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Desert Hot Springs candidates debate key issues

DESERT HOT SPRINGS — Candidates in Desert Hot Springs' Nov. 5 municipal election participated in a forum at Desert Hot Springs High School Thursday night.

Mayor Yvonne Parks and challenger John-Paul Valdez participated in the forum with City Council incumbents Scott Matas and Jan Pye and challengers Joe McKee and Robert Bentley.

VIDEO: [Desert Hot Springs candidate forum](#)

City Councilman Adam Sanchez is running for mayor, but a work-related scheduling conflict prevented him from participating in the forum.



Nearly 100 people attended the forum. Incumbents and candidates touched on subjects ranging from public safety to the regional CV Link trail project. Here are excerpts from the forum.

From left: Desert Hot Springs Mayor Pro Tem Scott Matas, Councilwoman Jan Pye, challengers Joe McKee and Robert Bentley, Mayor Yvonne Parks and challenger John Paul Valdez. / The Desert Sun

Issue: Desert Hot Springs joining the CV Link project

Park: “It will take us millions to get connected to the inner (CVLink) ... To get it up to Desert Hot Springs, I don’t think it’s feasible at this point and I don’t know how far into the future it will become feasible.”

Valdez: “It’s something we should hope for and it’s something we should keep in our minds. But it’s not within reach at this time.”

Matas: “We need to have hiking in and out of city ... Desert Hot Springs has to be in the mix.”

Pye: “I think it’s a good idea, but I’m concerned about public safety along the way. And whether the city should contribute, I think we should, but not at this time.”

McKee: “I don’t see how anyone’s going to ride a bike or electric vehicle down from Desert Hot Springs down the path (proposed) with wind and sun and dirt involved in that.”

Bentley: “As far as I know, it’s a very big waste of money.”

Issue: Improving public safety

Bentley: “I think they could’ve done it in a more effective way.”

Parks: “We are working toward that, every day, to reduce crime. It’s on our minds 24/7.”

Valdez: “We do have a fully (equipped) police department now and we should use that police department ... we want people involved in the neighborhood to be in touch with the police department, recreational activities at school.”

Matas: “We can increase revenues and find ways to put more police on the street.”

Pye: “It is what it is because of the economic downturn ... We need to try to boost economic development but not just for retail jobs, but for substantial jobs.”

McKee: “We can’t arrest our way out of this problem.”

Issue: Reversing the city's ban on medical marijuana dispensaries

Bentley: “Let’s grow up. We’re all in 2013 now. Yes, they should reconsider and reverse their stance.”

Matas: “It’s a tough question. It’s hard to answer. But could we look at it again as a City Council? Absolutely.”

Pye: “If we legalize it, what does it mean? What are the unintended consequences? And what is preferable for public safety? Until those are answered, I can’t answer this one.”

McKee: “I personally believe alcohol is a much worse substance than marijuana and if we’re going to allow people to buy alcohol in town, I don’t see how marijuana is any worse.”

Issue: Reversing the city's negative image

Valdez: “Financial stability will bring us safety and bring us further investment.”

Park: “We are not what we are perceived to be ... It’s a matter of educating the rest of the valley and continuing to build on the successes we have.”

Following the forum, several attendees said they were still undecided on who they would get their vote.

Desert Hot Springs resident Howard Rogers, 60, hinted at who has his support, but wouldn’t give any names. “I’ll say this; I don’t like all the incumbents,” he said.