

*Written by*

Desert Sun Editorial Board

Nov. 14, 2013 | [1 Comment](#)

## **Our Voice: Make the difficult calls to keep Desert Hot Springs on the map**

Adam Sanchez will become mayor of Desert Hot Springs if he survives incumbent Yvonne Parks' recount challenging his 12-vote margin of victory. No matter who holds the gavel, we hope the new council can put past differences aside and show the leadership to get through this financial mess and save this troubled town.

Parks says she was blindsided by the announcement that without drastic changes the city will run out of general fund cash by March 31. That could mean a path to bankruptcy or even disincorporation.

The Desert Sun endorsed Parks — somewhat reluctantly, believing she was the best of three options — but we find it hard to believe she didn't see this coming. She serves on the city finance committee and, as mayor, should be as familiar with budget projections as any elected official.

Interim City Manager Bob Adams says he warned the council weeks ago that the city faced significant financial problems in the coming fiscal year. But he wanted to wait until he had specific numbers before sounding the alarm. He also warned the city he would be out of town in the weeks leading up to the election. Nevertheless, it does seem suspicious to drop this bombshell just as the polls were about to close on Election Day.

**It also makes us wonder about the real motivation behind former City Manager Rick Daniels bolting to Needles.**

Councilman-elect Joe McKee, who also serves on the finance committee and got more votes than anyone on the Desert Hot Springs ballot, clearly saw it coming.

"Desert Hot Springs is in a budgetary crisis," he said in his opening statement to The Desert Sun editorial board during our endorsement interview. "Outside consultants have stated that in just a few months the city will run out of money."

To their credit, the council majority has reduced staff from 100 to 60 in the past few years. The challenge will be to keep the city intact by reducing staff even further, slashing salaries and making

other painful cuts. Relying on reserves to make it through this fiscal year is a weak strategy without a reasonable expectation of a surge in revenue.

“Your reserves are your rainy-day funds,” Adams told the council as it contemplated budget cuts on Tuesday, “and it has been raining for three or four years now.”

About 150 people attended that meeting and the crowd was unanimous in its opposition to cutting the police department. However, public safety represents nearly two-thirds of the budget. McKee observed that if the council got rid of all government except police and fire, it still couldn't cover the deficit.

In a city with a serious gang problem and a high percentage of parolees, it makes sense for Desert Hot Springs to have its own police department. But in this fiscal crisis it may be time to consider contracting with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department.

And there's no guarantee the Sheriff's Department would be a better deal for Desert Hot Springs. The sheriff's policy is not to provide cost estimates until a council votes for the transition.

Sanchez and Riverside County Supervisor John Benoit have agreed to meet with the interim city manager about how the county might be able to help. That's not without precedent.

In 2011, when the state cut off anticipated vehicle license fee revenue for the newly incorporated city of Jurupa Valley, it allowed a six-month delay in the payment for sheriff services. **And in 2007, Supervisor Marion Ashley spent \$90,000 from his discretionary fund to help pay Daniels' salary in his first year on the job.**

The county budget is not in great shape, either. Its reserves are below what they should be and the chief financial officer projects a shortfall of \$20 million.

Whatever help the county can provide would be greatly appreciated. Nobody wants Desert Hot Springs to go bankrupt or revert to unincorporated county land. We urge the new council majority to make the difficult budget decisions to keep the city afloat.

**DATABASE:** [City salaries for Desert Hot Springs employees](#)