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Lack of watering at DHS parks upsets council members

DESERT HOT SPRINGS, Calif. -

Bankruptcy's no longer an option for the city of Desert Hot Springs, but only after deep cuts to the salaries of the police department and city staff. The city's made other cuts, but what seemed like a water-saving, cost-saving measure is stirring some issues. Fields in the city are going brown, after council explicitly said it did not want to stop watering in an effort to save money.

Each day in Desert Hot Springs, the parents and coaches work to make the little league field at Wardman Park, game ready. The volunteers want to make sure more than 300 young baseball and softball players are proud of where they play. "It's a great field, it's a great field," said Dave Marquez, the vice president of Desert Hot Springs little league. "We take care of it, we put fresh dirt in every year."

But lately, it looks like there's more dirt than anything else. Teams warm up in an outfield where a few green spots stand out next to dead, brown grass. It's the cash-strapped city's job to water the public field. Even though the council's looking for ways to save money, Mayor Pro Tem Russell Betts says, this was never an option. "There's no good explanation when an entire city council tells you 'keep the water on,' there's no good explanation for city staff just to decide they're just going to do something on their own," said Betts.

Staff says they didn't turn off the water as the field and at parks all over the city, they just turned it on less often. "I think it was just the timing of the time we were watering the fields and now it's getting a little warmer earlier," said Martin Magana, the acting city manager for the city. "We need to reprogram the clocks to make sure they get plenty of water."

It's a promise the league's skeptical about, because they say the sprinklers haven't popped up since January. "It's been frustrating the whole season," said Marquez. "I see it and think, maybe it's going to green up, maybe it's going to green up and it just hasn't, it gets worse."

While the city works to keep the budget afloat, council makes it clear, these fields will get water, and more of it, because these little leaguers and the community deserves it. "Turning off the

water to our ball fields and making our residents suffer with something like this, is just unacceptable," said Betts.

City staff said regular watering should begin immediately.