

Written by

| The Desert Sun Editorial Board

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Re-elect Yvonne Parks, Scott Matas and Jan Pye

Listening to the candidates for mayor and City Council, Desert Hot Springs is all a matter of perspective. It's either a city on the brink of bankruptcy or on the precipice of success. It could be one or the other. That makes this year's elections critical to the city's future.

For mayor, The Desert Sun supports incumbent Yvonne Parks. First elected to the council in 2005, she became mayor in 2007 and has been re-elected twice. In her third attempt to hang on to the gavel, she is challenged by Councilman Adam Sanchez and financial consultant John-Paul Valdez.



The John Furbee Aquatics Center is part of the \$19.2 million Desert Hot Springs Health and Wellness Center, which opened in June. / Gerry Maceda/Special to The Desert Sun

Parks has been an enthusiastic spokeswoman for Desert Hot Springs and shows up at events throughout the valley and beyond. When the Coachella Valley Association of Governments was developing its economic blueprint to diversify the economy, she was at every meeting while other city representatives were inconsistent.

We have some reservations about Parks. When she unseated Mayor Alex Bias in 2007, she ran on a platform of “positive energy.” But during budget deliberations in July, she told Sanchez to shut up — twice. Asked about the incident in the endorsement interview with The Desert Sun editorial board, she apologized and explained that sometimes “my passion takes over good sense.”

We appreciate her passion, but we also expect our leaders to maintain self-control and avoid inflammatory words. Sanchez and Councilman Russell Betts, who challenged Parks for mayor in 2009, were accused by former City Manager Rick Daniels of harassment. An investigation found those charges to be unfounded, but clearly there is tension on this council — as there has been for years. Parks should not contribute to the turmoil.

Parks is running on a slate with Mayor Pro Tem Scott Matas and Councilwoman Jan Pye. The Desert Sun isn't a fan of slates. Candidates should be judged on their individual merits. However, we believe Matas and Pye are the best candidates for City Council — although we were impressed by challenger Joe McKee. All three candidates who attended the endorsement interview were articulate and knowledgeable about the issues.

Matas, who has served on the council since 2007, expressed concern about the quality of life in Desert Hot Springs and has worked hard over the years to improve it. He was a volunteer firefighter for 20 years, a Boy Scout leader, is still active in the DHS Little League as an umpire and president of the board of directors and founded the Youth Council. He expects economic improvement for several reasons.

“There's a ton of opportunities because of the space we have,” he said, pointing out that Ares Corp. is planning 2.6 million square feet of warehouse space in the city that will generate 1,000 jobs.

Pye, a health care consultant, noted an increase in volunteers on city commissions, representing a turnaround in the apathy she witnessed in the past.

“Mr. Matas and I co-chair an economic development committee, which originally was supposed to be a subcommittee,” she said. “We decided to make it a full committee so we could invite the public to come. We average 15 to 20 people a meeting.”

McKee, an engineer who serves on four city committees, raises concerns about the city budget and charges that the council majority has “demonstrated a reluctance to make necessary cuts in spending.” However, he also says in his campaign literature that the city staff has been reduced from 100 to about 60 in the past few years.

We wish McKee had run two years ago, when the choices for voters were weak. And, frankly, we wish Matas were running for mayor this time, as he illustrates the strongest level of statesmanship, collaboration and balance.

We share the concerns of McKee and others about the budget. Expenses are projected to exceed revenue by \$2 million. The plan is to take as much as \$2.3 million out of reserves, if necessary. No candidate expressed support for new taxes, which would be a bad idea for a city with more than 15 percent unemployment.

However, the city has made progress — notably the opening of the Health and Wellness Center, which includes an expanded Boys & Girls Club and an aquatic center. Last week, the Borrego Community Health Foundation had a soft opening for its new clinic on Pierson Boulevard and will have a grand opening soon. And there are promising signs of economic activity beyond the Ares project, such as a potential Walmart.

Despite our concerns about the budget, Desert Hot Springs is making progress. Parks, Matas and Pye should continue to lead the charge with a keen eye on fiscal preparedness and economic stability.

VIDEOS: [Adam Sanchez](#) | [Yvonne Parks](#) | [John-Paul Valdez](#) | [Jan Pye](#) | [Scott Matas](#) | [Joe McKee](#)

