

INDIAN WELLS CITY COUNCIL

October 16, 2025



To: City Council
From: City Manager Department
Prepared by: Eric Ceja, Assistant City Manager
Subject: **Amendment to Employment Agreement for City Manager**

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Council **APPROVES** Seventh Amendment to the Employment Agreement for City Manager Dr. Christopher Freeland; and

FINDS the action exempt from CEQA review under CEQA Guidelines section 15061(b)(3).

BACKGROUND:

On May 2, 2019, the City Council entered into an Employment Agreement with Dr. Chris Freeland to serve as City Manager, effective May 13, 2019. Employment Agreements are used by City Council's to establish a formal contract with the City Manager to define duties, compensation, benefits, termination, severance, and the term of their agreement. Employment Agreements are important to both the City Council and City Manager due to the unpredictable nature of the role including: the political nature and changing priorities of the Council and the expectations for performance in managing local government.

Annually, the City Council evaluates the City Manager's performance and determines if any changes to the Agreement are warranted. In previous evaluations, the City Council has approved of the City Manager's performance and has taken action to amend the original contract on six separate occasions, adjusting salary and benefits afforded to Dr. Freeland in his role as City Manager. Details for each amendment to the Agreement are attached to this report.

Performance Review and Contract Amendment No. 7

Coinciding with the conclusion of FY 24/25, the Council met individually with the City Manager to review his performance over the past year. In addition, the City Council discussed the City Manager's performance in a closed session meeting on September 4, 2025. The consensus is that the City Manager has done an excellent job managing the City's day-to-day operations, continues to advance community projects and priorities, continues to be successful in obtaining millions of dollars in grant funds, and seeing the

completion of city priorities. meriting changes to the City Manager’s Employment Agreement, including:

- A 5% (2.5% COLA and 2.5% Merit) increase to the base salary retroactive to July 1, 2025, to be consistent with other staff, and resulting in a new base salary of \$299,250.¹
- One-Time Vacation Bank of 120 hours.
- Additional language to reinforce the City Manager’s ability to teach at the University level outside of normal work hours.

The agreement's terms have not changed. The Employment Agreement will expire on December 31, 2029.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Seventh Amendment to the Employment Agreement results in a base salary increase of \$14,250 and an increase in the Vacation Bank of \$17,264, representing a cumulative total of \$31,514. The associated costs are allocated across the City’s operating funds as follows: General Fund – \$22,060; Fire Services Fund – \$4,727; Golf Resort Fund – \$3,151; and Housing Authority Fund – \$1,576. These allocations reflect the proportional distribution of the City Manager’s compensated responsibilities among the respective funds.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA):

The action is not a project within the meaning of Section 15378 of the State of California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) Guidelines, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change in the environment, directly or indirectly; and that the action is nonetheless exempt from the requirements of CEQA in that the activity is covered by the general rule that CEQA applies only to projects that have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. (15061(b)(3).)

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Agreement & Amendments
2. Seventh Amendment

¹ This new base salary falls within the range of base salaries for other Coachella Valley City Managers that range between \$242,000 and \$357,000, not including any additional salary or benefits afforded to all area City Managers.