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New DHS council sworn in, deals with budget woes

DESERT HOT SPRINGS, Calif. -

A new group of leaders took over the Desert Hot Springs city council, but continued to deal with old problems. Adam Sanchez was sworn in as mayor then joined by councilman elect Joe McKee, mayor pro tem Russell Betts, Jan Pye and councilman Scott Matas. The new council met for the first time in front of a full house to talk about the city's financial crisis. "We need \$2.6 million in cuts," said Matas. "Bring back recommendations on where they need to be, I am tired of sitting up here and hearing we need direction, we need direction, we need direction."

New numbers from the city's finance director show DHS is on track to spend \$4.8 million more than it brings in this fiscal year. Last month, the council declared a fiscal emergency, buying it some time to make cuts. The city's finance director said the city needs to cut approximately \$2.6 million in the next 6 months to get back to get out of a deficit for the fiscal year. Otherwise, the city would run out of money by the spring of 2014. City staff proposed 16 possible cuts to the council in a report. Some of them include:

- Minimizing watering grass/ lawns in city parks to save approximately \$179,812 per year
- Close the Wardman Park Pool, estimated savings of \$89,000 per year
- City council stipends and benefits, estimated savings of \$53,500 per year

Also on the list, eliminating the city's crossing guard program and asking PSUSD to pay for crossing guards for their schools. "If we don't have the crossing guards, then it'll just be more of a mess, and all the kids just rushing out to get hit by cars," said Rebecca Roberson as she was picking her 11-year-old daughter from school.

Just like she's worried about her child's safety, many people in the city continue to worry about their public safety. The police and fire department remain on the chopping block. "Show me

how we can get away with saving the police department, not just getting up and saying we love the police," said McKee.

Councilman Betts thinks the bigger cuts should come from the city itself. "You can't ignore the biggest single budget item which is salaries, that's where we're going to get the lions share of the savings and there's going to have to be salary cuts made," said Betts.

For Roberson, she says that's where they should always start. "Maybe take something out of their own pockets, instead of our children's," said Roberson. "Then things in this town would be better."

The council also voted to put a moratorium on travel expenses for its members for now. They will discuss more of the recommendations and bigger line items at their next meeting on December 17.

You can see the full list of possible cuts

here: <http://199.87.185.104/sirepub/cache/2/ixfq43wctbk1dmz1s1g3dq3y/11114912032013093255757.PDF>