

Section 14 Historical Context Study Key Findings

October 29, 2024



Section 14 Historical Context Study

Prepared for:

City of Palm Springs

Prepared by:



Architectural
Resources Group

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Section 14 Historical Context Study Key Findings: Preface

This Key Findings document was produced by Architectural Resources Group (ARG) in response to a request from Palm Springs City Council to summarize certain findings of the Section 14 Historical Context Study, prepared by ARG and dated October 29, 2024.

This Key Findings document in no way supplants the Study, nor should it be reviewed in lieu of the Study. The Study provides in-depth, fully cited, historic background and context. ARG encourages a thorough read of the Study and not just the Key Findings. When applicable, the reader of this document is directed to chapters and page numbers of the Study for further reading.

Section 14 Historical Context Study: Purpose and Scope

The primary objectives of the Historical Context Study were to research and document, to the greatest extent possible using available source material, the history of Section 14 in Palm Springs.

Palm Springs City Council tasked ARG with answering a series of questions about the eviction and abatement activities that displaced most of Section 14's residents in the mid-20th century. The Key Findings are organized around these questions. The scope of work did not include recommendations regarding the City's use of the Study and any of its content or findings.

The Study is organized into seven chapters and a bibliography. It starts with big-picture overview chapters establishing the legal, economic, social, and cultural contexts within which Section 14 developed, and narrows in later chapters to focus specifically on the people, agencies, and events associated with displacement of Section 14 residents between the 1930s and the 1960s.

Importantly, although ARG has made every effort to provide an accurate and detailed accounting of the history of Section 14 in the Study and this Key Findings document, they should by no means be considered a complete accounting of this history, nor should they be considered a direct reflection of or replacement for the voices and stories of those who were personally affected by displacement from Section 14.

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When did evictions and abatements begin on Section 14?

1936, with an abatement campaign by the State and the BIA. Palm Springs was not yet incorporated.

The City's first direct involvement occurred in **1948**.

Section 14 displacements, evictions, and abatements occurred in at least **5 major campaigns**, with less organized activities in between:

- 1936-1937 (pre-incorporation)
- 1948-1953
- 1954-1960
- 1961-1962
- 1965-1966

See Ch. 5 and 6

Who led the process and who else was involved?

All five of the campaigns were conducted by multiple government agencies/entities in partnership.

- 1936-1937: State led, partnered with Federal (BIA) with approval of Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce (pre-incorporation local policy leader)
- 1948-1953: County initiated, partnered with BIA; City led starting in 1950, partnered with BIA and County with participation by State health inspectors
- 1954-1960: City led, partnered with BIA with participation from County, State
- 1961-1962: City led, partnered with BIA with participation from Agua Caliente conservators, guardians, and allottees
- 1965-1966: City led, partnered with BIA with participation from Agua Caliente conservators, guardians, and allottees and with approval of Agua Caliente Tribal Council

See Ch. 6 pp. 68-97

When and how did the City become involved?

The City of Palm Springs (incorporated in 1938) became involved in 1948, in the second abatement campaign led by Riverside County and the BIA. It assumed management and funding in 1950.

The City planned, funded, and implemented the next three abatement campaigns. The BIA is documented as providing some funding in the last campaign, and as partnering in all of them.

See Ch. 6 pp. 68-97

What were steps taken by the others and by the City?

The abatement procedures were different in each campaign and are documented as having been inconsistently followed in at least some cases.

Generally speaking:

- The City planned and funded abatement campaigns, and carried out building demolition/burning.
- The BIA worked with Agua Caliente allottees, conservators, and guardians to issue eviction notices and approve abatement (through City-issued burn permits in the last campaign).
 - Also provided some funding in at least one campaign (1965-67)
- The County provided personnel support (e.g., seismic surveyors, health inspectors, Sheriff's deputies)
- The State provided personnel support (e.g., health inspectors)
- The Agua Caliente Tribal Council publicly supported the last campaign

Ch. 6 pp. 68-97 contains details on abatement procedures specific to each campaign.

What notices were provided, by whom and when?

Documentation on exact procedures for notices is incomplete. The information below reflects what could be ascertained from existing documentation.

1948-1953 campaign: County and City officials post 30-day notices to leave condemned buildings. In late 1953, the City Manager stated “notices given offenders were somewhat informal.”*

1954-1960 campaign: City issues notices of intent and notices to leave condemned buildings.

- Notice 1: 30 to 45 days to make improvements or raze
- Notice 2: sets date for appearance before board
- Notice 3: decision of board. If structure not brought up to code, City orders occupant removal, with demolition 30 days after notification to owner.
- It is unclear whether any instances of a tenant bringing a building up to code prevented eviction and abatement

1961-1962 campaign: BIA, allottees, conservators, and guardians issue 90-day eviction notices

- In multiple cases, land owners (allottees) received notices, not building owners (tenants); tenants were not always informed
- City adherence to the 90 day period was inconsistent

1965-1966 campaign: BIA, allottees, conservators, and guardians issue 30-day eviction notices

- In some cases, land owners (allottees) received notices, not building owners (tenants); tenants were not always informed
- City adherence to the 30 day period was inconsistent

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*Palm Springs City Council Minutes, September 18, 1953, 183.

What news reports and publicity at the time should residents of Section 14 have seen and heard?

Residents could have had access to reporting in the local *Desert Sun* and *Limelight-News*, and in the regional *Riverside Enterprise*, *Riverside Daily Press*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Los Angeles Sentinel*. Reporting on conditions on Section 14 and related evictions began as early as 1936.

The 1968 State Attorney General's memorandum on Section 14 displacement was widely disseminated and discussed.

Television reporting on Section 14 displacement included a KTLA story in October 1961 and a KNXT series in May 1967.

Word of mouth and dissemination of eyewitness accounts were the primary avenues distributing information about displacement events on Section 14 as displacement was occurring.

Who was present on Section 14 and when?

1934 estimate

- State health inspectors' report estimates 1,000 people.

1948 estimates

- County health office estimates 1,500 people living in substandard buildings on Sections 14 and 26.
- City Special Committee on Indian Affairs report estimates 6,000 non-Agua Caliente residing on all Agua Caliente lands, not just Section 14. As Section 14 was well documented as the most densely populated area, 3,000 is a reasonable estimate.

1950 census enumeration

- Over 2,500 people are enumerated on Section 14.

1959 estimate

- BIA agent estimates 2,000 “concentrated in the southwest corner” of Section 14.

1961 estimate (March)

- *Desert Sun* states eviction notices served to 2,500 people on Section 14, indicating a minimum estimated population of 2,500.

1967 estimate (April)

- *Riverside Independent Enterprise* states 437 people remained on Section 14.

The number of Agua Caliente residents on Section 14 rarely, if ever, exceeded 50 people.

What was the racial composition of the Section 14 population at the relevant times?

Estimates from the 1950 census, including only residents for which race was recorded:

- 1,650 White (includes most Latinos – see below)
- 549 Black
- 67 White Other (term used inconsistently for Latino; most Latinos were enumerated under White)
- 16 Filipino
- 6 Indian

Estimates from a 1961 City affordable housing study – **southwest quarter of Section 14 only, lower than total**

- 551 Non-White
- 285 White

Estimates from a 1968 City affordable housing study – **northwest quarter of Section 14 only, lower than total**

- 38 White
- 20 Black
- 14 Latino
- 2 Indian

Who left when, and under what circumstances specifically?

There is not a clear answer to this question. The number of residents who left Section 14 voluntarily or involuntarily between 1938 and 1967 is in the thousands, and specifics are only known for a fraction of them.

Recordkeeping of evictions is essentially nonexistent, or non-surviving. Thousands of eviction notices and notices to vacate were issued, but not all of them resulted in displacement due to public outcry that led to pauses and terminations of “cleanup” campaigns. This happened on multiple occasions.

Available evidence indicates people left Section 14 under a number of circumstances including:

- Eviction
- Threat of eviction, or witnessing or hearing about others’ evictions
- Voluntarily leaving as other housing/employment opportunities arose
- After having their dwelling demolished/burned without having received a notice

See Ch. 5 and 6

What role did race and ethnicity play in the eviction process?

People of color, and African American residents in particular, were prohibited from living in many other parts of Palm Springs due to institutionalized racism:

- Restrictive housing covenants on deeds, imposed by private entities, forbade selling or renting homes to people of color
- Discriminatory lending practices – Palm Springs banks would not issue home loans to people of color
- Most realtors, developers, and landlords refused to sell/rent housing to people of color

They also had fewer employment options open to them, due to discriminatory hiring practices that closed off most opportunities for positions offering higher wages. Palm Springs housing costs were high.

As a result, people of color had few housing options beyond Section 14, and were disproportionately subject to eviction compared to the general Palm Springs population. Residents of multiple ethnicities, including White, experienced eviction from Section 14.

See Ch. 4

When allotments were equalized and lease terms extended to 99 years in 1959, Agua Caliente allottees were able to develop their land in a profitable manner – an impetus for evictions. The allotment situation was inextricably tied to ethnicity, as was the conservator/guardian system put in place to manage Agua Caliente allottee finances.

See Ch. 2

Were the evictions legally carried out in accord with the law at the time of the evictions? If not, where and how did they fail to follow the legal demands of the time?

Some evictions were legally carried out (adhered to the required 30-day period after issuance of eviction notice). Some were not. In the 1961-62 and 1965-66 campaigns, there were multiple cases where the City demolished/burned dwellings before the 30-day period had ended; in some cases, residents were unaware notices had been issued.

See Ch. 6 pp. 76-97

The City used the following legislation as justification for enforcing local code on federal land held in trust:

Pre-1950

Federal Code, Section 458, Title 18: empowered state laws where federal law did not directly address an issue.

1950-1953

Public Law 322, 63 Stat. 705: shifted jurisdiction over criminal/civil actions on the reservation from the Feds to the State. The City broadly interpreted state jurisdiction to extend to local jurisdiction.

1953-1977

Public Law 280, 67 Stat. 588-589: replaced PL 280, same intent and broad interpretation by the City. The interpretation of the law as extending to local jurisdiction is adjudicated as incorrect in 1977.

What efforts were made, if any, to protect the personal property within the homes?

In the 1961-1962 campaign, few if any efforts were made to protect personal property within homes. This was most likely true of the 1948-1953 and 1954-1960 campaigns as well, though documentation is less clear.

In the 1965-1966 campaign, the City's procedures called for inspection to ensure property had been removed.

- These procedures are not known to have been put in writing until January 1967, after approximately 200 structures had already been demolished. More detail was added in December 1967.
- If these procedures were in place prior to 1967, the City evidently did not always adhere to them. Multiple accounts state personal property was destroyed along with homes.

See Ch. 6 pp. 76-97

How many, and whose, homes were burned and razed?

In most cases, records of which dwellings belonged to whom are unavailable. Oral histories, City Council minutes, and newspaper articles provide names in some cases.

1965-1966 campaign

- At least **235** structures (with cleanup activities into 1969) were razed and burned. Most are presumed to have been dwellings.
- This count is based on City abatement records from this campaign.

1961-1962 campaign

- At least **100** structures were razed and burned. Most are presumed to have been dwellings.
- This estimate is based on newspaper articles, City Council minutes, and oral histories.
- At least 430 households received eviction notices by June 1961, but not all were carried out due to moratoria and the 1962 campaign ending.

1954-1960 campaign

- At least **44** structures were razed and burned. Most are presumed to have been dwellings.
- This estimate is based on newspaper articles, City Council minutes, and oral histories.

1948-1953 campaign

- At least **7** structures were razed and burned. Most are presumed to have been dwellings.
- This estimate is based on newspaper articles, City Council minutes, and oral histories.