

*Written by*

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The Desert Sun

Dec. 12, 2013 | [2 Comments](#)

## Desert Hot Springs considers cutting funds to Boys and Girls Club



*Gym director Christopher Honoré teaches Michael Hartwell at the Boys and Girls Club in Desert Hot Springs on Nov. 8, 2013. / Omar Ornelas/ The Desert Sun*

**DESERT HOT SPRINGS** — The Desert Hot Springs City Council will consider cutting funding to the Boys & Girls Club of Coachella Valley and will continue negotiating with city unions in an effort to save the city from bankruptcy.

Negotiations between officials and unions, including the Teamsters and the Desert Hot Springs Police Officers Association, have been ongoing since the city declared a fiscal emergency in November. According to the agenda for the next City Council meeting, the negotiations will continue Tuesday in a closed session.

City leaders were hoping the declaration of a fiscal emergency would give them more options and legroom as they try to solve the city's budget crisis.

So far, union leaders have not brought forth a cost-cutting proposal as city leaders had hoped. Mayor Pro Tem Russell Betts had previously told The Desert Sun that the time for department heads to make "their own recommendations" is over.

The city is not contractually obligated to continue giving the Boys & Girls Club the \$250,000 annual payment that covers the cost of its lease and utilities in the city's year-old Health and Wellness Center.

If the funding cut is approved, the city can save \$125,000 since it has already paid the first half of the annual subsidy.

To date, the City Council has approved several cuts, including immediately freezing cash payouts for unused vacation time for non-union city employees and halting all citywide expenses for travel, training and conferences. These cuts could save the city up to \$400,000.

Despite the reductions already approved, the city still needs to make more than \$2 million in cuts by June in order to pay all of its employees and make payment on other contractual obligations. According to city documents, Desert Hot Springs is on course to collect revenues of \$13.9 million this fiscal year, and spend \$18 million. More than \$9 million of city's budget goes toward its police and code enforcement services.

According to city documents, the Boy & Girls Club has more than 1,200 young people registered and offers "daily after school programs and activities for youth." The staff recommendation states that a new facilities user agreement should be negotiated with the club but does not state the terms.

"Unfortunately, due to the City's fiscal emergency, the current Facilities Use/Lease Agreement should be terminated," reads a document posted along with the council agenda. "The City may wish to consider additional options during this time period for more fiscal accountability."

The gap in the city's finances was released by city staff last month and was blamed on a projected 2013-2014 budget that has been called "too optimistic" by the city's Finance Director Amy Aguer.

**These optimistic numbers were projected by the city's former manager Rick Daniels, who has since moved on take a job as the city manager of Needles.**

**Daniels has not returned calls from The Desert Sun to comment on the budget situation.**

## **If you go**

**Where: Carl May Community Center, 11711 West Drive**

**When: 6 p.m., Tuesday, Dec. 17**