contains varying degrees of hot water.

Wayfinding: the way in which people position themselves in a physical space and subsequently navigate from place to place

Mansard Roof: a roof which has four sloping sides, each of which becomes steeper halfway down.

Ranch-style: A domestic architecture originating in the United States that is noted for its long, close-to-the-ground profile, and wide-open layout.

Pueblo-style: Is a regional architectural style of the Southwestern United States, which draws its inspiration from Santa Fe de Nuevo México's traditional Pueblo architecture, the Spanish missions, and Territorial Style.