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Desert Hot Springs council OKs senior center conduct policy



The entrance to Desert Hot Springs City Hall located at 65-950 Pierson Blvd. in Desert Hot Springs. In a 4-1 vote, the Desert Hot Springs City Council approved a 'behavioral conduct' policy Tuesday to curb inappropriate behavior at the city's senior center. / Desert Sun file

DESERT HOT SPRINGS — In a 4-1 vote, the Desert Hot Springs City Council approved a “behavioral conduct” policy Tuesday to curb inappropriate behavior at the city’s senior center.

According to a report presented by city staff, there have been times at the center when this behavior, described as “cursing, threats and physical violence,” has “created tension among its users” and employees.

Founded in 1979, the senior center, 11-777 West Drive, serves seniors in the community with a variety of programs, including legal aid, nutritional services and recreational activity, said senior center Manager Erin Bressler.

“We serve an average of about 50 to 60 seniors a day,” Bressler said. “However, when you get 100-plus people in one room things happen — we just want a good policy and for the public to know what the protocols are” when using the facility.

The new 17-point conduct policy, includes restrictions on behavior deemed too disruptive, such as threatening physical violence and “unwanted/unsolicited harmful touching.”

Also, under the new guidelines, patrons are expected to maintain “an acceptable standard of personal hygiene,” and not drink alcohol.

The new policy will also prohibit patrons from bringing shopping and luggage carts into the building, and encourages visitors to not wear scented products.

However, not every council member approved of the outlined guidelines as presented by city staff.

Councilman Russell Betts, who cast the only no vote, took issue with a clause in the guidelines restricting “political activity and political solicitation” on the center’s grounds.

He also did not approve of language requiring individuals aiming to “circulate a petition or survey, sell tickets for an organization or event, or take pictures” at the center to have prior consent from the city manager.

Under the city’s current ordinance, political solicitation or activity is prohibited on all city property, said Councilwoman Jan Pye during the meeting.

“This is not just about political activity, there are 17 policies outlined here,” Pye said.

Those who violate the new policy will face a three-tier disciplinary approach before being permanently banned from the center.

First-time offenders will receive a verbal warning, second-time offenders will face possible suspension and third-time violators will be “banished from the center permanently” and/or suspended.

Since 2011, the city has contracted a private firm, the Family Service Association, to operate the senior facility. Hours of operation are 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday through Friday.