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POSTED: 05:43 PM PDT May 28, 2014 UPDATED: 05:50 PM PDT May 28, 2014

Desert Hot Springs considers medical marijuana ordinance



DESERT HOT SPRINGS, Calif. -

Desert Hot Springs is looking at a new idea to get itself out of a financial emergency, teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. The city council wants to explore legalizing medical marijuana dispensaries. It would be just the second city in Riverside county to do it, right behind Palm Springs. The council voted unanimously in support of exploring the idea, but some residents don't feel the same. "If people are responsible, I'm okay with it," said a mother of two who did not want to be identified. "But there's a lot of irresponsible people here, especially in Desert Hot Springs that I know will smoke pot and go driving."

The council thinks the pot could profit the city. All agree any future dispensaries should pay some sort of tax, creating much-needed revenue for a city facing a potential \$3.8 million deficit in the new fiscal year. "I think the ones that aren't legitimate, they're going to end up getting the drugs anyway," said Doug Steed, a Desert Hot Springs resident. "If somehow we can defer some of that and make some tax money for the city, I think it's great."

The council needs to decide how many dispensaries it might allow on the city's streets, what kind of tax would be levied and how much money it could potentially make. No matter what the numbers look like, some feel weed's still not the answer. "There's different options for offering people work and there's different options for getting revenue," said the mother of two.

The city of Palm Springs understands the revenue stream from marijuana dispensaries. Last year, voters approved a 10% sales tax on the three legal dispensaries in the city. That's expected to bring in \$450,000 each year, with another dispensary on the way. One DHS resident says, legal dispensaries in one valley city is more than enough. "Buy it over there, it's not like it's miles and miles away," said Rosa Alvarado. "It's close. So why mess with this town? We're already messed up."

The city attorney will present a draft of the ordinance at the council's next meeting on June 5. It will include ideas to regulate dispensaries in the city.