



# PALM SPRINGS CITY HALL

Eckbo, Royston, & Williams, Landscape Architects, 1957.

## HISTORIC LANDSCAPE REPORT

*WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TURF REMOVAL AND LANDSCAPE RESTORATION*

*Prepared by Steven Keylon*

*For the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, April 19, 2024*



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*Palm Springs City Hall Dedication, November 8, 1957. Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society.*

## INTRODUCTION;

In late 2023, the Palm Springs Department of Planning Services approached architectural historian Steven Keylon to develop a limited historic resources report on the original design of the landscape at the Palm Springs City Hall (3200 Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, California, 92262). The Palm Springs City Hall is a Class I historic site that is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The design of the original landscape is credited to notable mid-twentieth-century landscape architects Eckbo, Royston, & Williams.

The city is interested in reducing water usage on city-owned properties considering the recent drought conditions and the State Water Board's recent mandates to reduce water usage for turf irrigation throughout California.

The report aims to develop preliminary/conceptual design information necessary to restore the Eckbo-designed landscape in the front of City Hall, which, through historic photos, was observed to have significantly less turf than what currently exists and utilized mostly drought-tolerant plants. Thus, a turf removal project at City Hall would not only restore the landscape by a

renowned landscape architectural firm but would provide a prominent example of how conversion from turf to water-efficient landscape can enhance the attractiveness of buildings in Palm Springs. The Planning Department requested the following scope for the report:

1. Discover any existing archival drawings by landscape architects Eckbo, Royston, & Williams, original photographs, or any other materials that the city could use to restore the landscape.
2. Provide a brief background on Eckbo's significance and contributions to landscape design during the mid-twentieth-century, with specific attention to Eckbo's work in Palm Springs and the landscape design for City Hall.
3. Review the plant list from the original drawings and recommend substitutions for any plants that may no longer be available or appropriate for a drought-tolerant landscape palette.

The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation (PSPF) has generously underwritten the cost of this report's background research and preparation.

SUMMARY: Palm Springs City Hall was designed in the early 1950s by the architectural firms Clark & Frey in collaboration with Williams, Williams & Williams. The original design of the landscape for Palm Springs City Hall was created by master modernist landscape architects Eckbo, Royston, & Williams, one of the most important and influential landscape architectural firms in the United States. Landscape architect Francis Dean, a partner in the firm, led the project. As construction on City Hall was nearing completion, it was announced in March of 1957 that preliminary landscape plans had been drawn up:

*“Plans for the landscaping of the city hall were presented to the City Council this week, with an estimated cost for the entire project set at over \$60,000 by city hall architect John Clark. The plans, drawn by landscape architects Eckbo, Royston and Williams of Los Angeles call for the use of different trees, shrubs, and ground areas. On both sides of the city hall and in back of the west wing are spaces for parking spots. Tall palm trees will mark the entrance to the city hall's main entrance, and a long hedge of sycamores will be planted along the west side of the building. A difference of opinion arose over the construction of a driveway between the parking lot in front of the council chambers and the parking lot in front of the west wing, with some councilmen believing that it should be replaced by a wide sidewalk. This will be one thing to be decided at the regular meeting next week. Clark reported to the council that the landscaping could be put in for a minimum of \$32,000, but this would only cover half of the parking areas, allowing space for some 75 automobiles. However, the entire project calls for the parking of 120 cars, for a council chambers which will hold 130 persons. As the council*

*makes its final determination of the landscape project, it will be meeting for the first time in the new council chambers. Francis Dean, representative of the landscape architects, has been asked to be present next Wednesday evening to answer council questions.”<sup>1</sup>*

**TIMELINE:**

November 8, 1957: City Hall was officially dedicated, before the landscape was fully installed.

October 2, 1996: Palm Springs City Hall was designated a Class I Historic Site by City Council Resolution 18907.

2022: Architectural Resources Group authored a report identifying the period of significance for Palm Springs City Hall to be 1956-1965. “Contributing elements of the property as currently designated/defined include: The original building (started 1956, completed 1957), The open space at the front of the building including the parking lots, landscape areas, and drive aisles. (1957).” Because most of the original Eckbo, Royston, & Williams-designed landscape at the rear of the building was removed to accommodate later additions, this report will focus only on those sections described by ARG as having a period of significance of 1957.

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<sup>1</sup> “Council Given City Hall Landscaping,” *Desert Sun*, March 20, 1957, 1.



*Palm Springs City Hall and its surroundings, 1959. Flight AXM\_1959, Frame 10W-162. Courtesy of UCSB Library Geospatial Collection.*

## **LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE OF PALM SPRINGS CITY HALL**

Master landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, in collaboration with his partner Francis Dean, designed the landscape of Palm Springs City Hall. Portions of the landscape featured xeriscaped specimen gardens showcasing a mix of species native to the Sonoran Desert (using specimens sourced from the site in many instances), while other areas utilized primarily drought-tolerant Mediterranean species that were part of Eckbo's trusted toolbox of hardy plant materials.

Grass was used sparingly to highlight landscaped zones of desert plants. Because much of the landscape design utilized a more informal type of desert planting, the judicious use of grass also contrasted with the areas where the designers intentionally created a more formal, manicured aesthetic.

Interestingly, the xeriscaped areas were left to bare native sand, vs. the typical decomposed granite or gravel used to cover landscaped areas using desert plants. The landscape plans don't reveal the rationale behind this decision. However, perhaps it was another way to strengthen the concept of a "reverse oasis," which would celebrate the Sonoran Desert context for Palm Springs' iconic new City Hall. Eckbo, Royston, & Williams's prescient design choice predates the City's Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (PSMC 8.60), which encourages portions of water-efficient landscape designs to incorporate areas with no mulch or gravel – to provide habitat for insects and wildlife.<sup>2</sup>

In designing the landscape for City Hall, Eckbo, Royston, & Williams created an overall landscape program with several different zones that would visually relate to the building's architecture. The program also included visibly different elements directly relating to each element's function. The west wing of City Hall, which initially contained the building and planning departments, is distinct from the east wing, which included the city manager and executive offices. The north wing contained the finance and accounting departments. The council chamber is also a uniquely different architectural form from the various office wings. The landscape zones enhance and strengthen this "form follows function" approach to the building design in which the designed form of each part of the building reflects its intended function or purpose.<sup>3</sup>

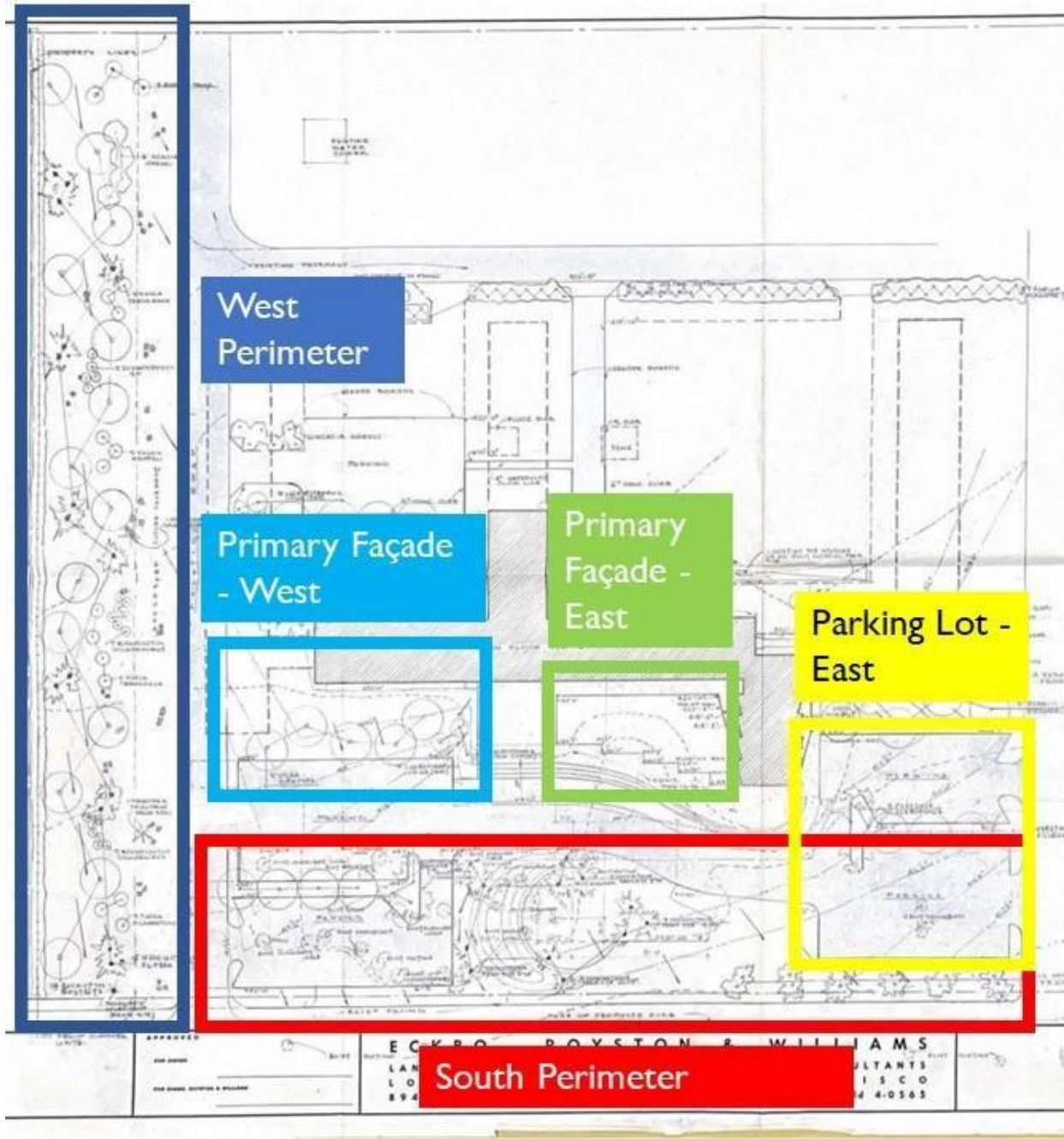
The landscape zones identified in this report are:

- The south perimeter (which includes the west parking lot)
- The primary facade - west
- The primary facade – east
- The east parking lot
- The west perimeter

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<sup>2</sup> The City's Water Efficient Landscape ordinance (PSMC 8.60) denotes up to 5% of a water efficient landscape plan may include bare soil..

<sup>3</sup> The maxim "Form follows function" was coined by the renowned American architect Louis Sullivan and became a guiding principle of twentieth-century modernist architecture and industrial design.





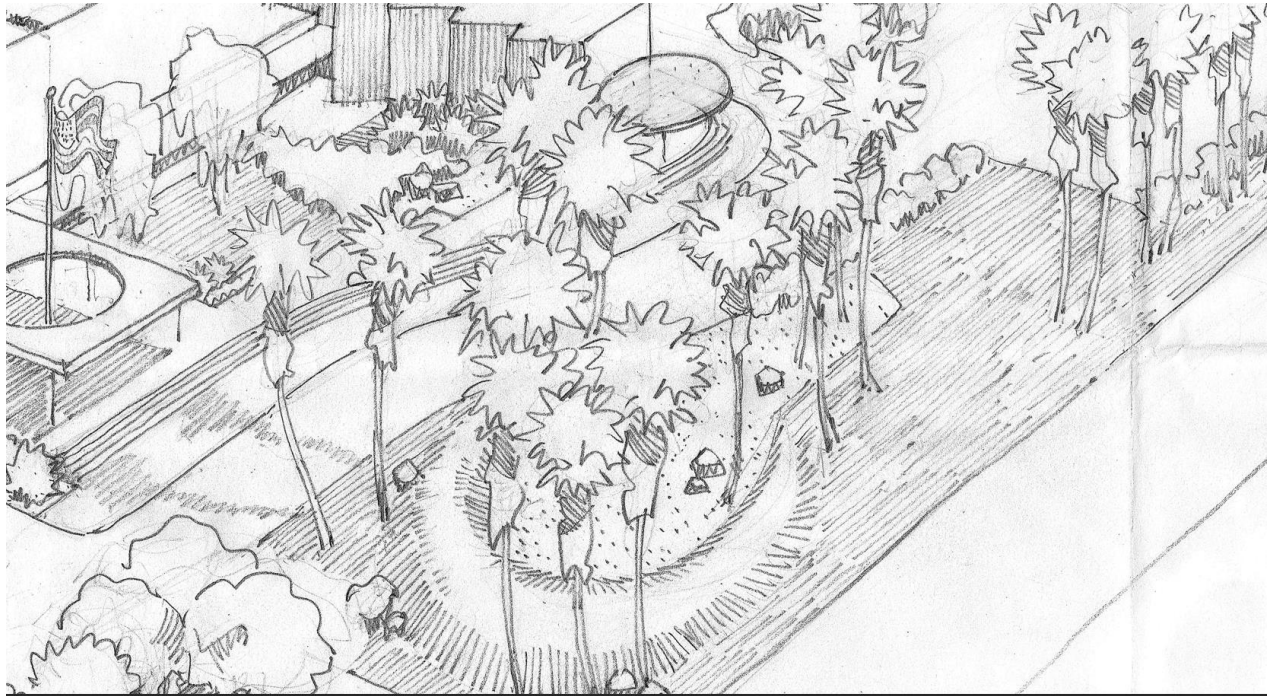


*The earthen mound of the south perimeter landscape, as seen from the front entrance to City Hall. Julius Shulman photograph, 1958. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10).*

**SOUTH PERIMETER:** The most conspicuous element of the landscape was along the south perimeter. Here, the main feature was a “reverse oasis” – a desert specimen garden set amid a large turf panel. This desert scene featured a large, apostrophe-shaped bed of sand and scattered boulders, into which was planted a mixture of native species, some of which were sourced from the site. A large, undulating crescent-shaped earthform enclosed this on the western side. Previously utilized by Eckbo at other Palm Springs gardens (see Appendixes, page 64), these large dirt mounds were later described by Francis Dean as designed to “capture the subtleties of the forms in the San Jacinto Mountains.”<sup>4</sup> This earthen sandy mound was planted with 2,000 Peruvian Mock Verbena, a relatively fast-growing ground cover that trails and

<sup>4</sup>“Koerner Garden – 1955,” typewritten sheet dated January 14, 1991, Francis Dean Collection, ENV Archives- Special Collections, Cal Poly Pomona.

spreads with new herbaceous roots to form a dense mat. Peruvian Mock Verbena was chosen to emulate the indigenous desert sand-verbena, which is difficult to establish in a designed garden and more often is found self-propagating in open desert areas. Because of this, the Peruvian Mock Verbena is presumed to have been purple (though Eckbo used white flowering plants on earlier earthen mounds at other sites in Palm Springs).



*A detail from Francis Dean's rendering shows the apostrophe-shaped xeriscaped zone, in contrast to the surrounding grass panel. Courtesy Francis Dean Archives, Cal Poly Pomona.*

California fan palms, planted in pairs or single specimens, were planted in the large panels of turf surrounding the desert specimen garden along the south perimeter, in alignment parallel with Tahquitz-McCallum Way (now Tahquitz Canyon Way). In contrast, Mexican fan palms sourced at the site were planted within the desert garden. A non-native juniper hedge enclosed this area partially to the north of the landscape feature. The south perimeter also includes the west parking lot, which had four carob trees and a small grouping of three London plane trees planted in a curbed area, which provided shade to the parking lot. This was underplanted with a bed of asparagus fern. The southern edge of the west parking lot had a juniper hedge to screen parked cars along Tahquitz Canyon Way.



*The Primary Façade – West, photographed in Kodachrome by landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, no date. Courtesy Garrett Eckbo Collection, (1990-1), Environmental Design Archives. College of Environmental Design. University of California, Berkeley. Berkeley, California.*

**PRIMARY FACADE – WEST:** The landscape in front of the west portion of the primary facade had five European olive trees planted in a large bed of sand and placed in a staggered row (these are extant). This row terminated at the walkway with a grouping of three white crape myrtle (two of these still exist). The olives were underplanted with a naturalistic informal native desert garden, with groupings of drought-tolerant species planted in the sandy soil. Throughout were scattered groupings of boulders, some of which were sourced from the site.



*The Primary Façade - East. Julius Shulman photograph, 1958. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10).*

**PRIMARY FACADE – EAST:** The eastern half of the primary facade featured a large, paved area from the City Hall entrance to the entrance to the City Council chambers. Here, in contrast to the informal nature of the landscape of the west section of the facade, the landscape is a geometric design with a more formal feeling. The adjacent paving consisted of a grid of 4' by 4' concrete squares set into expansion joints of exposed aggregate stained a warm pinkish red. To the east of the walkway leading to the main entry to City Hall, a large panel of turf was created by subtracting concrete squares, creating an ample open space with a staggered edge toward the south section. This motif was used by early Modernist landscape architects, starting with Eckbo's Harvard GSD classmate James C. Rose, who called them "Modular Gardens" (See Appendixes, page 56). Eckbo had used a similar device for the 1948 courtyard patio garden at the Town & Country Center in Palm Springs, designed by Paul R. Williams and A. Quincy Jones. Short hedge rows of varying plant species enclosed the lawn panel on three sides.



*The East Parking Lot. Julius Shulman photograph, 1958. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10).*

**EAST PARKING LOT:** At the north boundary of the east parking lot was a large bed of sandy soil, planted with a native specimen garden, mirroring roughly the landscaped area in front of the primary facade – west. Five European olives were installed in a staggered row, with four California fan palms running north, salvaged from the site. Groupings of indigenous plant species were installed among scattered clusters of boulders. The landscaped bed was enclosed at the north and east with a row of white oleanders. The parking area was planted to match the planting of the west parking lot, with carob, London plane, and asparagus fern.

**WEST PERIMETER:** When City Hall was built, North Civic Drive was a narrow, unpaved road, with plans to be widened and paved soon. The landscape to the west of Civic Drive was planted in sandy soil. To create a windbreak, fourteen fast-growing eucalyptus trees were planted in a zig-zag pattern along the western edge. The remaining landscape consisted of native

species, including fifteen California fan palms (planted in clusters or as single specimens) and other plant material, some sourced from the site. Groupings of boulders were placed informally through the landscape.

## **CHANGES OVER TIME**

Though Julius Shulman's 1958 photographs show the earthen mound in place, in an aerial photograph taken in 1959, just two years after the landscape was installed, it appears that the earthen mound and sandy landscaped area have been removed and replaced with a much larger panel of turf. Nothing to suggest a reason for this change so early was discovered during research.

By 1965, North Civic Drive had been paved. At that time, the City Hall landscape was extended slightly west, and a curbed panel of turf was installed, with a concrete sidewalk running through, north to south. Three trees are planted in the grass panel. Also, the sandy landscaped area on the west primary facade was replaced with a large turf panel.

In 1972 and again in 1985, extensive additions were made at the rear of City Hall that removed landscaped areas initially designed by Eckbo.<sup>5</sup>

In 1981, the flagpole, designed initially to rise through the roof's oculus at the main entrance to City Hall, was moved to the lawn area in the south perimeter, which formerly had the earthen mound.<sup>6</sup> Three enormous mature Mexican fan palm specimens were installed in its place.

In 1990, Mexican artist Raymundo Cobo Reyes created a life-sized bronze statue of former mayor and longtime Palm Springs booster Frank Bogert, depicting Bogert astride a horse. The sculpture was placed near the flagpole in the south perimeter. Master landscape architect David Hamilton created the surrounding landscape, which consisted of large boulders providing a base for the sculpture.<sup>7</sup>

In 1996, City Hall was named a Class I Historic Resource.

In 2009, a plan to reconfigure the parking lot in front of City Hall was sent to City Council which would have negatively impacted sight lines to the Class I Historic Site. Alarmed, citizens (including the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation and the Palm Springs Modern Committee) began fighting to reverse the proposal. In February 2010, the Historic Site Preservation Board unanimously voted to have city staff prepare a recommendation to the City Council to declare the city hall a historic site (not just a historic building). The board then issued a stay of

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<sup>5</sup> *Palm Springs City Hall (HSPB-33D) Limited Historic Resources Report*, Architectural Resources Group, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* David Hamilton was the first university trained and licensed landscape architect to both live and work in the Coachella Valley. His landscapes include the adjacent Palm Springs Airport and Tahquitz Canyon Way.

demolition for ninety days (with a potential extension of another ninety days) for the city hall site to include the parking lot. On August 23, 2010, the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation sent a letter to the Planning Commission chair informing them that recent research had revealed that the original landscape architects for City Hall were Eckbo, Royston, & Williams.<sup>8</sup> On September 8, 2010, the city's planning commission unanimously upheld the appeal.

On March 7, 2012, the Palm Springs City Council approved Resolution 23106, which amended the 1996 historic designation of the City Hall site to include the entire southern part of the parcel "...bounded by the northern edge of the north parking lot, and the curb edges of Civic Drive, Tahquitz Canyon Way, and El Cielo Road, excepting the landscape plant materials therein..."<sup>9</sup>

In 2020, Architectural Resources Group was hired by the city to complete a limited historic resources report to determine the resource's period of significance and its character-defining features. This was initiated as part of the City Council's consideration to remove the statue of former mayor Frank Bogert. Their report summarized, "On October 2, 1996, Palm Springs City Hall was designated a Class I (Landmark) historic site through Council Resolution No. 18907, along with five other buildings designed by master architect Albert Frey. This designation did not list the character-defining features that contribute to the sites' historical significance; this was partially, but not fully, clarified in 2012 when Resolution 23106 was passed."<sup>10</sup>

Specific to the historic landscape, ARG's report states:

*"The original landscape design by Eckbo, Royston & Williams has been significantly altered since 1957: most of the original plantings have changed; all low relief elements, notably an undulating hillock in the lawn area, have been flattened out; most boulders have been removed; and parking light standards have been replaced. The general site plan configuration and layout of hardscape and landscape appears as it was during the period of significance, however the parking lot light fixtures and the specific plant materials that exist today in the landscape do not reflect the Eckbo design as seen in historic photos and a 1957 rendering. The 2012 designation amendment specified that "landscape plant materials" are not included in the designation, and this is presumed to cover any remaining original as well as current vegetation. The flagpole and Frank Bogert statue located in the lawn area in front of the building are alterations that occurred well after the period of significance and do not contribute to the property's significance in*

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<sup>8</sup> According to Ken Lyon, Principal Planner with the City of Palm Springs, "until the PSPF letter was sent identifying Eckbo as the designer of the City Hall landscape, there was no awareness that a significant designer was associated with it, and I believe the Council wanted the flexibility to remove the turf and create a "water-efficient demonstration garden." Email from Ken Lyon to the author, April 4, 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Information from the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation website.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

*terms of architecture or association with/embodiment of historic patterns of development the flagpole was moved here from the main entrance in 1981, and the statue was added in 1990. In summary, the open space at the front of the building is a contributing element, while the actual vegetation, flagpole, and statue are not contributing elements.”*

The Human Rights Commission recommended in 2021 that the statue be removed, and after much debate, the City Council voted to remove it. It was removed from the site in 2022.”

## **PLANNING AND FUNDING TURF REMOVAL AND LANDSCAPE RESTORATION AT THE PALM SPRINGS CITY HALL**

Though many of the original trees still exist, nearly all of the low-level landscape has been replaced over the years with turf, which has increased water usage and significantly diminished the creative impact of the historic Eckbo, Royston & Williams-designed landscape.

A suggested outline to implement the turf removal and landscape restoration at the Palm Springs City Hall is provided here:

1. Based on present site conditions, parking lots, and extant landscape areas, determine what parts of the original 1957 Eckbo, Royston, & Williams-designed landscape can be restored.
2. Work with a qualified landscape architect using the original Eckbo design to develop a scope of work defining the extent of turf removal and determining areas where rehabilitation of the Eckbo, Royston, & Williams-designed landscape features is feasible. (This can be conceived as a multi-phased project with components prioritized to maximize turf removal in the first phase).
3. Eckbo, Royston, & Williams specified native sandy soil in the xeriscaped portions of the landscape, in lieu of the more typical decomposed granite, gravel, or mulch. This was an important design choice, and when restoring those areas, it is recommended that they return to sandy soil. Weed barriers should probably be put down first, and if there are concerns about sand blowing away, perhaps a binder, as is used to bind decomposed granite, might be used.
4. Certain trees planted after the period of significance that are recommended for removal include the olive trees planted in the “modular garden” area at the east lawn area of the primary facade. These trees are in decline and detract from the formal aesthetic of this part of the Eckbo-designed landscape.
5. Because most plant species initially specified by Eckbo, Royston, & Williams were drought-tolerant, they are appropriate selections to achieve water efficiency today. For those species that may no longer be available from commercial nurseries, the landscape architect can specify alternative species that resemble the originals in form, color, leaf texture, and drought tolerance. A qualified historic landscape architect should be consulted to advise



on appropriate replacements.

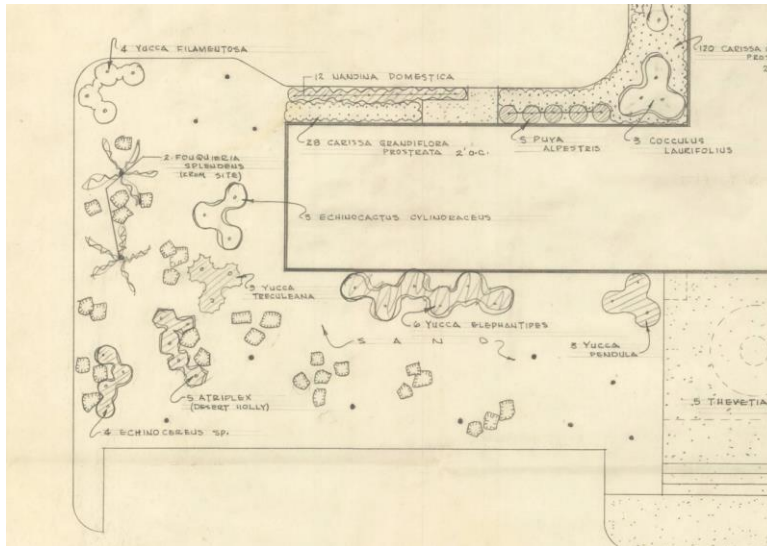
6. The limited use of grass was vital to the historic landscape design, showcasing the “reverse oasis” effect Eckbo, Royston, & Williams designed. For example, at the south perimeter, where grass was used in contrast to the dry garden and earthen mound. Therefore, it is recommended that the existing turf in some of these areas be removed and replaced with newly developed turf hybrids. Also, there is an area in the south perimeter where grass has been replaced with an unremarkable landscape of decomposed granite, evenly spaced boulders, and scattered spiky plants. This portion of the flag-shaped grass, which featured evenly spaced pairs of native California fan palms in the grass, should be restored with the drought-tolerant turf hybrid, simplifying and restoring the original design intent. The O’Donnell Golf Club has recently replaced much of its turf with a new hybrid grass and successfully reduced its water consumption significantly.<sup>11</sup>
7. Once the areas where the landscape can be restored based on the original Eckbo drawings are defined and plant lists revised where necessary, cost estimates should be developed to determine logical funding and phasing for the project. Competitive construction bids can then be obtained, and the turf removal and restoration of the historic landscape can be implemented as funding allows.

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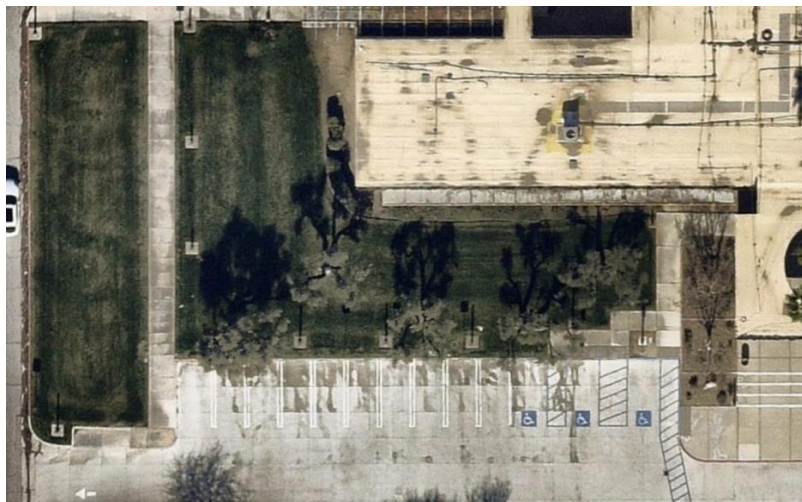
<sup>11</sup> The board and manager Koll Farman at the O’Donnell Golf Club have been working with Dr. James Baird from UC Riverside, who has been exploring ways that golf courses can achieve water savings through watering methodology and is looking at new types of grass that use less water. For nearly a hundred years, the club had a base of Bermuda grass, which was overseeded with rye in the winter. In 2023, Baird divided the golf course up into three significant test parcels and used multiple wetting agents and applications to drastically reduce water usage in these areas while maintaining optimal turf and playing conditions. They updated their irrigation system to help reduce water usage. Working with Evergreen Turf, The club has renovated their greens using Mini Verde Bermuda grass, which requires significantly less water, and no overseeding. During the winter months, it goes dormant, turning slightly gold. The club applies Civitas pigment monthly to give their grass a green tint.

# EXAMPLES OF AREAS FOR POSSIBLE TURF REMOVAL/LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

## PRIMARY FACADE – WEST



Detail from Eckbo, Royston, & Williams's 1957 drawing shows the primary façade's landscape – west. Here, a landscape of drought-tolerant native species was planted in sandy dirt (instead of the more typical decomposed granite).



Here is the same area today. The multi-trunk European olives and two white crape myrtle trees are original 1957 specimens. The native plantings and sandy soil have been replaced by large panels of turf and a foundation planting of shrubbery against the building. The median strip directly west of this is a post-1957 addition. This turf panel could be redesigned in the spirit of the 1957 Eckbo design, removing turf and providing a compatible extension of the original water-efficient landscape design.

## Turf Removal Option #1: West Primary Facade:

Total estimated turf removed: 10,760 square feet restore to water-efficient landscaping  
(Roughly 7,260 square feet historic, 3,500 square feet non-historic)



Measurement Result  
3,503.2 Sq Feet  
Clear

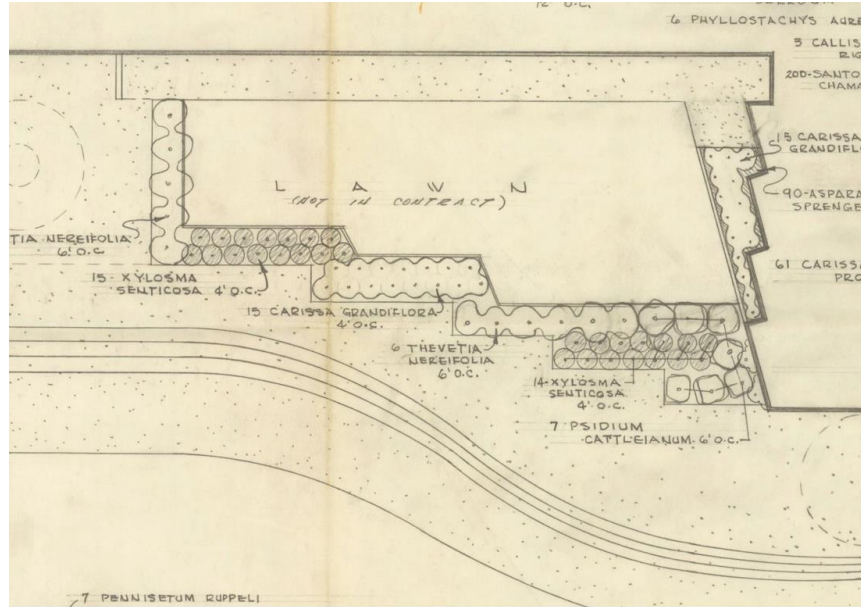


7,256.5 Sq Feet  
Clear

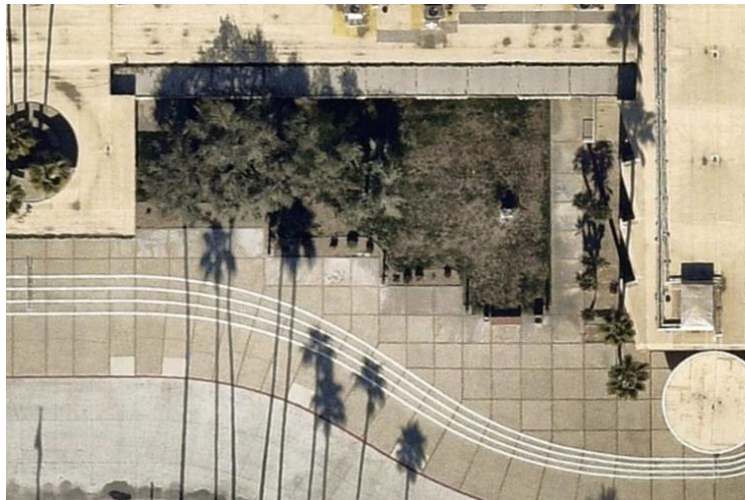


*The top photo is circa 1960, showing the primary façade – west with recently planted European olives and native plants grown in a large bed of sandy soil. The bottom photo from Google Maps is from 2023 and shows the same area today. The European olives still exist from the 1957 design, but the large areas of grass and foundation planting along the building are later replacements for the original design. This area is an ideal candidate for turf removal and landscape restoration.*

## PRIMARY FACADE – EAST “MODULAR GARDEN”



*Detail of Eckbo, Royston, & Williams’s 1957 drawing for the “Modular Garden” at the primary façade – east, showing a geometric, irregular area within the paving, with a geometric turf panel enclosed by varying shrub species. Along the sawtooth wall of the council chambers, Eckbo designed a planter area of low-growing Natal plum and asparagus fern that soften, but don’t obscure that interesting architectural feature.*



*The same view today. The panel of turf remains, but large multi-trunk olive trees have been planted, partially obscuring the architecture. The varying shrub hedges have been removed. Mediterranean palms have been planted along the sawtooth wall of council chambers, partially obscuring that important architectural detail. These palm trees are recommended for removal and relocation. Here, the old grass is recommended to be replaced with a new drought-tolerant hybrid and the olive trees removed (or moved to the north section of the east parking lot, restoring a row of olive trees there that were part of the original Eckbo landscape design. Lastly the original design for the modular garden hedge enclosure is recommended to be restored.*

## Turf Removal Option #2 East Modular Garden:

Total area of turf replaced with water-efficient hybrid turf: 3,355 square feet

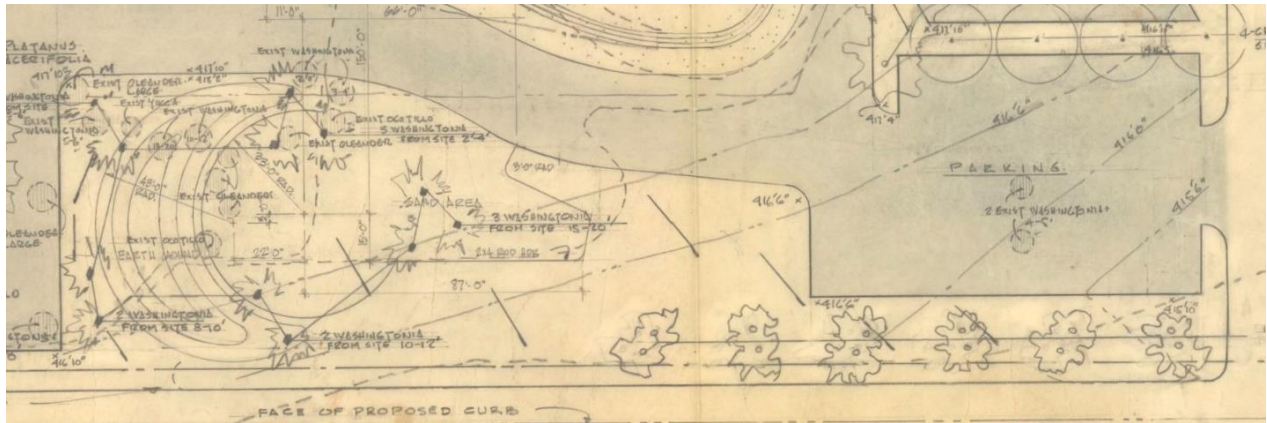


3,355.1 Sq Feet

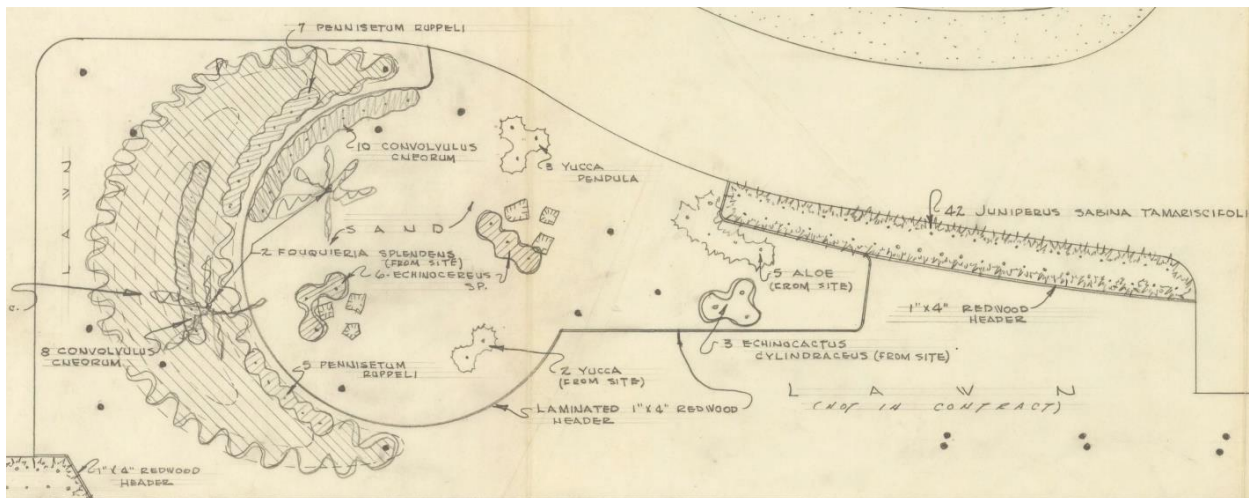
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# DETAIL FROM ECKBO, ROYSTON, & WILLIAMS LANDSCAPE PLANS

## SOUTH PERIMETER:



Trees



Shrubs and Groundcovers

### Turf Removal Option Area #3: South perimeter frontage:

total area of turf removed at South perimeter: 16,110 square feet



16,110.9 Sq Feet

Clear

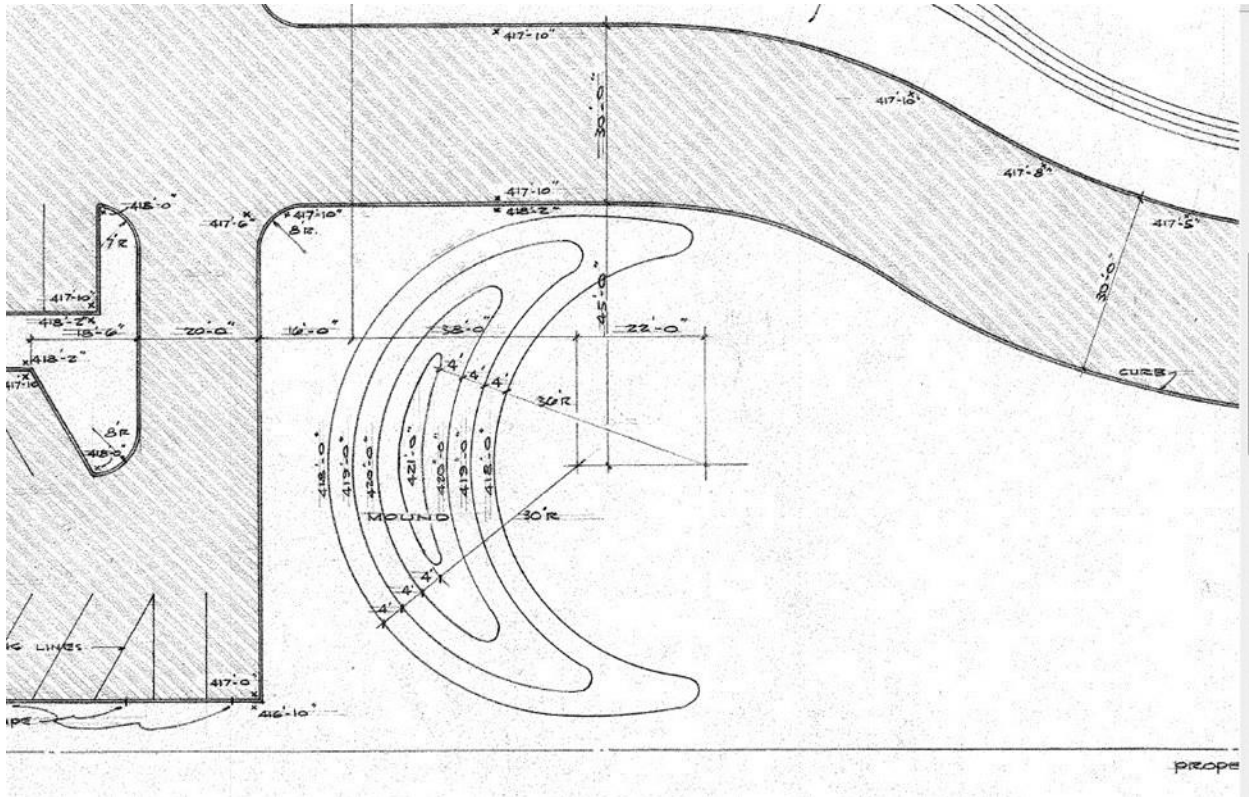
Restore roughly 7,000 square feet of water-efficient landscaping and convert 9,100 square feet of Bermuda grass to water-efficient hybrid turf.



6,970.4 Sq Feet

Clear





### Earthen Mound Measurements

On the earthen mound:

- 2,000 Peruvian Mock Verbian (*Verbena peruviana*), planted 12" on center as groundcover.
- 8 Silverbush (*Convolvulus cneorum*), planted in a gently curving arc atop the mound.
- Fountain grass (*Pennisetum Rupelli*): Two curving arcs planted at inner base of mound, one having five, the other having seven specimens. (Note this specific cultivar of fountaingrass is sterile and not considered invasive.)
- 1 Ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*), salvaged from site, planted at top of mound.

In sandy area:

- 8 Mexican fan palms (*Washingtonia robusta*), planted inside the earthen mound, in two groupings of three each, and another grouping of two. These were salvaged from the site.
- 10 Silverbush (*Convolvulus cneorum*), planted in a curving hedge along the inner northwest base of the earthen mound.
- 1 Ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*) salvaged from site.
- 2 Yucca, salvaged from the site.
- 6 Hedgehog Cactus (*Echinocereus sp.*), planted in clusters of 3 each.
- 3 Spanish Dagger (*Yucca pendula*).

- 5 Aloe, salvaged from the site.
- 3 California barrel cactus (*Ferocactus cylindraceus*), salvaged from the site.

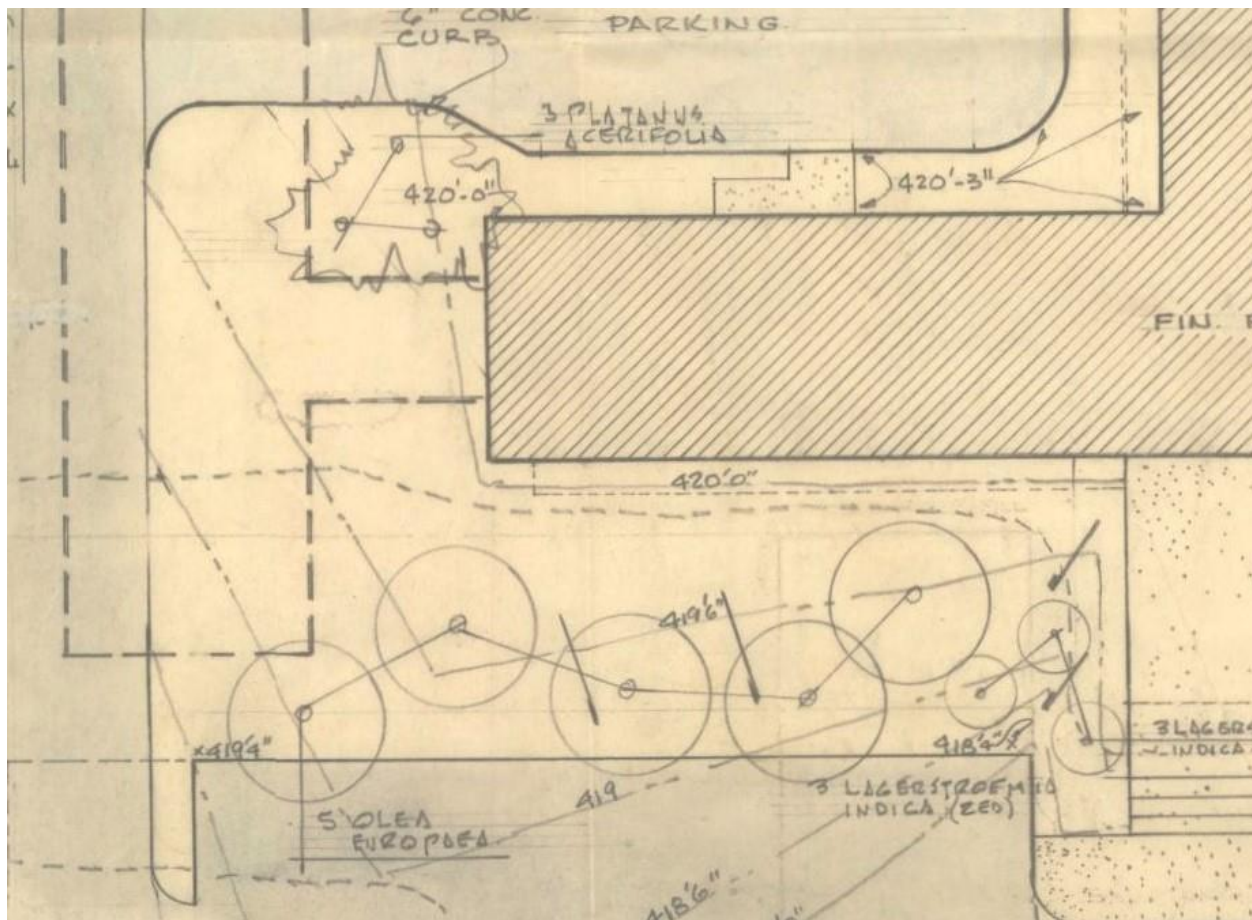
Adjacent to sandy area:

- 4 California fan palms (*Washingtonia filifera*), salvaged from the site.
- 42 Tamarix juniper (*Juniperus sabina* 'Tamariscifolia'), planted a very gently curving arc on the north side of the sandy area, also bordering the lawn.

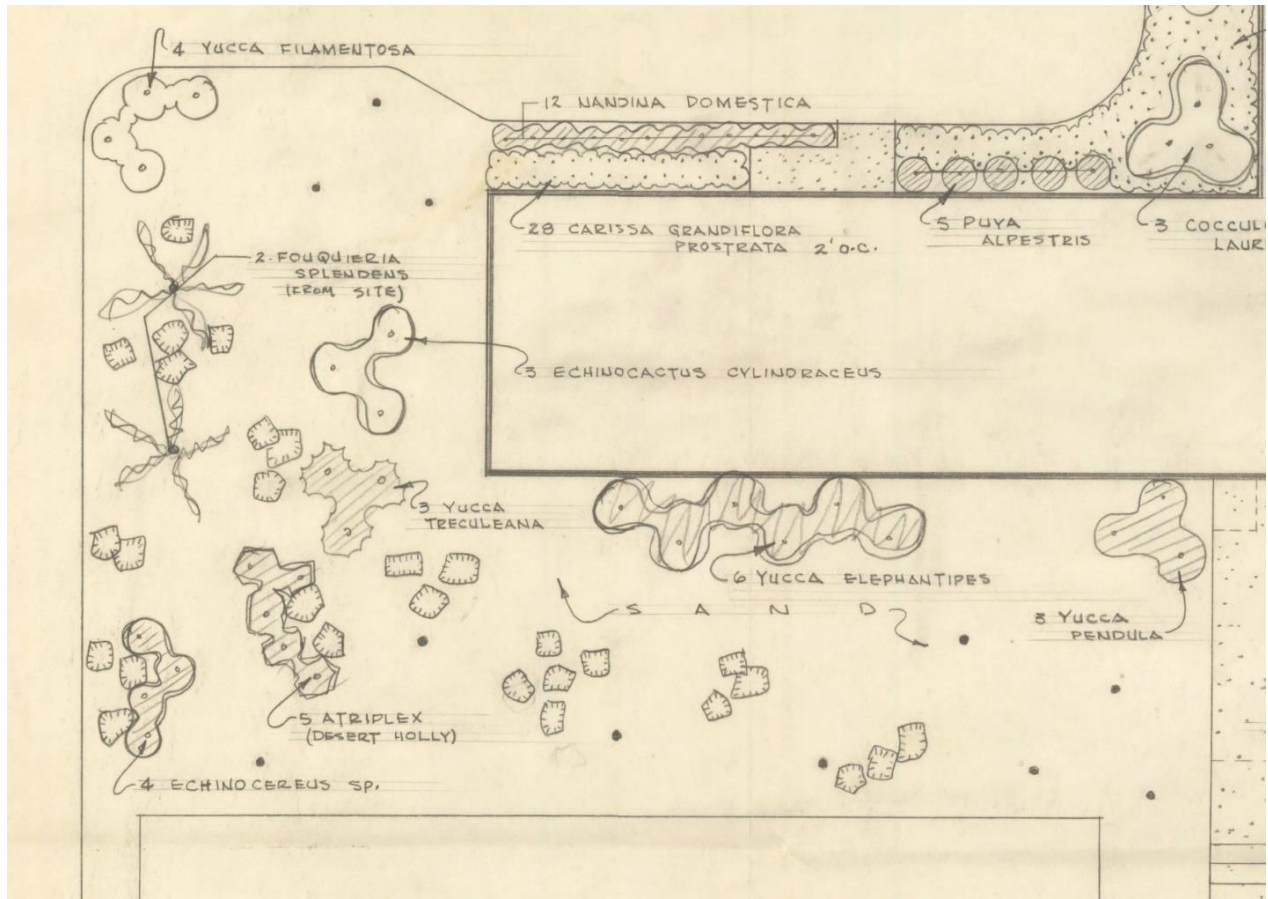
In grass panel along Tahquitz:

- 12 California fan palm (*Washingtonia filifera*), planted in six evenly spaced pairs. These mature 25–35-foot specimens were sourced from Tahquitz Avenue.

## PRIMARY FACADE – WEST:



Trees



### Shrubs and Groundcovers

Planted in sand, with large boulders scattered throughout.

### TREES:

- 5 European olive trees (*Olea Europa*) planted in a staggered, asymmetrical pattern along facade.
- 3 White crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*) planted in a cluster near walkway at building entrance.

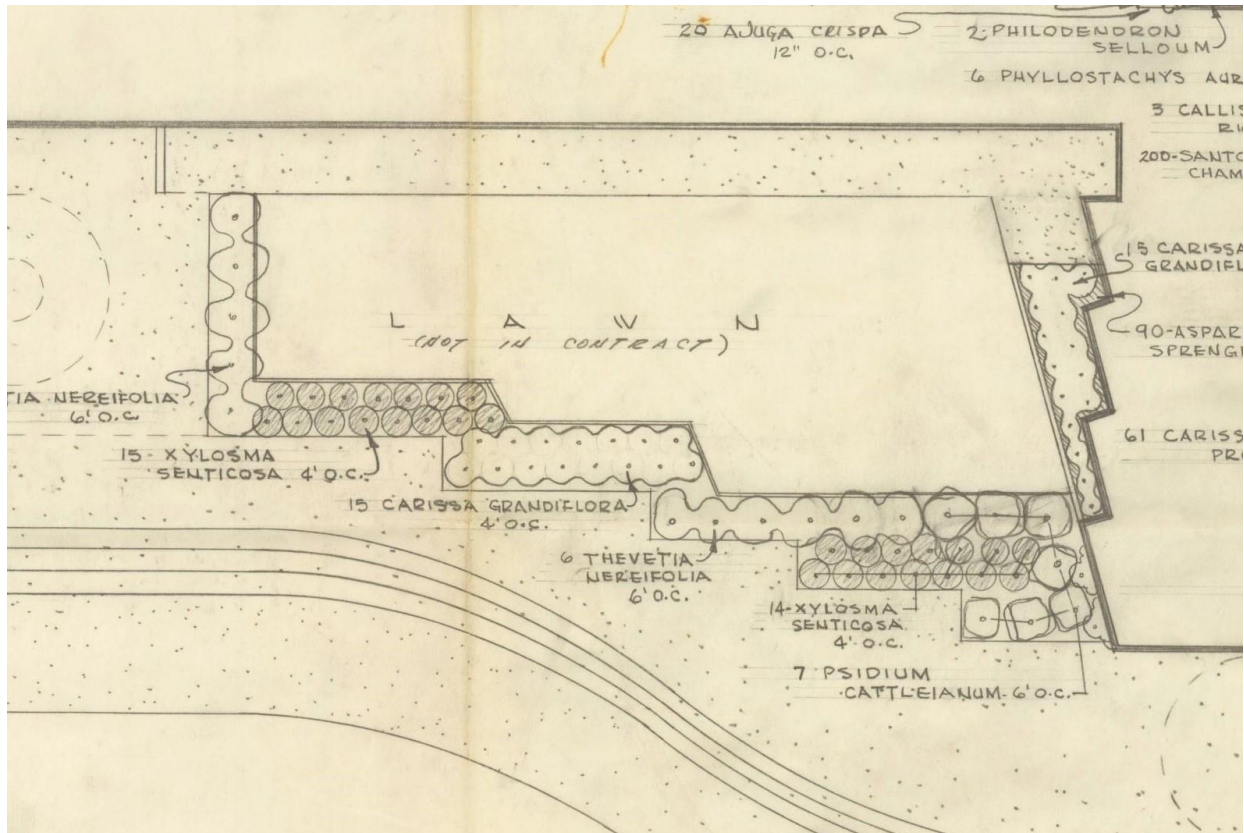
### SHRUBS AND GROUNDCOVER:

Varieties of Yucca, planted in groupings:

- 4 Adam's Needle (*Yucca filamentosa*)
- 3 Spanish Dagger (*Yucca treculeana*)
- 6 Spineless Yucca (*Yucca elephantipes*)
- 3 Soft leaf Yucca (*Yucca pendula*)
- 2 Ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*) salvaged from site
- 5 Barrel cactus (*Echinocactus cylindraceus*)

- 4 Hedgehog cactus (*Echinocereus sp*)
- 5 Desert Holly (*Atriplex hymenelytra*)

## PRIMARY FACADE – EAST:



### Shrubs and groundcovers

Inset in the concrete is an irregular panel of lawn. Enclosing the lawn on three sides are various hedges in groupings:

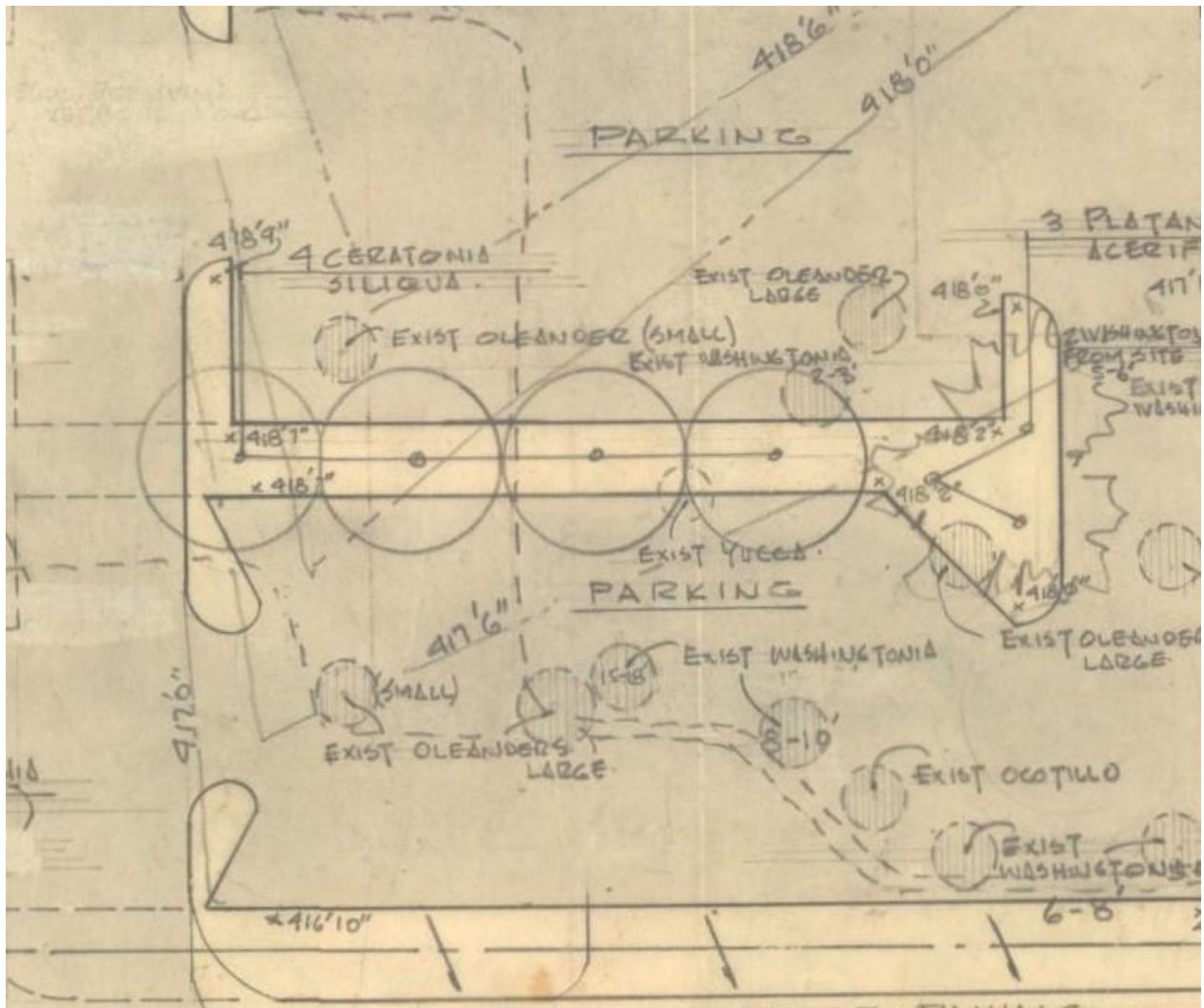
- 5 Yellow Oleander (*Thevetia nereifolia*), planted 6" on center, enclosing the lawn panel on the left.
- 15 Shiny Xylosma (*Xylosma senticosa*), planted 4" on center.
- 15 Natal plum (*Carissa grandiflora*), planted 4" on center.
- 6 additional Yellow oleander, 6" on center.
- 14 additional Shiny Xylosma, planted 4" on center.
- 7 Strawberry guava (*Psidium cattleianum*), planted 6" on center in small "U"-shaped grouping at far right of hedge enclosing lawn.

- 15 additional Natal plum bordering lawn panel at the right, adjacent to staggered walls of City Council chambers. This is underplanted with 90 Asparagus ferns (*Asparagus sprengeri*), planted 2" on center.

On the other side of the staggered wall of City Council chamber:

- 61 Natal plum (*Carissa grandiflora*), planted as a foundation planting.
- 3 Stiff bottlebrush (*Callistemon rigidum*), planted in grouping, underplanted with 200 Lavender cotton (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*), a yellow-flowering evergreen shrub.

## PARKING LOT – WEST:

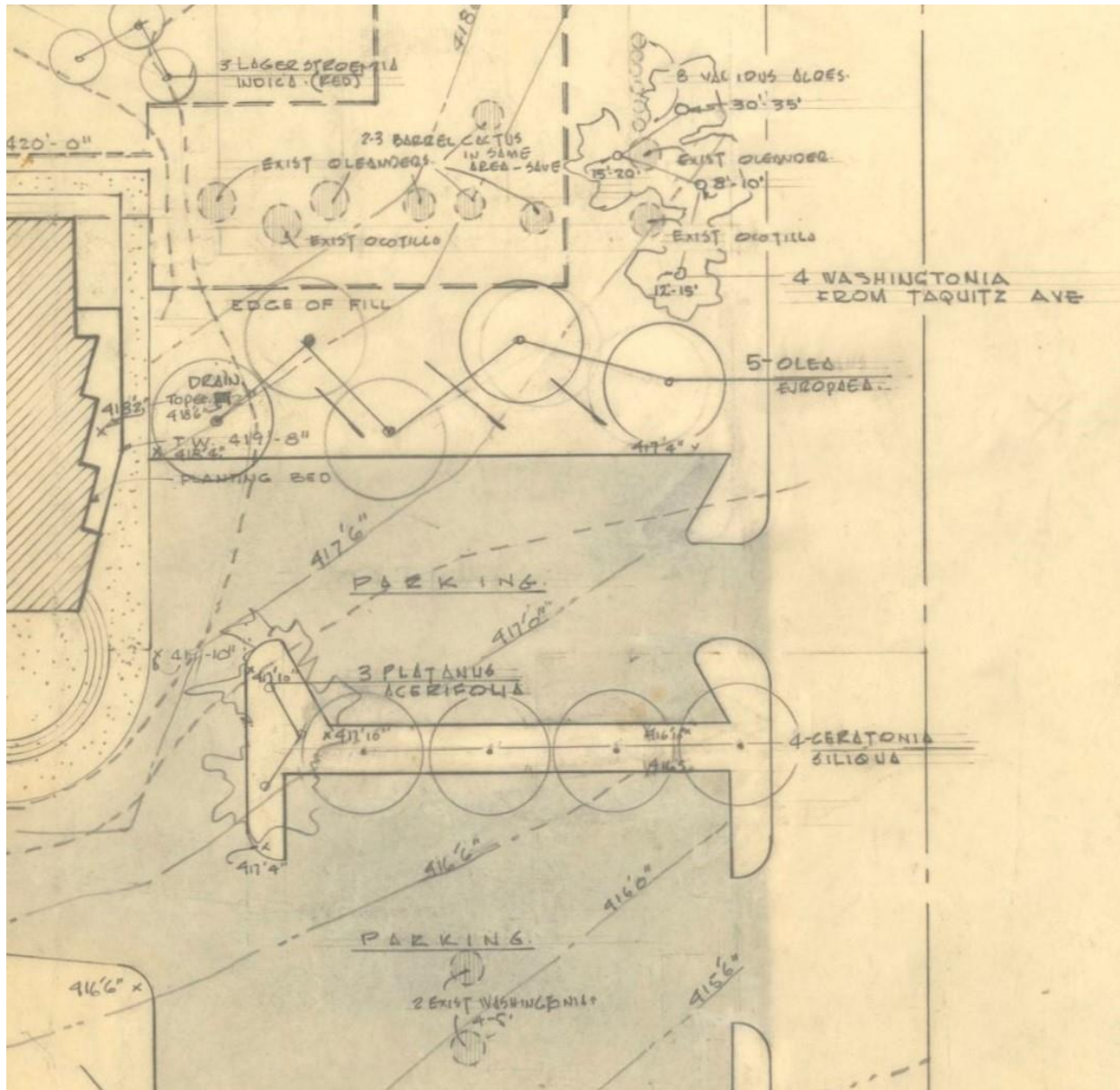


### Trees

- 4 Carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*) planted in a row in the central island's planting bed, providing year-round shade.

- 3 London plane trees (*Platanus acerifolia*), planted in a cluster just east of carob trees.
- 810 Asparagus Fern 'Sprengeri' (*Asparagus setaceus*), planted 2" on center, creating a dense carpet groundcover in the central island's planting bed.
- 120 Tamarix juniper (*Juniperus sabina* 'Tamariscifolia'), planted in a long hedge at the southern edge of the west parking lot.

**PARKING LOT – EAST:**



Trees

In curbed parking strip:

- 4 Carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*) planted in a row in the central island's planting bed, providing year-round shade.
- 3 London plane trees (*Platanus acerifolia*), planted in a cluster just west of carob trees.
- 740 Asparagus Fern 'Sprengeri' (*Asparagus setaceus*), planted 2" on center, creating a dense carpet groundcover in the central island's planting bed.

In sandy landscape bed directly north of parking area:

TREES:

- 5 European olive trees (*Olea Europa*) planted in a staggered, asymmetrical pattern along facade.

SHRUBS AND GROUNDCOVER:

Planted in groupings, with scattered boulders:

- 2 Spineless Yucca (*Yucca elephantipes*)
- 3 Soft leaf Yucca (*Yucca pendula*)
- 4 Barrel cactus (*Echinocactus cylindraceus*)
- 4 Giant spear lily (*Doryanthes palmeri*)
- 3 Aloe (sourced from site)
- 25 White oleander (*Nerium oleander*), planted to enclose this area on two sides.

WEST PERIMETER:

Planted in sand, with boulders scattered throughout.

- 14 Red gum (*eucalyptus rostrata*) planted in a staggered zig-zag pattern
- 15 California fan palm (*Washingtonia filifera*) planted in clusters of two, three, or in single specimens
- 3 Adam's needle Yuccas (*Yucca filamentosa*) planted in cluster; 4 and 3 Spanish dagger (*Yucca traculeana*); 3 Chaparral yucca (*Yucca whipplei*)
- Several single specimens of Ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*) salvaged from site
- Two clusters of 7 Barrel cactus (*Echinocactus cylindraceus*)
- 5 Hedgehog cactus (*Echinocereus sp*)
- 3 Desert Ironwood (*Olneya tesota*)
- 4 Catclaw acacia (*Acacia greggii*)





### Turf Removal Option #4: North side of west wing:

Roughly 5,000 square feet of turf (non-historic) available for conversion to water-efficient landscaping.



5,078 Sq Feet

Clear

### Turf Removal Option #5: North of east wing of City Hall:

Roughly 13,700 square feet of turf north of the east wing (non-historic) available for conversion to water-efficient landscaping.



13,692.8 Sq Feet

Clear

### Turf Removal Option #6: East side parking lot:

Roughly 2,900 square feet of turf east side parking lot (non-historic) Available for conversion to water-efficient landscaping.



2,843.3 Sq Feet

Clear

**Summary of possible opportunities for turf removal and restoration of historic water-efficient landscape areas and new non-historic water-efficient landscape areas:**

- Turf Removal Option #1: East side 10,760 sf (historic & non-historic) restore with water-efficient landscape.
- Turf Removal Option #2: East Modular Garden: 3,355 sf replace Bermuda grass with hybrid turf (historic).
- Turf Removal Option #3: South perimeter 16,110 sf (historic) restore 7,000 sf water-efficient landscape and 9,100 sf remove Bermuda grass and replace with water-efficient hybrid turf.
- Turf Removal Option #4: North side of west wing 5,000 sf (non-historic) convert to water-efficient landscape.
- Turf Removal Option #5 North of east wing of City Hall: 13,700 sf (non-historic) convert to water-efficient landscape.
- Turf Removal Option #6: East side parking lot: 2,900 sf (non-historic) convert to water-efficient landscape.
- 

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TOTAL POSSIBLE AREA OF TURF REMOVAL: APPROXIMATELY 51,825 SQUARE FEET;  
(26,725 sf historic, 25,100 sf non-historic)

# APPENDIXES

## I. AERIAL PHOTOS:



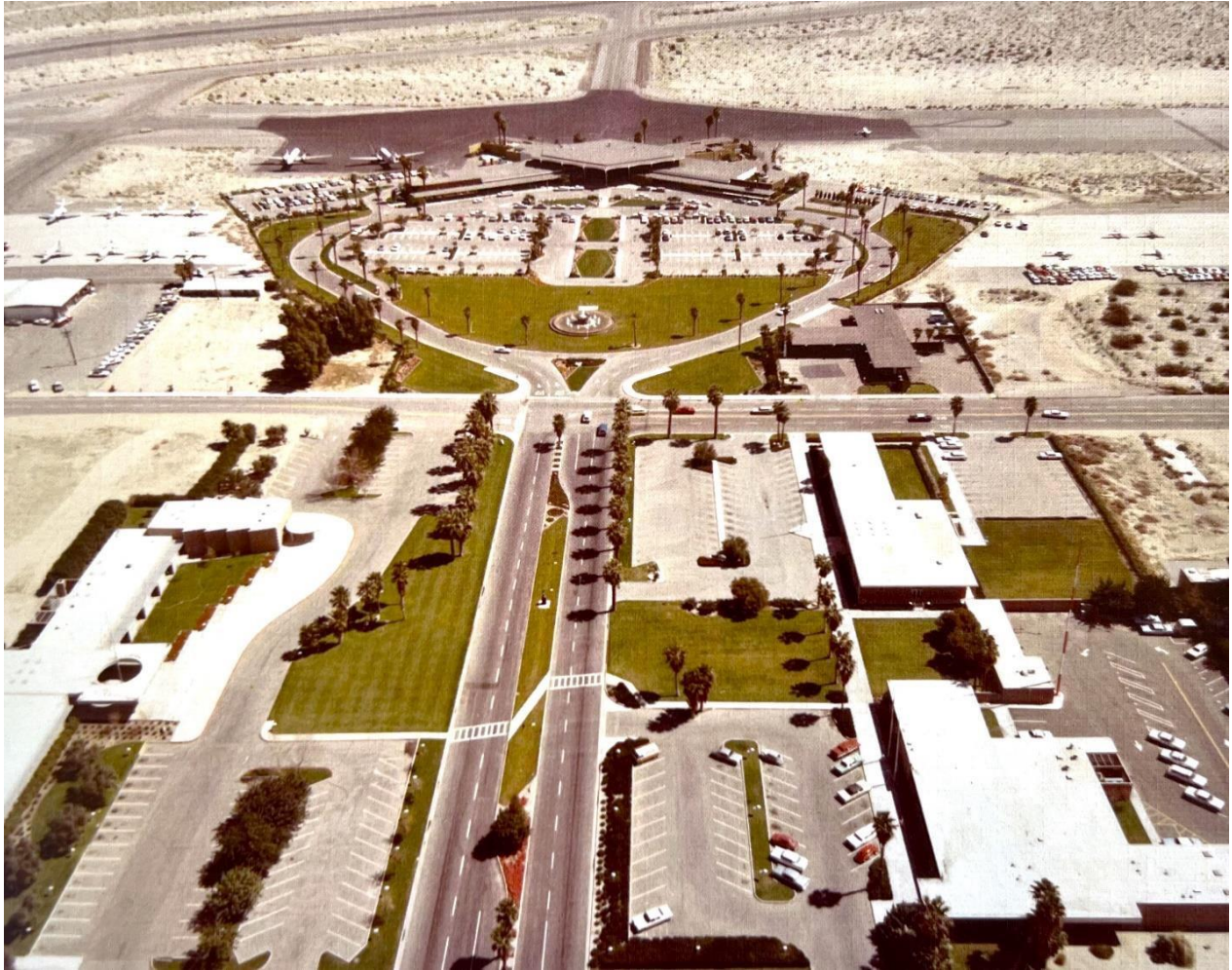
*Flight AXM\_1959, Frame 10W-162. Courtesy of UCSB Library Geospatial Collection.*



December 9, 1965. Flight Universe\_113\_1, Frame 103. Courtesy of UCSB Library Geospatial Collection.



Aerial photograph 1967. Flight AMI\_RIV\_67, Frame 1493. Courtesy of UCSB Library Geospatial Collection.



*Circa 1970 aerial showing landscape at City Hall, as well as Palm Springs Airport (1966, Donald Wexler, architect: David Hamilton, landscape architect) and Tahquitz-McCallum Way (David Hamilton, landscape architect). Courtesy Gary Wexler.*



*Another view of the area from a mid-1960s postcard.*



*2005 Google Maps aerial.*



*Google Maps photograph 2015 showing Frank Bogert statue in lawn area where earthen mound was originally installed. The statue has since been removed.*

## 2. JULIUS SHULMAN PHOTOGRAPHS, 1958. GETTY CONSERVATION INSTITUTE.

All photos Julius Shulman photograph, 1958. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty  
Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10).



*The earthen mound feature at the south perimeter.*





*Viewing the earthen mound from the front entrance to City Hall.*



*The irregularly shaped lawn in the “Modular Garden” in front of City Hall’s east façade.*



*The pairs of California fan palms, planted in a large panel of turf, along the south perimeter. The grass appears light because this photo was taken with an infrared filter to enhance the contrast of the sky.*



*View of the East Parking Lot, facing west.*



*View of front entrance to City Hall, showing flagpole which originally projected through the oculus. The sandy soil of the landscape in front of the Primary Façade – West can be seen directly adjacent to the steps.*



*The grass and palms at the south perimeter.*

3. GARRETT ECKBO KODACHROME SLIDES, CIRCA 1960 (UC BERKELEY)



*View looking west along Tahquitz at the grass and palms of the south perimeter.*



*The dry garden at the Primary Façade – West.*



*Looking toward City Hall from the West Perimeter.*



*Looking at the south perimeter from outside Council Chambers.*



*View of the south perimeter from Tahquitz.*



*The landscape in front of the Primary Façade – West.*



*The landscape at the West Perimeter.*



*The south perimeter.*



*The “Modular Garden” in front of the Primary Façade – East.*



*The drought-tolerant landscape at the Primary Façade – West.*





*View of the shrub hedges enclosing the lawn panel of the "Modular Garden."*



*In this photo of the south perimeter, the earthen mound and desert landscape have already been replaced with more grass.*

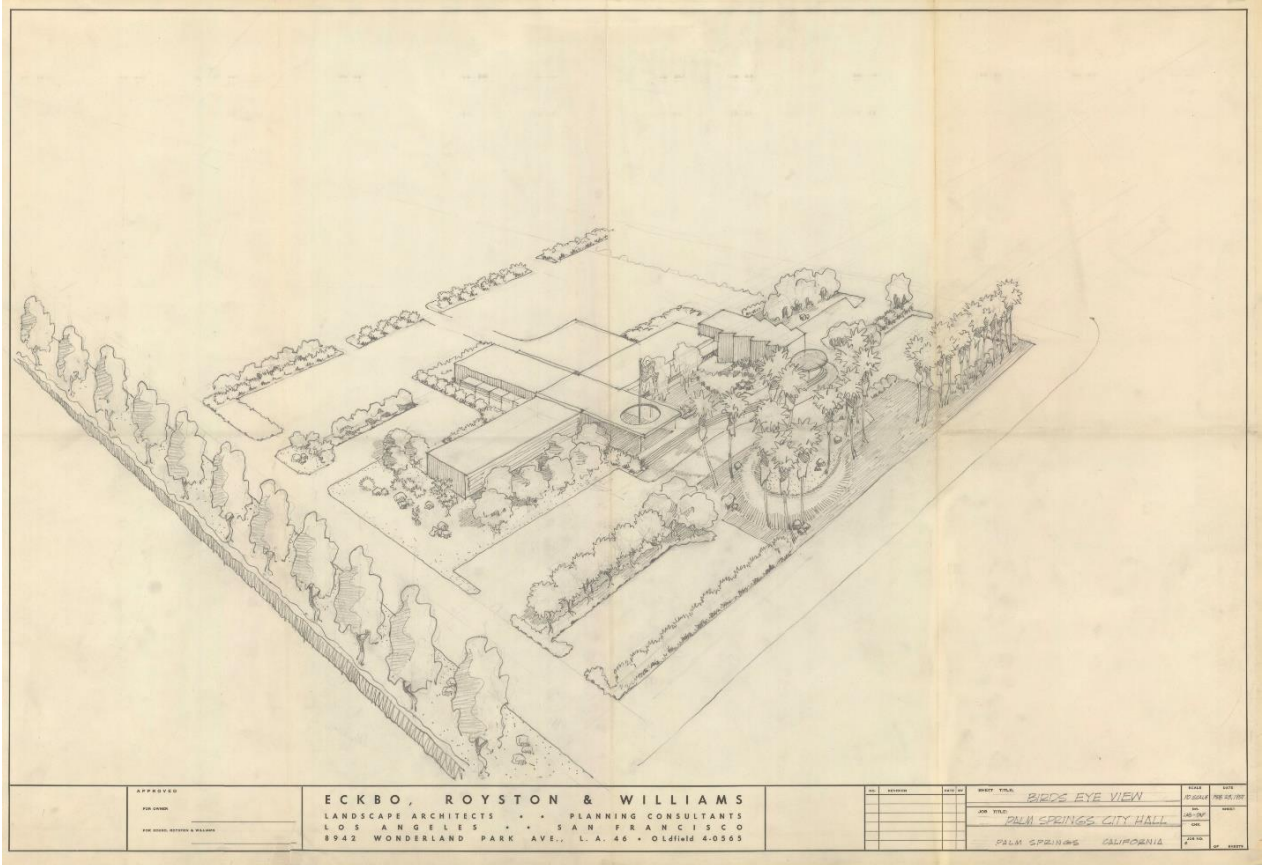


*Two more views showing the area where the earthen mound and desert garden once were.*

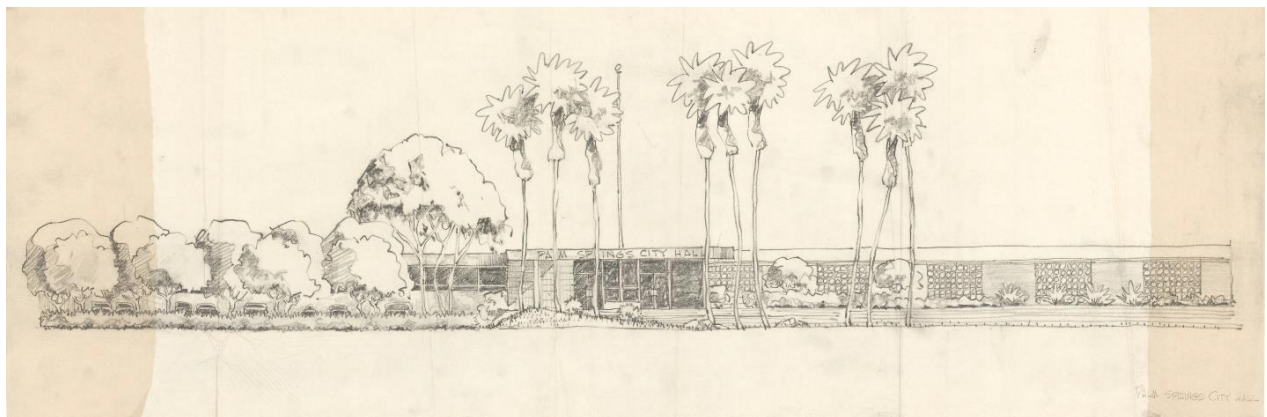


*The desert landscape at the Primary Façade – West.*

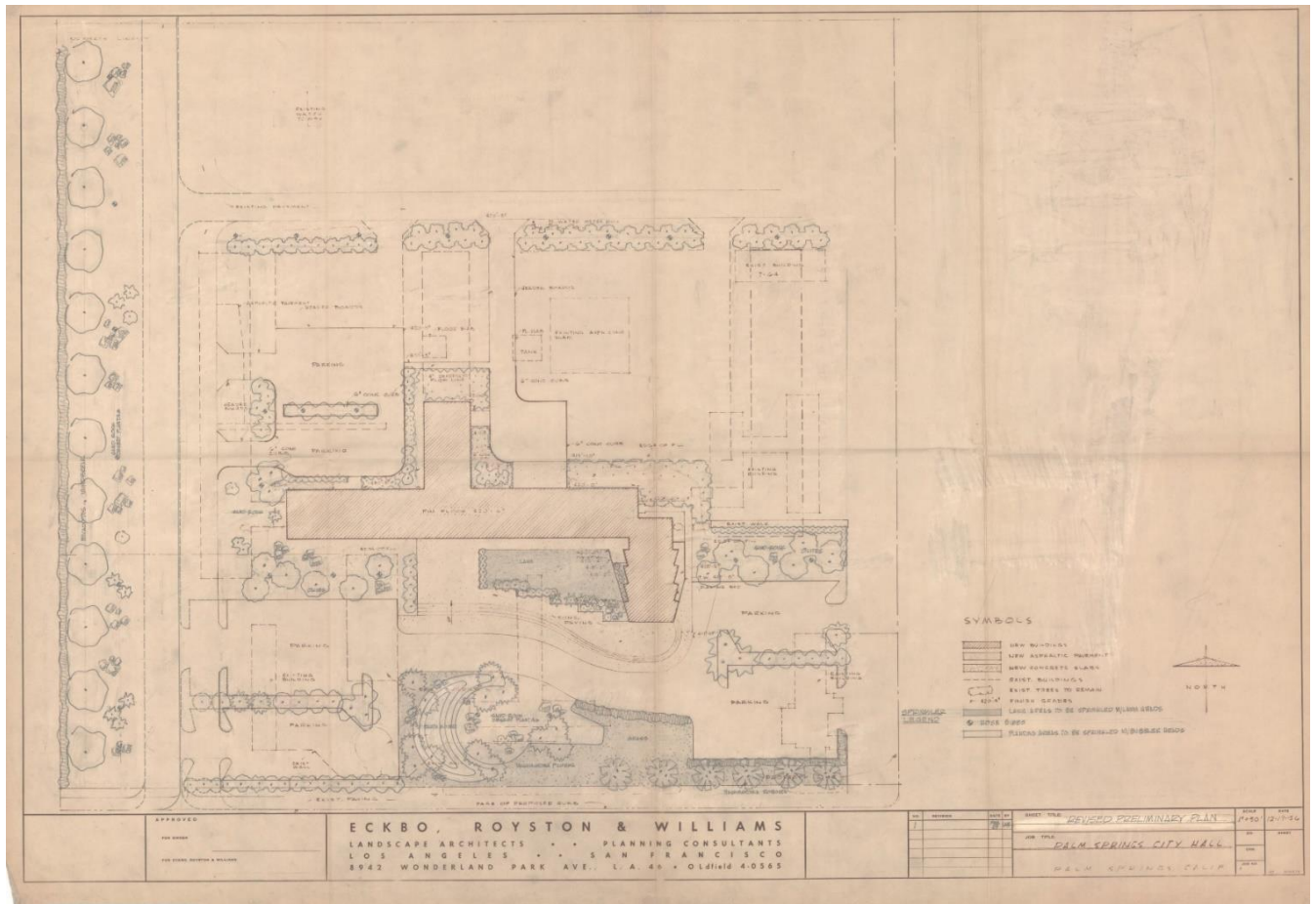
#### 4. FRANCIS DEAN ARCHIVES– CAL POLY POMONA, COLLEGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



*“Birds Eye View,” dated February 28, 1957.*

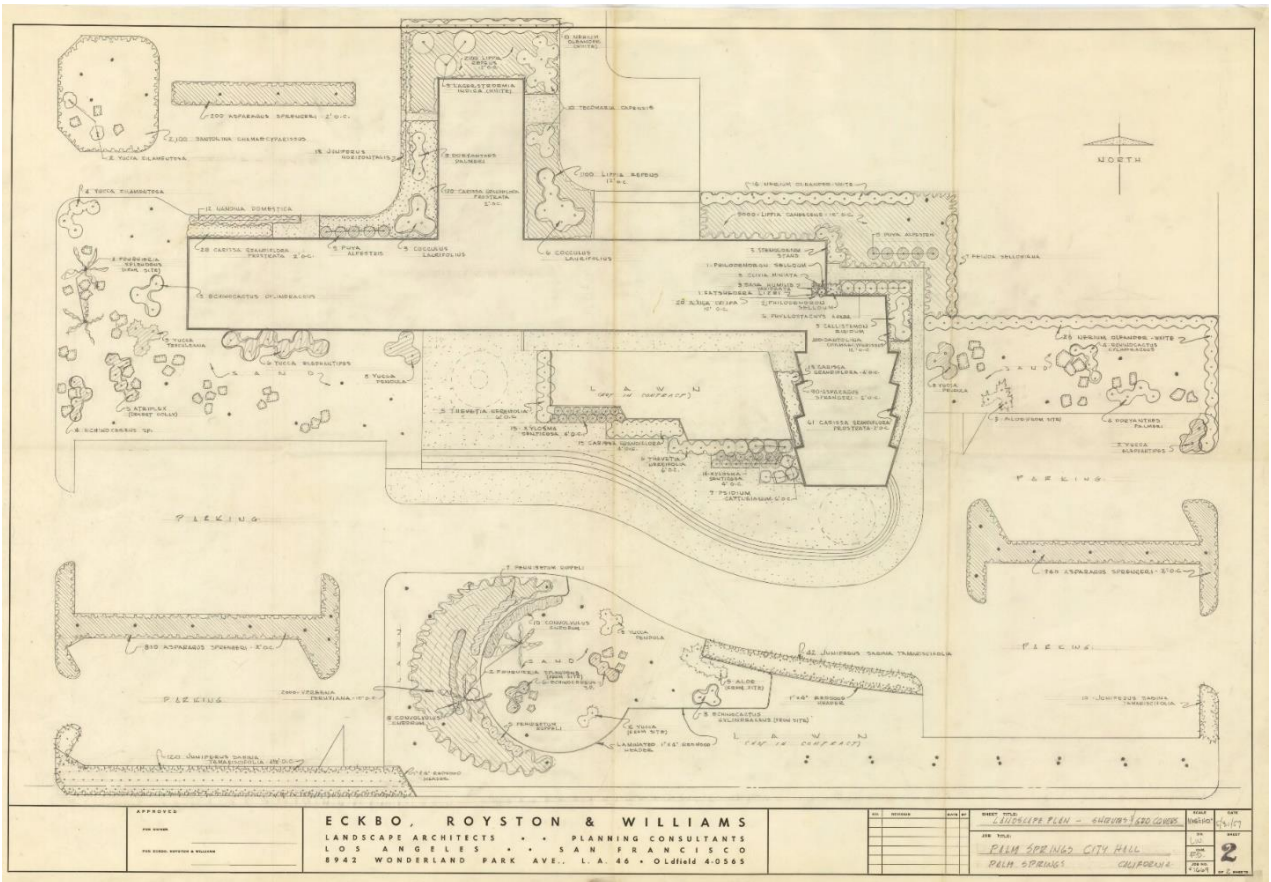


*Rendering of City Hall Landscape, Eckbo, Royston, & Williams.*



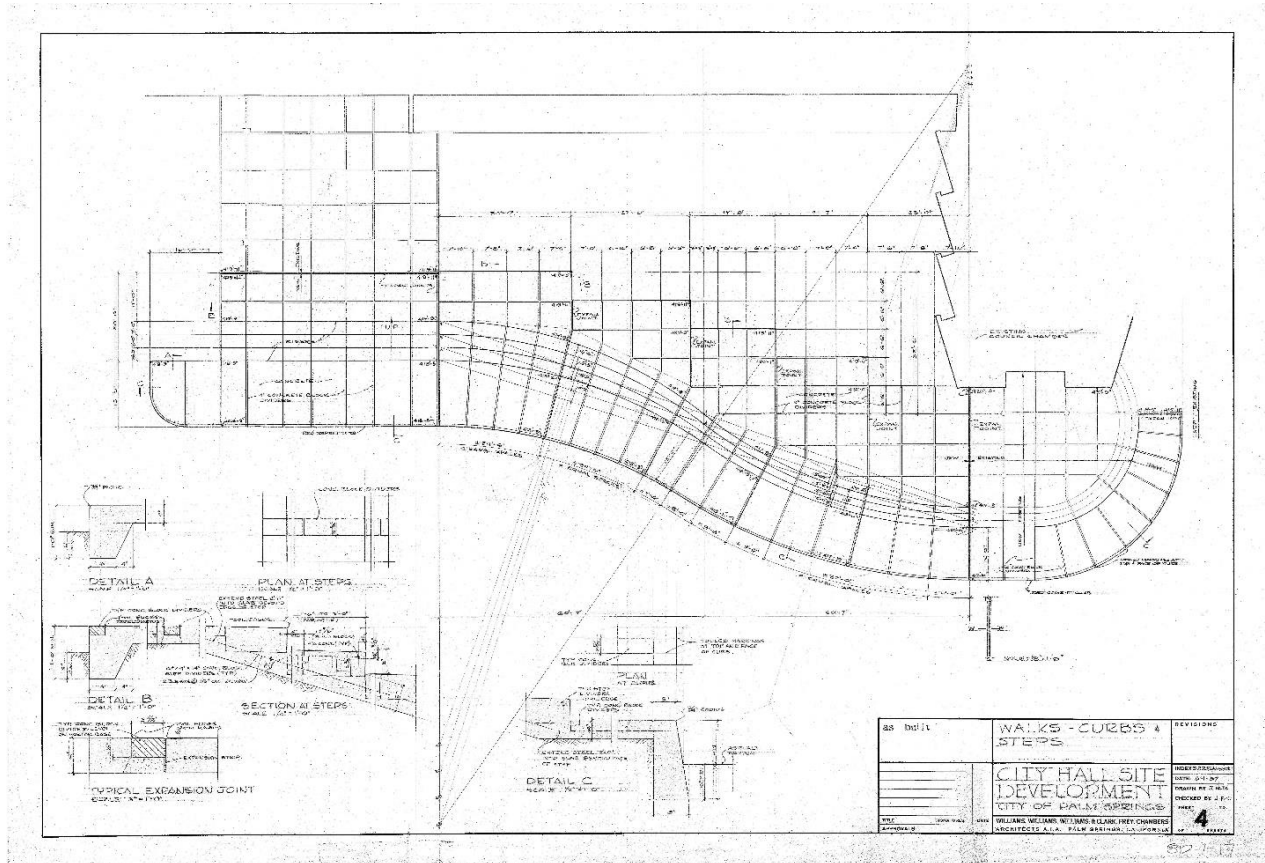
“Revised Preliminary Plan,” dated December 19, 1956.





"Landscape Plan – Shrubs & Groundcovers," dated May 31, 1957.

## 5. MODULAR GARDENS



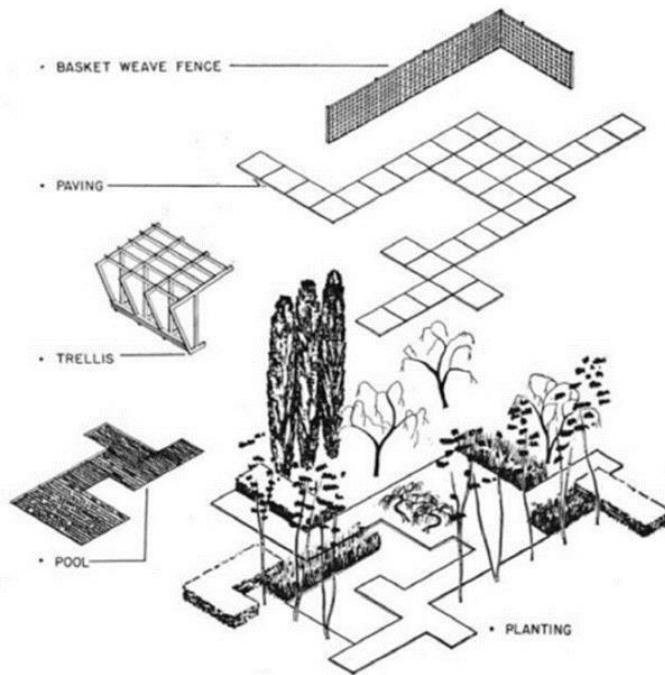
*Modular paving plan for south façade of Palm Springs City Hall, dated June 1, 1957. Courtesy City of Palm Springs.*

At the primary facade – east section of the City Hall Landscape, Eckbo used a device known as a “Modular Garden” for the panel of turf, surrounded by various hedges. The paving in front of City Hall here consisted of a grid of 4’ by 4’ concrete squares, set into expansion joints of exposed aggregate stained a warm pinkish red. To the east of the walkway leading to the front doors, a large panel of turf was created by subtracting concrete squares, creating a large open space with a staggered edge joint toward the south section.

This motif had been used by early Modernist landscape architects starting with Eckbo’s Harvard GSD classmate James C. Rose, who called them “Modular Gardens.” Though he worked primarily on the East Coast, in 1940-41 Rose came to Southern California and created an important early Modernist garden for a house in Pasadena designed by architect Woodbridge Dickinson for his mother. At the rear of the house, Rose installed a large patio of square exposed aggregate paving stones, with redwood expansion joints. Rose subtracted squares in



certain areas, opening those spaces up to create irregularly shaped planting beds and other landscape features.

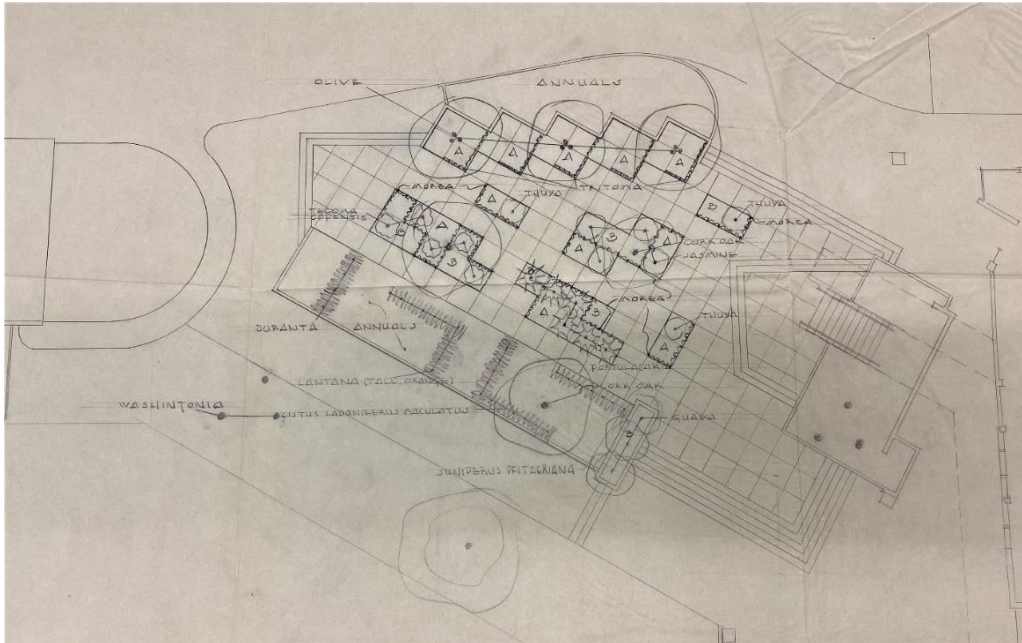


*James C. Rose diagram of the Woodbridge Residence patio's "Modular Garden." From Progressive Architecture, September 1947.*



*Julius Shulman photograph of the 1941 James C. Rose landscape at the Woodbridge Residence. Julius Shulman photograph, 1958. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10).*

Eckbo had used a similar device for the 1948 courtyard patio garden at the Town & Country Center in Palm Springs, designed by Paul R. Williams and A. Quincy Jones. The lawn panel was enclosed on three sides by short hedge rows of varying plant species.



*Eckbo, Royston, & Williams landscape plan for the courtyard at the Town & Country Center, dated February 10, 1948. Courtesy UCB*



*The Modular Garden at the Town & Country Center. Julius Shulman photograph, 1958. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10).*



*Eckbo, Royston, & Williams, landscape architects.  
From left, Garrett Eckbo, Francis Dean, Edward Williams, and Robert Royston.*

## **6. DESIGNER BIOGRAPHIES**

### **Garrett Eckbo**

(From The Cultural Landscape Foundation's "Pioneers of Landscape Design" website. Essay by Dorothee Imbert).

Although born in Cooperstown, New York, to Theodora Munn and Axel Eckbo on November 28, 1910, Garrett Eckbo identified with California.

In 1912, following his parents' divorce, he moved with his mother to Alameda, east of San Francisco, where he grew up with very limited social opportunities. Prospects improved in 1929 with a six-month visit to a wealthy and enterprising paternal uncle in Oslo, Norway, spurring

young Eckbo's ambition to pursue higher education. After a year at Marin Junior College, Eckbo entered the Division of Landscape Design and Floriculture at the University of California at Berkeley, in the fall of 1932. He later credited Professor H. Leland Vaughan, a former student of Thomas D. Church at Ohio State University, as being influential in his professional development. Vaughan and the Great Depression years impressed Berkeley landscape students with the need for pragmatic and reductive design, even though their projects rarely strayed from adaptations of historical styles, as witnessed in Eckbo's 1934 design entitled, *Estate in the Manner of Louis XIV*. Upon graduating in June 1935, Eckbo moved south. Employed by Armstrong Nurseries in Ontario, California, for a year, he produced approximately one hundred garden plans and acquired a wide knowledge of Southern California plants.

A scholarship to Harvard University's Graduate School of Design allowed him to move beyond the service industry. In the fall of 1936, Eckbo drove east to enroll in the Department of Landscape Architecture. Soon disillusioned with the school's traditional curriculum, Eckbo questioned the legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted and the program's reliance on Henry V. Hubbard and Theodora Kimball's *Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design*, a textbook which he condemned as formulaic and overly aesthetic. While the landscape department conformed to a Beaux Arts tradition and the formal/informal dialectic, the architecture department at Harvard was undergoing a complete transformation under the leadership of Walter Gropius, who had joined the faculty in 1937. Eckbo began to define his own modernist theory by establishing connections among landscape design, architecture, and art. He collaborated with architecture students on projects such as a recreation center and park in underprivileged South Boston. He announced his beliefs that "what is good for the rich is good for the poor," and that design required a multidisciplinary approach. He further explored the relationships between private gardens and public space, and urban and suburban design, in both his master's thesis project, *Contempoville* — a superblock with a central common — and "Small Gardens in the City." The publication of the latter in the architectural periodical *Pencil Points* in September 1937 brought him notoriety at home and abroad.

Eckbo quickly understood the necessity of advancing his ideas in writing. He joined forces with fellow students and modernism champions Dan Kiley and James Rose to produce the three-part seminal text "Landscape Design in the Urban Environment," "Landscape Design in the Rural Environment," and "Landscape Design in the Primeval Environment" which appeared in *Architectural Record* in May and August 1939 and February 1940, respectively. These articles argued for collaborative, cohesive design, and planning, from city garden to natural preserve, stressing the interdependency of such environments.

On September 19, 1937, he married Arline Williams, the sister of his future business partner. Having received a master's in landscape architecture degree in 1938, Eckbo took a series of project-based jobs, each lasting six weeks. He worked on the Federal Building for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition at the office of Kastner and Berla in Washington, DC

While in Washington, Eckbo designed prototypical open spaces for housing projects at the request of Frederick Gutheim of the United States Housing Authority. In addition, he conceived several unbuilt landscape schemes for Norman Bel Geddes' General Motors pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair in New York.

Having returned to California, Eckbo worked for the San Francisco office of the New Deal's Farm Security Administration from 1939 to 1942, where he designed environments for migrant-worker camps across the valleys of California, Washington, and Texas. Collaborating with architects Vernon DeMars and Burton Cairns and landscape architect Francis Violic, Eckbo would further his spatial explorations and provide shelter at the human scale within the expansive agricultural landscape. At Tulare and Ceres, in the San Joaquin Valley, his grand and richly varied planting schemes offered shade, wind protection, and a sense of place for a transient population. With the same group of designers, Eckbo founded Telesis, an organization that focused on the impact of development in the Bay Area. From 1942 to 1945, he participated in the World War II effort by contributing landscape designs for defense housing in the San Francisco region.

In the postwar era, Eckbo founded a firm with Robert Royston and Edward Williams. Eckbo Royston and Williams soon expanded their scope of work from residential gardens to suburban parks (the 1949 Standard Oil Rod and Gun Club in Richmond and 1957 Mitchell Park in Palo Alto) and planned communities (Ladera on the San Francisco Peninsula). From 1946, Eckbo headed the firm in the Los Angeles area with the assistance of Francis Dean. The early years were marked by a multitude of garden designs for the wealthy and the more modest, and by collaborations with modernist architects on several developments. His unbuilt 1946 to 1949 design for Community Homes in Reseda remains exemplary in its sophisticated use of vegetation as a tool for structuring neighborhoods. Other designs included the semi-urban Park Planned Homes from 1946 to 1947; Mar Vista Housing in 1948; both with Gregory Ain; and the dramatically canyon-sited Crestwood Hills in 1948 and Wonderland Park in 1950.

In 1950, Eckbo coalesced his ideas in *Landscape for Living*, defining the modern discipline of landscape architecture for his professional peers and a broader readership. A quintessential twentieth-century text in a field that has shied away from theory, *Landscape for Living* stands apart with Christopher Tunnard's *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* (1938, 1948) and Ian McHarg's *Design with Nature* (1969) as remarkable attempts to define the field in relation to planning and the environment. Eckbo illustrated its theory, defined as "a generalization of social experience," with his own projects and those of the firm. He reiterated the call for an organized and planned landscape, from garden to nature, a designed landscape that would stress the relations between human and land without apologizing for the human presence.

Eckbo continued to balance design and writing in his mature years. He taught in the School of Architecture at the University of Southern California from 1948 to 1956. His widely publicized

1956 to 1959 Forecast Garden, commissioned by the Aluminum Company of America, tested aluminum as a spatial and decorative force in landscape design. The year 1956 also saw the publication of *The Art of Home Landscaping*, a garden and site planning manual aimed at a popular audience. Eckbo's innovative design for the pedestrian blocks of the Fulton Street Mall in Fresno, developed with Victor Gruen in the early 1960s, proposed an urban alternative to shopping centers. In 1962, Eckbo began a twenty-year design and planning process for the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque. He published *Urban Landscape Design* in 1964 and *The Landscape We See* in 1969.

His firm continued to evolve as well. In 1958, Eckbo Royston and Williams divided into Royston Hanamoto and Mayes, and Eckbo Dean and Williams. In 1964, Donald Austin became a partner and the firm was recast as Eckbo, Dean, Austin and Williams, later known as EDAW. Ultimately, the laboratory for progressive landscape design with a focus on the relationship between individual and community grew into a multinational planning corporation. Eckbo returned to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1963 to head the Department of Landscape Architecture at Berkeley until 1969. He received the Medal of Honor from the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1975; he retired as Professor Emeritus in 1978, and left EDAW a year later.

In an attempt to start anew, Eckbo formed Eckbo Kay Associates with Kenneth Kay in 1979 with whom he collaborated until 1983. During the final years of practice, Garrett Eckbo and Associates addressed the scales of planning and garden design, having come full circle. His involvement in writing and debating the state and future of landscape architecture never abated. Eckbo still believed in landscape design as an agent of societal change, publishing *People in the Landscape* two years before his death on May 14, 2000, in Oakland, California.

## **Francis H. Dean**

(From the Cultural Landscape Foundation's "Pioneers of Landscape Design" website).

Born in Concord, California, Dean spent much of his childhood on a family farm. During World War II he served as a pilot in the US Army Air Corps, once crash-landing his plane on an Italian farmstead after engaging the enemy. He studied landscape architecture under H. Leland Vaughan and Robert Royston at the University of California, Berkeley, graduating in 1948 (he would earn his master's degree in landscape architecture in 1981). Upon receiving his undergraduate degree, Dean was invited to join the firm Eckbo, Royston, & Williams, becoming a partner in 1953. After changes in partnership and with the addition of Don Austin, the firm was renamed Eckbo, Dean, Austin and Williams in 1964, with Dean eventually directing the offices in Irvine, California. The firm's official moniker became EDAW in 1974.

During his tenure with the firm, Dean worked on a wide range of projects, from residential gardens to university campuses and regional plans. In 1955 he was the landscape architect for

San Fernando Gardens, a public housing project comprising 450 garden apartments in the Pacoima neighborhood of Los Angeles. By the 1960s Dean and his firm were at the forefront of sustainable planning, working on groundbreaking large-scale projects, such as the California Urban Metropolitan Open Space Plan for the State of California. Dean took the leading role on the Santa Ana River /Santiago Creek Greenbelt Study, completed in 1971. In 1976 he began teaching part-time at the Department of Landscape Architecture at the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona), moving to full-time status two years later. He was named a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1978 and a Distinguished Professor in the Cal Poly Pomona Department of Landscape Architecture in 1990. In 1995 Dean received the Richard J. Neutra Award for Professional Excellence from the Cal Poly Pomona Department of Architecture. He died at the age of eighty in his home on Vashon Island, near Seattle. His professional papers are repositied at the special collections archives of the College of Environmental Design at Cal Poly Pomona.

## ECKBO IN PALM SPRINGS

Eckbo, Royston, & Williams created several landscapes in the Coachella Valley. In Eckbo's finding aid, besides the Koerner Residence, the following projects are listed. It is unknown whether all were built:

- Tom May Residence, 1947. William F. Cody architect.
- Town & Country Center, 1948. Paul R. Williams and A. Quincy Jones, architects. (Built using a modified design; extant).
- Preston Higgins Residence, 1950. E. Stewart Williams architect. (built, demolished).
- Colonia #1 & #2, 1955. Houses adjacent to Thunderbird Country Club. (There are ads for this project in *Desert Sun*, not sure if the Eckbo plans were installed).
- Thunderbird North Golf Club, 1955.
- C. E. Needham Residence, 1955-1956.
- Palm Springs City Hall, 1956. (Built, landscape altered).
- Desert Holiday House, 1956. Palmer & Krisel, architects (project was renamed Ocotillo Lodge).
- Sidney Charney Residence, 1956-58. Wexler & Harrison, architects. Tamarisk Country Club. (Built, extant).
- A. J. Coffey Residence, 1960. (unknown if built. Coffey was remodeling a house at 1630 S Calle Marcus in Deepwell Estates in 1960).
- Birdie Lyman Residence, 1960.
- Desert Highland Park, 1968. (built).

- Russell Garner Residence, William F. Cody, architect. (Palm Desert, built, current condition unknown).
- G. E. Karlen Residence, E. Stewart Williams, architect. (Unknown).
- Kaufmann House restoration, 1996. Collaborator: Marmol & Radziner (restoration architects).

## **EARTHEN MOUNDS AT THE PRESTON HIGGINS RESIDENCE**

(From the Koerner Residence Class I Historic Resource Nomination by Steven Keylon)

At the Preston Higgins residence, designed in 1950 by architect E. Stewart Williams, Eckbo used sculptural mounds of earth, covered primarily in white alyssum, as a device to add interest and break up the large panels of turf. They also were meant to relate to the San Jacinto Mountains, which were always looming over the landscapes. Other Eckbo signatures used in both the Koerner and Higgins gardens were the shallow steel tank ends used as planters and circular concrete pads. The initial landscape was designed in 1950. In 1953, Eckbo returned to create a design for the front of the house.

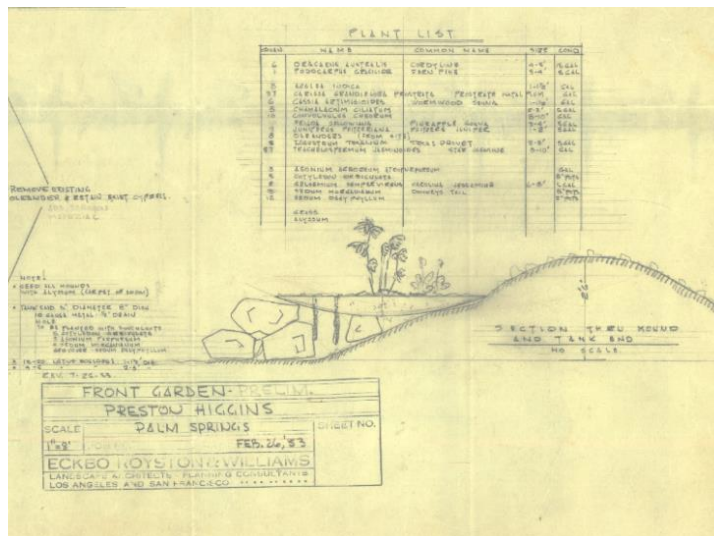


*Eckbo's sculpted earthen mounds at the Higgins Garden. William Aplin photograph, courtesy Eckbo archives, UC Berkeley.*





William Aplin photograph of the Higgins Garden, courtesy Eckbo archives at UC Berkeley. Though concrete signatures are widely conceived as a William Krisel signature in Palm Springs today, Krisel's Professor of landscape architecture at USC was Garrett Eckbo, and it is Eckbo's influence that resulted in Krisel's similar design feature



Landscape architect Garrett Eckbo's drawing for the earth mounds and tank ends at the Higgins Garden. Courtesy Eckbo archives at UC Berkeley.



*At Palm Springs City Hall, 1957, Eckbo used sculpted earth mounds to enclose an area in front of the structure devoted to desert plants. The mounds were planted with verbena. Julius Shulman photograph, © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10).*



*At Palm Springs City Hall, the median between the street and parking lot featured native desert plants, with earth mounds. Julius Shulman photograph, © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10).*



*The earthen mounds, covered in flowering color, are an important element of the landscape of the Leon and Thea Koerner Residence in Palm Springs' Deepwell Estates. Julius Shulman photograph. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10).*

## **Notes on Koerner Garden and the Role of Garrett Eckbo as Designer**

By JC Miller (For the Koerner Residence Class I Historic Resource Nomination)

Garrett Eckbo's career, perhaps more accurately his life's work, was multifaceted. While he is widely known for his success as a landscape architect, he was also an educator, writer, and theorist. His prominence in the field of postwar landscape architecture is such that current discussions often describe him as "the father of modern landscape architecture."<sup>12</sup> A survey of his legacy, both the built and published work, indicates that he considered his writings as important as his designs. In both *Landscape for Living* (1950) and the subsequent *The Art of Home Landscaping*

(1956) he provides his audience with a thoughtful, thorough, and detailed guide to the principles of landscape design. Beyond “how-to” instructions, however, Eckbo’s writing is, in his own words, a “why-to” of landscape architecture. This is immensely helpful for the retrospective analysis of his built work.

In 1955, when Eckbo Royston and Williams (ERW) was engaged to design a garden for the soon-to-be-built seasonal home of Mr. and Mrs. Leon Koerner in Palm Springs, Eckbo’s design practice was thriving. ERW’s Los Angeles office opened in 1948. It was in a studio building adjacent to Eckbo’s Wonderland Park home in the Hollywood Hills. The office was busy with residential commissions and an increasing number of larger and more complex commercial and institutional projects.<sup>13</sup> Working with Eckbo in the Wonderland Park studio was Francis Dean, who had joined ERW in 1948 after graduating from the University of California, Berkeley’s Landscape Architecture program, where he had studied under Eckbo’s ERW partner Robert Royston. Dean became a partner in ERW in 1953.<sup>14</sup> Given Eckbo’s divided schedule during this period—he was concurrently teaching in the School of Architecture at USC —Dean likely functioned as the managing principal in the Los Angeles studio.

The issue of authorship often arises when individuals work as partners in the same office. The ERW office was a collaborative environment and without doubt, Eckbo and Dean worked together on the Koerner project. During this period, Eckbo and Royston often traveled to meet each other, meeting mid-state, to stay informed on current projects in the north and south offices.<sup>15</sup> Francis Dean certainly had a prominent role in the Southern California office and the Koerners’ garden project in 1955, but Eckbo’s primary role in the project’s design is obvious. Eckbo’s writing in *Landscape for Living*, the book that preceded the work, and *The Art of Home Landscaping* that followed it support this assertion. A review of Eckbo’s design drawings,

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<sup>12</sup> Los Angeles Conservancy Website: <https://www.laconservancy.org/architects/Garrett-eckbo>

<sup>13</sup> Timeline of Eckbo, Royston, & Williams office – *Modern Public Gardens*, 25

<sup>14</sup> Cultural Landscape Foundation – Pioneers: <https://www.tclf.org/francis-h-dean>

<sup>15</sup> Op.cit – citation 2

construction detailing, and the built features of the 1950-53 Higgins garden in Palm Springs reinforce the point.

The large shade structure that encloses the west end of the swimming pool in the Koerner Garden directly reflects ideas put forth by Eckbo in his published work and confirms his role in the garden's design. At some point in the past, prior homeowners removed this critical garden feature. Rebuilding it was a high priority of the recently completed garden restoration project. It was rebuilt from period photographs because the original construction details for the shade structure were not available for reference.

In *Art of Home Landscaping*, Eckbo describes in detail his ideas about the general nature of enclosure and the specifics of wood construction as well as the view from the house to the garden. His explanation of these concepts could be a specific description of the Koerner structure. Images supporting the text show arbors and pergolas very similar in appearance to the Koerner structure. The images illustrate Eckbo's ideas on structural geometry, the control of garden views, and the directional function of built elements in the garden.

Also rebuilt as a part of the restoration project was exposed aggregate paving beneath the shade structure. No archival reference material was available for the material specification, so a close examination of period photos guided the restoration work. Historic photos revealed a variety of sizes in the decorative aggregate, an Eckbo technique.<sup>16</sup> In *The Art of Home Landscaping* he states that a wide variety of decorative aggregates might be used and that the "proportions must be determined by experiment."<sup>17</sup> Demolition brought to light pieces of the original patio. Those fragments provided physical reference to match the aggregate and concrete color (white) of the original patios in the restoration.

When planning for the garden restoration project began in 2019, the geometric planting areas adjacent to the house and flagstone patios and the sculptural earth mounds along the north edge and at the northwest corner of the garden were no longer existent. Recreating and replanting these areas was a high priority for the garden restoration project. The visual tension between Eckbo's signature angled geometries and the flowing and organic forms of the planted mounds was a significant part of the original garden. This subtle relationship of geometry and form was also a strong indicator of Eckbo's primary role in the authorship of the design.

In *Garrett Eckbo Modern Landscape for Living* (1997), Marc Treib and Dorothee Imbert explore in detail Eckbo's art-inspired compositional strategies. "In gardens that can be counted in the high

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<sup>16</sup> Recorded conversation between JC Miller and Robert Royston in 2006 in which Royston describes Eckbo's fondness for "pebbly concrete" and his preference to be on site when concrete was poured to hand cast the aggregate when possible. Royston further elaborated that Eckbo used a range of aggregates that varied in color and size.

<sup>17</sup> Eckbo, Garrett. *The Art of Home Landscaping*, 100.

hundreds, if not thousands, Eckbo investigated and reinvestigated the play among space, activity, geometry, climate, and vegetation.”<sup>18</sup>

A comparison of the Koerner plan with Eckbo’s drawings for the Higgins garden 1950-53, an earlier project also in Palm Springs, follows Treib and Imbert’s thesis of investigation and reinvestigation. The Higgins plan details mounds very similar in size, form, and arrangement to those found in the later Koerner Garden. The similarity between the two projects continues beyond the earthwork, to planting design. In both projects, we see Eckbo placing Ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*) as vertical accents on the crest of mounds. Further similarities are found in tree planting on the mounds. In the Higgins garden, he specified the relocation of an existing Chinese elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*) to the top of a newly created planted mound. For the Koerner Garden he called for California pepper (*Schinus molle*), a tree of similar character and form, to be placed in the same way.

A comparison of the planting plans and plant lists prepared for both the Higgins and Koerner gardens reveals further similarities and significant duplication, not only in the various species called for but in the way in which plants were to be used. For example, both plans include a low, dark, and directional line of Pfitzer’s juniper (*Juniperus pfitzeriana*) in the front garden. This indicates a consistency in design intent and suggests that, at minimum, Eckbo’s earlier plan for Higgins was a template for the later Koerner plan.

The planting plan developed for the Koerner Garden restoration relied heavily on the original plan. Fortunately, the 2019 garden still included many of the trees planted originally. Specifically, the Mission olives (*Olea europea*), Blue palms (*Brahea clara*, previously known as *Erythea armata*), and fan palms (*Washingtonia robusta* and *Washingtonia filifera*). Due to poor condition, the original California fan palms (*Washingtonia filifera*) on the southeast corner of the pool were replaced with specimen plants in kind. Important structure-defining plants from the original plant list were restored to the garden wherever possible, including the Ocotillo and California pepper tree mentioned previously.

The sculptural mounds in the first iteration of the Koerner Garden were planted heavily with several varieties of showy annuals, including Sweet Alyssum (*Lobelia maritima*) which was also the cover plant used in the Higgins garden. Historic photos of the garden made by Julius Shulman demonstrate the dramatic effect of this mass color planting strategy. This approach to planting reflected the part-time seasonal occupancy of postwar homes in Palm Springs. While lush and colorful in winter and spring, the planted mounds would have been bare through summer and fall. Planting for the restored garden strives to replicate the effect of the initial large-scale color planting with a variety of flowering perennials that persist year-round.

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<sup>18</sup> Eckbo, Garrett. *Modern Landscape for Living*, Berkeley Design Books/William Stout Publisher, 59-67.

Both the Koerner and earlier Higgins gardens include industrial boiler tank ends as large shallow planters. This was a favorite device used by Eckbo and his partners. A casual survey of both *Landscape for Living* and *The Art of Home Landscaping* shows that many early ERW gardens included tank ends as planters and fountains, so it is not surprising to find them in the Palm Springs gardens. The plan for the Higgins garden includes a whimsical sketch of a tank end planter partially set into a planted mound and supported on stones. This is also how the tank end planters were arranged for the Koerners. The sketch is in Eckbo's hand and includes a list of succulent plants. While no instructions are given, it is assumed that the proposed succulent planting was to be refreshed seasonally since the species called for would not have persisted through high summer temperatures in the desert.

Similarities of the plant lists proposed for the tank end planters are nearly identical, reinforcing the kinship of the Higgins and Koerner gardens. Both are a mix of *Aeonium*, *Cotyledon*, and *Sedum* varieties supplemented with Blue Fescue grass (*Festuca ovina*). It is worth noting that in 1954 the January and June issues of *Sunset* magazine included articles on tank end planters and succulents.<sup>19</sup> Both articles include essentially the same plant list and are illustrated with photos of ERW work in Northern California. It is possible that Robert Royston, Eckbo's partner in Mill Valley, originally developed the list and it was in general use for both offices.

*Landscape architect JC Miller worked for more than a decade in the Royston office and, as a principal, assisted Royston in the design and execution of his final projects. He is coauthor of "Robert Royston," a volume in the Library of American Landscape History's "Masters of Modern Landscape Design" series, and coauthor, with Reuben Rainey, of the book "Modern Public Gardens: Robert Royston and the Suburban Park." Miller was the historic landscape architect in charge of restoring the Koerner Garden.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR – STEVEN KEYLON

Architectural historian Steven Keylon writes and lectures about Southern California's cultural landscapes. He is editor of *Eden*, the Journal of the California Garden & Landscape History Society (CGLHS) and is past president of CGLHS. He also serves as vice president of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation (PSPF) and is on DocomomoUS/SoCal and Beverly Hills Heritage boards. The author of two books, *The Design of Herbert W. Burns*, and *The Modern Architecture of Hugh Michael Kaptur*, he is also coauthor, with Tracy Conrad and Steve Vaught, of *Tom O'Donnell: Generous Spirit of Palm Springs*. His essays on landscape architects Fred Barlow, Jr. and Tommy Tomson are featured in *Shaping the Postwar Landscape*, edited by Charles Birnbaum and Scott Craver.

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<sup>19</sup> *Sunset*, January 1954 – These are "tank" gardens and June 1954 – "Gardening with Succulents."



## ABOUT THE PALM SPRINGS PRESERVATION FOUNDATION

The Palm Springs Historic Site Foundation was founded in 1997 by Professor Carl Prout, Diana “Mousie” Powell, and other concerned citizens who believed that a fuller appreciation of Palm Springs’ architecture and history could be achieved through education. The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation is the successor to that original mission. Over the years, the foundation has done much to achieve its stated goal of educating many audiences about the importance of preservation. One of the primary ways this educational goal is accomplished is by publishing books to various desert architects and architectural designers (including William F. Cody, E. Stewart Williams, Hugh Kaptur, and Herbert Burns), and builders (the Alexander Construction Company). The foundation has also published publications celebrating the city’s Spanish Colonial Revival and Polynesian “tiki” architecture.