



MEMORANDUM

To: City of Palm Springs

From: Sharon Lock, President
Coachella Valley Mosquito and Vector Control District

Date: April 24, 2012

Re: Laboratory Expansion Project

As the City's representative to the Coachella Valley Mosquito and Vector Control District ("District"), I want to provide you some background information on a laboratory expansion project that has recently garnered media attention.

Last month, the District approved \$2.6 million in capital expenditures in order to enhance the District's mosquito, vector and disease testing service. These expenses will be used to expand and upgrade the District's laboratory, not build a new facility.

On April 15, the Desert Sun published a lengthy article in which some questioned this expenditure. Also, on April 20, there was a Desert Sun editorial that raised the same issues set forth in the article, neither of which addressed the upgrade in public health and safety issues. This memorandum is intended to clarify the necessity for expansion of the laboratory which was unanimously approved by the Board of Trustees, and to explain the procedures through which it was determined that the expansion was necessary and in the best interests of the District and its residents – your constituents.

Preliminarily, I want to reassure you that the District is starkly aware of the importance of not only safeguarding public funds, but also of bolstering public confidence in the District—while at the same time ensuring that the District is able to carry out its core mission of reducing the risk of disease transmission through mosquitoes and vectors. The District has reduced its annual homeowner assessment by over 80% since 2007.

The Project

Unfortunately, the Desert Sun misrepresented the project by stating a new lab building is to be constructed. In fact, this is a remodel and expansion of existing facilities.

The Desert Sun correctly indicated that a major reason for the laboratory expansion was to expedite mosquito testing, which is currently outsourced to the University of California, Davis. While this is one of the critical reasons the expansion is necessary, there are a number of other reasons that should be explained.

Expansion Project

The District currently has professional and technical staff in place to provide rapid molecular surveillance services to District residents. However, the District relies on an outside agency for certain necessary testing, which causes a delay in response times. Additionally, the current testing prices are expensive and incur additional shipping costs to UC Davis.

The upgraded facility will resolve all the problems with the current facility listed above, and allow for anticipated future growth. It will allow the District to provide enhanced surveillance of a broad range of vector borne pathogens that cause human and animal disease. It will result in cost savings of approximately \$37,000 per year in controlling arbovirus transmission and testing. (Initial equipment costs are approximately \$70,000, which will be paid off in less than two years). This increased expediency will result in less pesticide use, savings on chemicals and labor, and reduced environmental risk.

Increased processing capabilities will allow the District to not only combat West Nile virus, but also St. Louis encephalitis virus, western equine encephalomyelitis virus, and potentially new, emerging diseases such as Dengue and Chikungunya fever. If an arbovirus is detected early in mosquitoes then the virus transmission can be controlled, human health may be preserved, and money can be saved from trying to control a widespread outbreak. With its improved capabilities, the District will have the ability to test for multiple viruses, and costs to test for new viruses would be reduced and controlled.

Allowing for on-site testing has other benefits as well. In late January, it was announced at a meeting of the Mosquito and Vector Control Association of California that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have reduced supporting states with arbovirus testing, including West Nile Virus surveillance. This was not a surprise, as the CDC has undergone major budget cuts recently.

The District lacks control over funding or reporting time at UC Davis. With uncertainties in future state funding for the University of California (which has recently suffered major budget cuts), testing time could potentially increase—especially since UC Davis is not mandated by the State to perform the testing.

The upgraded facility will consolidate all laboratory functions into one building. Having a single work and office space for staff in the surveillance and integrated vector and

quality control groups will facilitate collaborations between the groups and streamline some of the experimental procedures. This will increase productivity, and allow the District to improve response time and effectiveness.

From a planning perspective, the floor plan principally groups program functions into three zones: laboratories, offices and support services. New mechanical and electrical spaces are located in or near the new addition for improved, cost-effective utility distribution.

Inadequacy of Current Facilities

The District's laboratory is currently housed in two locations (the Biocontrol Building and the Operations Building). Although the buildings are within walking distance from one another, having separate facilities causes workflow inefficiencies and hinders communication and collaboration between staff.

Both buildings fail to comply with the standards set forth by the United States Department of Health and Human Services as established in its handbook on "Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories." Currently, workers must pass through the workrooms to access rearing rooms, restrooms, janitor rooms, and the storage/archive/office room. This potentially puts science work and staff at risk. In addition, some of the areas are underutilized, while others are inefficient.

Space in a number of rooms is inadequate. There is inadequate space for essential equipment, such as incubators and chemical storage cabinets. There are exposed pipes which pose a potential hazard to staff. From an environmental conditioning standpoint, temperature and relative humidity are not reliable in certain areas, making it difficult to maintain natural outdoor conditions which are needed. Some of the rooms are not suited for the wet conditions present and lack vermin control.

Due to lack of space, some work areas are being used for purposes for which they were not intended. At least one of the rooms is overflowing with tools, parts, supplies, boxes, and carts and does not provide appropriate ventilation for storage of batteries.

In the Operations Building, there is a problem with insufficient exit egress near a laboratory hood, which is not in compliance with the standards promulgated by the National Fire Protection Association.

The expanded facility will also allow for expansion of the District's Information Technology ("IT") Department—which will have to be expanded somehow in any event. Under the plan, the existing laboratory office space in the Operations building is to be utilized by IT, allowing for improved communication and collaboration on issues affecting software end-users.

Procedures

In 2011, the District updated its Strategic Plan. The purpose of the Strategic Plan is to address key issues and present guidelines on how to meet the District's professional, ethical and legal obligations successfully. It provided a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what the District is, what it does, and why it does it. The major goal of the Strategic Plan was to prepare the District for known issues and at the same time provide guidance in areas where future conditions may be more difficult to anticipate. A Strategic Planning Workshop was held with the Board of Trustees, District Management, and representative employees on March 19, 2011.

With respect to capital improvement programs, the District endeavored, with the implementation of the Strategic Plan, to: (1) establish elements for a capital improvement needs assessment policy and procedure; (2) conduct a complete and accurate inventory of capital assets; (3) complete a space inventory within one year; and (4) establish a list of future capital improvements and timetables.

Subsequently, the District commissioned a Laboratory Feasibility Study which included an existing facility assessment, site analysis, and conceptual floor plan. A Needs Assessment was also prepared which also examined the necessity for improved laboratory facilities. Ultimately, this led to unanimous approval of the project by the Board of Trustees last month.

We have an outstanding and professional staff at the District. The General Manager and District staff endeavored to keep the entire Board fully apprised of the planning for this project at every step. I can assure you that all the Trustees were intimately involved in the planning phase, and that involvement and concern has resulted in a better project which has increased the public benefit that will be derived from the project.

I am confident that this project will be sufficient to serve the District's needs for many years. This project is reasonable and necessary to ensure the District's scientific operations staff has sufficient resources and capabilities to protect the public from the threat of mosquito and vector borne diseases. I am also confident that this project will be completed on time and within budget. The proposed budget accounts for inflation through the year 2013, assuming an 18 month completion date.