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The Desert Sun

Dec. 2, 2013 | [0 Comments](#)

## **Desert Hot Springs City Council to consider spending cuts**

**Parks, pool listed, but councilmen also eye pay, benefits**



*Mission Springs Park in Desert Hot Springs would be one of the city's parks that would go brown under the proposal to stop watering at some city facilities. / Desert Sun file photo*

**DESERT HOT SPRINGS** — Turning off the water at city parks and closing down a community pool are just a few cost-cutting measures the City Council will consider at its meeting Dec. 3 in the face of a financial crisis.

The most recent budget projections show that the city will run out of cash by spring, according to city documents.

City staff have been meeting with department leaders and have recommended 16 cuts. Those, and the estimated annual savings, include:

- Stop or minimize watering the grass at city parks — \$179,800.
- Close Wardman Park community pool — \$89,000.
- Eliminate the city's crossing guard program. This proposal would transfer the "guard function to a school district-staffed position" —\$58,600.
- Decommission the city's camera systems — \$75,000.

"I think it's pretty safe to say there will be cuts, and not on things that will impact the residents first," said Councilman Russell Betts, adding that the council will have to eventually discuss city employee compensation packages.

The City Council unanimously declared a fiscal emergency last month. This legal maneuver will give the city greater flexibility to negotiate contracts with labor organizations.

Betts said the only items he would seriously consider from the list of 16 recommendations are those seeking to make cuts at City Hall, such as the proposal to immediately freeze cash payouts for unused vacation time. This could save the city about \$300,000 per year.

If it is the obligation of the Palms Springs Unified School District to pay for crossing guards, then they should, he added. Regardless, "we are not going to have children crossing the street without crossing guards," he said.

Councilman-elect Joe McKee, who is to be sworn-in Tuesday, said that even with all the proposals put forth by staff, the city will not be a "third of the way" to where it needs to be fiscally.

"We have already discussed freezes and vacations payouts and comp time ... these are things we are going to look at," he said.

Mayor-elect Adam Sanchez, who also will be sworn into office Tuesday, said he wants to "get input from all of our council members" before discussing cost-cutting measures with the press. Sanchez said he prefers not coming out of the gate with his mind made up and wants to hear other members of the "new council" share their thoughts.

"This is the beginning of a whole new council," he added.

Councilman Scott Matas could not be reached for comment. Councilwoman Jan Pye said she was busy and for The Desert Sun to call back in the morning.