Canyon Palms Neighborhood Organization

Annual Meeting Summary for Residents

Saturday, April 11, 2026 | Mizell Center, Palm Springs

Hi neighbors! For those who couldn't make it on Saturday, here's a rundown of everything covered at our Annual Meeting. It was a great morning with a lot of really useful information directly from the Mayor, our City Councilmember, and former Councilmember Lisa Middleton. Two resources referenced throughout this summary: the CPNO website at canyonpalms.com, and the city's community engagement platform, Engage Palm Springs, at engagepalmsprings.com. Neighbors can also join the private CPNO Facebook group at https://www.facebook.com/groups/canyonpalms

From Mayor Naomi Soto

Convention Center Modernization

The Mayor kicked off with news about the Palm Springs Convention Center. The city is working on a major modernization plan to keep it competitive with other cities — think upgraded technology, better indoor/outdoor spaces, and improved connectivity to downtown. The big news: the hospitality industry (hotels and short-term rentals) voted to assess themselves a 1% fee, generating about $4 million annually toward the project. This is their initiative, not a city tax on residents. It will come back to council for two public hearings before it's finalized.

Airport Updates

The Mayor clarified that a recent airport meeting at the Plaza Theatre wasn't announcing major changes — it was about planning the phases of work. Near-term improvements include fixing the escalator and upgrading baggage claim. Longer-range work (3–10 years out) is planned but will be revisited as demand warrants. One note: the airport's director recently left for Sacramento's airport, but a strong team remains in place.

Road Paving

The city now paves approximately $9 million worth of roads per year — up from $500K/year when Councilmember Ready joined the city and $3 million when the Mayor started on the Measure J oversight commission. Every road in the city is graded, and you can look up when your street is expected to be paved or get a slurry seal on Engage Palm Springs (engagepalmsprings.com).

Bridges and Infrastructure

Multiple bridge projects are underway across the city. The one to watch: the Ramon Road bridge at Cathedral City, which is a joint project. It'll remain two lanes each direction but may briefly drop to one. The Mayor asked that the city communicate early and clearly when weather also closes Vista Chino and Gene Autry, since Ramon becomes critical. Check Engage Palm Springs (engagepalmsprings.com) for updates on bridges near your commute.

Police Department

Police Chief Andy Mills is eventually departing (timeline unknown, likely tied to selling his home). The Mayor credited him with significantly improving officer morale and filling chronic vacancies. His successor will inherit a strong team.

Downtown Fire Station

The city absolutely needs a new downtown fire station. The current one is 70 years old, can't accommodate women firefighters or modern equipment, and is a Class 1 historic site that can't be enlarged or modified to be a suitable fire station. The city is still evaluating which site makes the most sense, taking into account nearby businesses' concerns about parking. The Mayor said they want to be able to confidently say every option was explored before a final decision is made. The current station is likely to be repurposed for administrative offices for the Fire department and/or a museum.

City Governance: Mayor Structure

On Wednesday, April 9, the City Council began formal discussion about potentially returning to a directly elected mayor. A working group has been formed (Councilmembers deHarte and Garner) that will report to council at every meeting going forward. Staff will post all historical documents from the 2018 process on Engage Palm Springs (engagepalmsprings.com) so residents can review the background. More on this below under Lisa Middleton's remarks.

From Mayor Pro Tem / District 5 Councilmember David H. Ready

Street Paving in Our Neighborhood

Good news for our neighborhood: both La Verne Way and Toledo are on the paving schedule for this summer. Councilmember Ready emphasized that street upkeep is a priority and that the city's increased investment in road maintenance makes a real difference in quality of life.

Street Signage

Several months ago, residents flagged that the street signs on the traffic lights at Sunrise and La Verne Way were faded and unreadable. The signage in question is at the intersection of Sunrise Way and E Palm Canyon. Councilmember Ready followed up with city staff, and new signs are expected to be installed in the coming week. The hope is that clearer signage will also make it easier to identify where La Verne Way begins. He acknowledged that this kind of detail matters, and that it sometimes takes longer than it should due to ordering lead times — he also suggested the city should stock up on spares. Several attendees noted similar faded sign issues at other intersections along Palm Canyon.

Traffic Signal Policy

A resident raised a detailed concern about the city's widespread use of fixed (non-permissive) left-turn signals, arguing the city has overdone it and that drivers are now running lights or speeding in frustration. Councilmember Ready said he agrees it's a significant issue and confirmed the City Council and City Manager have agreed to put a formal traffic signal policy review on an upcoming agenda. The goal is to establish clear criteria for when intersections need a protected signal vs. a protected-permissive (flashing yellow arrow) one.

Pavement Markings at East Palm Canyon/La Verne Way

A resident noted that when East Palm Canyon was repaved, the dotted turn lines at the Sunrise/La Verne Way intersection were marked incorrectly and then re-marked, leaving confusing double lines visible. Councilmember Ready committed to asking engineering to take a look and get it corrected.

In-N-Out Burger Update

Yes, it's still happening. The project is active and going through a subcommittee process with planning commissioners, the Architecture Review Committee, and city staff. In-N-Out is a single-owner company and is reportedly still figuring out how much they'll flex on Palm Springs' design requirements (the city isn't budging on aesthetics). On the traffic front: the frontage road where the old Bank of America was will be widened from two to three lanes, and traffic light synchronization at that intersection is being planned to handle the added volume.

Dream Hotel / Orchid Tree

The city has milestone-based incentive agreements with the Dream Hotel and the Orchid Tree development. The Orchid Tree's most recent milestone was met, with the next one due in about six months. Each agreement requires the developer to appear publicly before the council if a milestone is missed — no more quiet extensions. Mayor Soto added that the city is monitoring every aspect of both agreements, including community meeting commitments and fence management.

From Former Councilmember Lisa Middleton — Directly Elected Mayor

Lisa Middleton came with a team, including John Lano and Jason Kravitz, to make the case for why Palm Springs should return to having a directly elected mayor. Here's the background and argument:

How We Got Here

Before 2018, Palm Springs elected all council members and the mayor at-large (citywide). The California Voting Rights Act pushed cities toward district-based elections to increase representation. When Palm Springs received the demand letter, the Council took it seriously — holding 37 neighborhood meetings — and chose to go to five districts plus a rotating mayor, rather than four districts and an elected mayor (a model many other cities chose). The intent was to create a district with a majority-minority voting-age population, which resulted in more diverse representation: Grace Garner (first Latina on council), Mayor Soto (second), and a council now with a Latino majority. Ms. Middleton expressed pride in that outcome.

The Problem with a Rotating Mayor

Palm Springs is now on its 8th or 9th mayor in 8–9 years. Ms. Middleton's argument: that's not enough continuity to manage major long-term projects. The bridges on Indian Canyon and Gene Autry, for example, each cost over $200 million to make flood-proof year-round — more than the city's entire annual revenue of $180 million. Getting those projects done requires sustained relationships in Sacramento and Washington. A mayor who serves one year can't build those.

The Advocacy Effort

The group is advocating for a ballot initiative to amend the city charter and restore a directly elected mayor. Two models are being discussed: one with a sixth vote on the council, and a model closer to Pasadena, Long Beach, and Bakersfield where the mayor presides over meetings but doesn't vote — the latter is seen as less likely to raise California Voting Rights Act concerns. Ms. Middleton noted that no city has been sued over a mayoral position, and that conversations are ongoing with stakeholders who have concerns about the CVRA. She's hopeful a middle ground can be found. Three cities in the Coachella Valley currently have directly elected mayors: La Quinta, Desert Hot Springs, and Coachella.

Q&A Highlights

The presentation prompted a number of questions from attendees. Here are the highlights:

Would a directly elected mayor mean a sixth vote on the City Council?

Not necessarily. Ms. Middleton described two models under discussion. One would add the mayor as a sixth voting member of the council. The other — which she finds more attractive and which closely resembles the Pasadena, Long Beach, and Bakersfield model — would have the mayor serve as the presiding officer at meetings without a council vote. That model is also seen as less likely to raise concerns under the California Voting Rights Act.

Is this a full-time paid position?

The position would be officially designated as part-time. Current City Council members receive approximately $45,000 per year; the rotating mayor position receives about $10,000 more. Adding benefits (health insurance and related costs) that not everyone takes would add roughly $20,000–$30,000 above salary. There would also be some one-time costs for conducting an election, estimated in the range of $100,000, and some office space remodeling at City Hall.

Would there be term limits?

There are currently no term limits in Palm Springs, and none are being proposed for the mayor position. The mayor would serve a four-year term. City Council members also serve four-year staggered terms.

How does City Council oversight of city staff actually work?

A resident asked how oversight of city staff actually works in practice. Both Councilmember Ready and Ms. Middleton addressed this. The City Council appoints the City Manager, who handles day-to-day operations. Accountability runs through that relationship: the Council sets policy and direction; the City Manager carries it out. The analogy offered was that Council members should keep their "eyes in and fingers out" — responsible for outcomes, but not involved in daily operations. Ms. Middleton added that a good council member "thinks in questions" — constantly asking why, how, and what happened — rather than directing staff directly. Councilmember Ready expressed agreement with the value of a directly elected mayor working alongside a professional city manager as offering the best of both models.

What about the California Voting Rights Act — could this invite a lawsuit?

Ms. Middleton addressed this directly: no city in California has been sued over a mayoral position. Suits under the CVRA have been about district council seats, and every city that

fought those suits lost — except Santa Monica, which chose to challenge the law all the way to the California Supreme Court. She noted Palm Springs is not in that situation. She also said she had met with a stakeholder who has concerns about the CVRA and is cautiously hopeful that a middle ground can be found.

How does Palm Springs compare to other Coachella Valley cities?

Of the nine cities in the Coachella Valley, three currently have directly elected mayors: La Quinta, Desert Hot Springs, and Coachella. Palm Springs is the only valley city that transitioned away from a directly elected mayor. Statewide, just under 200 of California's 475 cities have directly elected mayors.

Neighborhood Traffic and Safety — Community Discussion

Pedestrian Crossing at Caliente and La Verne Way

A number of residents raised the need for a safe crossing where Caliente intersects La Verne Way. There is currently no crosswalk between Toledo and Camino Real on La Verne Way. The city's process for requesting a crosswalk requires a Community Action Request submitted through the Traffic Management Center, and a work group of at least five households. Neighbor John Carlisle volunteered to lead the work group. If you live in that area and want to be part of the five households, reach out to John or to Kristin. The city may have previously studied and declined a crosswalk there, but the threshold to reapply may have been met (approximately two years).

Flashing Stop Sign at Maricopa and Toledo

Multiple residents raised concerns about the stop sign at Maricopa and Toledo being widely ignored — one neighbor counted 12 out of 15 cars blowing through it in a single stint. There has been a longstanding request for a flashing stop sign at that intersection. A speed indicator sign on Toledo is a first step for traffic calming on that street. The flashing stop sign request is still unresolved due to objections from at least one unidentified neighbor. A board member also noted making phone calls to city engineering to follow up on this question, but calls were not returned. Councilmember Ready committed to following up personally.

CPNO Year in Review and Announcements

Social Events

Since last April, CPNO hosted three Evening Cocktails events bringing out about 75 neighbors total: in November (at Kristin and David's after their long renovation — 30 attendees), in February (at David and Bill's — 20 attendees), and in March (at Les and Paul's during that heat wave — 20 attendees). Thank you to all who hosted!

Summer Evening Cocktails — Save the Date

Thursday, May 28, 2026 | 6:30–8:30 PM | Location TBD. The date is timed for sunset. A backup host is lined up, but if you have indoor/outdoor space and want to host, let us know — the board will help and reimburse costs.

Emergency Preparedness Survey

CPNO is finishing up an optional online household information survey to help neighbors look out for each other in an emergency. It'll capture things like: do you have pets? Do you have medical equipment that requires power? Are you often away? We're aiming to roll it out in November. One of the questions will ask whether your household has 72 hours of emergency supplies — so consider this your six-month heads-up to get prepared. Resources are on the CPNO website (canyonpalms.com).

Finances

CPNO has about $530 total on deposit at Sun Community Federal Credit Union. Starting in November, newsletters will include a link for an optional annual household donation to help cover event costs. No pressure — just a way to chip in if you'd like.

New Board for 2026

The following board members were unanimously elected for 2026:

- Kristin Maschka (returning)
- Matt Lancellotti (returning)
- Howard Goldberg (returning)
- Peter Morrison (returning)
- Julie Fey-Clark (new!) — Julie grew up in the neighborhood and just moved back into her childhood home. Welcome, Julie!

And a heartfelt thank-you to outgoing members David Vignolo and Janice Kaminsky, who have served since CPNO was founded seven years ago. We wouldn't be the organization we are without you.