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## **Desert Hot Springs ends contract with Boys & Girls Club**

**City Council insists it's a technicality and the club will be able to continue serving children**



*Despite vocalized concerns from a band of residents, the City Council voted unanimously to terminate a lease agreement with the Boys & Girls Club of Coachella Valley and directed staff to renegotiate a new contract on Tuesday night. / Desert Sun file photo*

**DESERT HOT SPRINGS** — Despite vocalized concerns from a band of residents, the City Council voted unanimously to terminate a lease agreement with the Boys & Girls Club of Coachella Valley and directed staff to renegotiate a new contract on Tuesday night.

Under the previous agreement, the financially-strapped city subsidized the organization annual with \$250,000, of which \$125,000 has already been paid. Interim City Manager Bob Adams said the city has to provide a 180-day termination notice to the nonprofit.

“We have 1,200 children and we are giving those children a good life and a chance to do something great,” said John H. Furbee, a longtime resident of Desert Hot Springs. “Perhaps Desert Hot Springs cannot afford \$250,000 a year, but we have to do what we can. ... We need to make an agreement and continue working with the Boys & Girls Club.”

Offering daily after-school programs and activities, the Boys & Girls Club of Coachella Valley serves about 200 young people, including 90 teens a day, in the year-old Health and Wellness Center location in Desert Hot Springs. Funding to the club is the largest social subsidy the city provides to its residents. The organization also provides juvenile delinquency prevention and academic success programs.

“I think the Boys & Girls Club is doing fine and I think it is the best thing that has happened to the youth of this city in its history,” Dave Christensen, a more than 20-year resident of the city, told the council.

In November, the city declared a fiscal emergency in an effort to keep from slipping into bankruptcy. Since the decision, city officials have been working with local unions to make more cuts.

**According to city documents, Desert Hot Springs is on course to collect revenues of \$13.9 million this fiscal year but spend \$18 million. More than \$9 million of the city’s budget funds its police and code enforcement services.**

City officials have been meeting with the Desert Hot Springs Police Officer Association in order to find cost cuts. According to Wendell Phillips, the police union’s representative, city officials proposed a more than \$1.1 million cut to police salaries and benefits.

The city needs to cut more than \$2 million by June in order to pay all municipal employees and make payment on other contractual obligations.

So far, the council has already approved several cuts, including freezing cash payouts for unused vacation time for non-union city employees and ending citywide expenses for travel, training and conferences.

“In these difficult times, I realize the choices may come down to police protection or our children,” said Courtney Moe, a 12-year resident of the city. “I believe that serving and protecting our children is a better choice than one or two police men” on the streets.

This city can still save \$125,000 by June if it ends the Boys & Girls Club agreement and doesn't come up with a new contract.

Adams said the purpose of this motion is not “because we are dissatisfied” with the club, adding that there is no other city in the valley that subsidizes the Boys & Girls Club like Desert Hot Springs does.

Jim Ducatte, chief executive officer of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Coachella Valley Foundation, said the club “not only provides after-school care for more than 1,200 members, but we also provide juvenile delinquency programs and allow parents to work while their children are thriving.”

Councilman Scott Matas said the community “saw as a community explosion from 300 kids to 1,200 kids. Matas encouraged staff to look for ways to renegotiate the contract and keeps the facility functioning.

“This is procedural matter,” Councilman Russell Betts said. “We have to go through and understand that we do not have enough money. ... The objective of this motion is to keep a youth facility open but doing nothing will close that facility.”

Ducatte said the facility costs \$420,000 to operate and that the organization cannot afford to stay at the location without the city's subsidy.

Mayor Adam Sanchez had previously told The Desert Sun the children of the community will always have a place to go. “This is about oversight and accountability.”

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