

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF  
PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA, SUPPORTING THE  
MISSION SPRINGS WATER DISTRICT GROUNDWATER  
QUALITY PROTECTION PROJECT.

WHEREAS, the Mission Springs Water District's Groundwater Quality Protection Project will protect the Mission Creek and Palm Springs Aquifers, which are at the headwaters of the water supply for the Coachella Valley. These aquifers are the main sources of drinking water for parts of the Valley and world-renowned spa mineral water. These aquifers are also important to conservation of important wildlife habitat in the area; and

WHEREAS, for the past ten years the Mission Springs Water District has partnered with state and federal agencies to replace septic tanks that threaten to leak into the aquifers. Approximately \$5.7 million in federal funds have been matched by \$8 million in state and local funding to abate 1400 individual septic tanks, replacing them with a modern wastewater collection and treatment system; and

WHEREAS, the community of Palm Springs is making an investment to conserve its pristine water source that is the backbone of the region's economy. An additional 4000 septic systems must be abated during the remaining three years of a local tax assessment district that provides local funding for the project. Local residents voted to create the assessment district despite the region's economic conditions of high unemployment, low-income, and high number of foreclosures; and

WHEREAS, groundwater is the sole source of water to nearly 400,000 people in the Coachella Valley. Protection of this groundwater is a significant priority for the City of Palm Springs.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Palm Springs supports the Mission Springs Water District's Groundwater Quality Protection Project, and encourages support to continue implementation of this program to safeguard our groundwater resources.

PASSED, ADOPTED, AND APPROVED BY THE PALM SPRINGS CITY COUNCIL THIS 21<sup>ST</sup> DAY OF JULY, 2010.

\_\_\_\_\_  
David H. Ready, City Manager

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
James Thompson, City Clerk

ITEM NO. 8.1.

CERTIFICATION

STATE OF CALIFORNIA )  
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE ) ss.  
CITY OF PALM SPRINGS )

I, JAMES THOMPSON, City Clerk of the City of Palm Springs, hereby certify that Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_ is a full, true and correct copy, and was duly adopted at a regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Palm Springs on this 21<sup>st</sup> day of July, 2010, by the following vote:

AYES:  
NOES:  
ABSENT:  
ABSTAIN:

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James Thompson, City Clerk  
City of Palm Springs, California

# Opinion

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."  
 First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

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## OUR VOICE

### Invest to keep water safe and pure

Support Mission Springs Water District's bid to rid Desert Hot Springs of septic tanks

If the groundwater in Desert Hot Springs becomes tainted by failing septic tanks, it would be not only a disaster for the city but a potential threat to the entire Coachella Valley.

The Mission Springs Water District delivers some of the purest water in the world, melting snow from Mount San Jacinto and Mount San Geronio, two of the tallest mountains in Southern California.

From Desert Hot Springs, water seeps into the Coachella Valley aquifer and flows all the way to the Salton Sea. Even worse for the city would be contamination of the hot mineral springs that give the town its name and is the lifeblood of more than three dozen spas.

"If that were to happen, you might as well roll up the city," John Brown, a district director, told The Desert Sun editorial board last week.

Congress has authorized \$35 million for the Groundwater Quality Protection Act, which would expand the sewer system and eliminate 2,500 septic systems, but the money hasn't been appropriated.

The district is pushing hard to release the funds and build enough sewers to eliminate all the septic tanks in town. The Desert Sun supports the effort.

#### Better safe than sorry

District General Manager Arden Wallum said there's no way to know when or if septic tanks will fail. But if they did, it would cost 10 to 100 times more to clean up a tainted water supply — at least \$400 million, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Two major mountains, San Geronio and San Jacinto, come together at the western end of Coachella Valley," Wallum said. "This is also where the southeasterly groundwater flow into the valley narrows. Thousands of septic tanks exist in this area and many are decades old. The extent of the impact to this water is unknown but the potential for impacting new and existing areas downstream is possible. This groundwater flow moves in the direction of the communities below and eliminating septic tanks can be nothing but a benefit to the valley as a whole."

The district does not control homes using septic tanks, nor does the city. That's up to the Riverside County Environmental Health Department. But if a home is within 100 feet of a sewer line, it is required to hook up to it. The district has spent \$20 million since the early 1990s to install 75 miles of sewer lines.

There are five areas in the city that don't have sewer service. The city has spent \$10 million improving 37 miles of streets, said City Manager Rick Daniels. It hasn't improved the 10 miles of streets where sewers have yet to be installed.

"It would be foolish to improve a street only to see it torn up for sewers," he said.

As a result, drivers can tell that when they hit a rough road, the houses are generally on septic tanks.

Hot springs like no other place on Earth

Cabot Yerxa, a homesteader, discovered the hot springs of Miracle Hill around 1913. The water is heated to about 180 degrees by geothermal forces thousands of feet below the Earth's surface.

Daniels called the hot springs "invaluable."

"It's a phenomenon that occurs nowhere else on Earth," he said. There are many other hot springs, such as the waters of Baden-Baden, Germany, but, uniquely, the local springs don't have the sulfur smell.

Desert Hot Springs Mayor Yvonne Parks said the springs are the city's third-highest source of revenue. "It's extremely important to our tourism industry, which generates transit occupancy tax (TOT) that goes directly into our general fund," she said.

According to Jeff Bowman, owner of Living Waters Spa who also serves on the district board, the spas generate \$15 million to \$20 million of economic activity a year and \$1.3 million in TOT.

The hot water table is closer to the surface than the cold water aquifer, Parks said, and therefore at greater risk. The potential threat

In 1996, the district

commissioned the U.S. Geological Survey and Michigan Technological University to assess the threat of wastewater from septic tanks on groundwater.

The study found:  
 • The contamination potential from septic tanks is of significant concern.

• The density of systems overlying the groundwater is 2.3 to 2.8 times the recommended density.

• High levels of nitrate from the septic effluent pose a particularly critical risk to infants. Fecal matter of humans can contain organisms responsible for poliomyelitis, meningitis and several central nervous system disorders.

• Because many systems have been in operation for 40 years, the rate of wastewater movement suggests contamination will easily reach the groundwater supply. "The valley is one big watershed," said Nancy Wright, longtime district director. "Watershed protection is the best way to ensure that our valley has a healthy sustainable water supply, which is also important for economic development and future generations."

"Water contamination knows no boundaries." Call to action  
 Armed with this alarming report, the district went to the voters to ask for an assessment district in 1998. It failed.

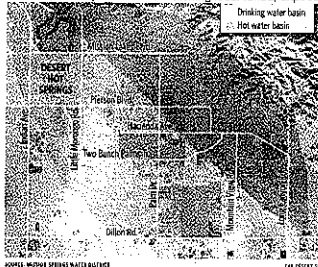
But in 2000, voters approved Assessment District 11, which generated \$8



The Whitewater River flows from the San Geronio Wilderness area through the Coachella Valley toward the Salton Sea.

#### Septic tanks in Desert Hot Springs

About 5,800 parcels remained to be sewered in the Desert Hot Springs area. In 2000, voters approved Assessment 11, which generated \$8 million to hook up 1,233 homes to sewers and eliminate 998 septic tanks. In 2004, voters approved Assessment District 12, which will generate \$28 million through 2014. In 2007, another \$25 million was authorized by Congress in the Water Resources Development Act, but the money has been appropriated. Mission Springs Water District is pushing to have the money released before Assessment 12, which provides the matching local funds, expires in 2014.



million to hook up 1,233 homes to sewers and eliminated 998 septic tanks.

In 2004, voters approved Assessment District 12, which will generate \$28 million through 2014.

That money also serves as matching funds for the \$35 million appropriated in 2007 as part of the Water Resources Development Act, carried by U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer, a Rancho Mirage Republican and chairwoman of the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

The federal funds must be appropriated before the local matching funds expire.

Supporters of the district's campaign to release the money should contact Boxer and U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who is on the Senate Appropriations Committee.

#### A district free of septic tanks

Combined with Assessment District 12, the federal money would allow the district to virtually eliminate septic tanks in Desert Hot Springs and the other areas it serves.

Homeowners would incur about \$4,000 in sewer fees spread out over 20 years. That's a bargain compared to the arrangement recently worked out in Cathedral City Cove, where homeowners will pay more than \$20,000 over 30 years.

Shovel-ready project  
 According to Brown, Wallum and Wright, designs for the sewer expansion are ready to go. The federal funds would generate 250 local construction jobs in 2011 and beyond.

"In addition to construction job creation, the ongoing

#### Contact your lawmakers

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maintenance of an expanded sewer system will keep existing staff at work and require additional permanent hires," Brown said. "Increased sewer flows will require the construction of a suitably expanded wastewater treatment plant, another source of additional jobs."

#### Little big district

Although it sounds like an ideal candidate for the federal stimulus program, the funds are authorized in the Water Resources Development Act.

If it can accomplish its goal of eradicating septic tanks, that would be quite a feat by a small agency like the Mission Springs Water District.

The Desert Sun applauds the effort and encourages Sens. Boxer and Feinstein to appropriate the \$35 million to create jobs and prevent a potential public health disaster.

Local lawmakers should lend their support as well.