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# The Desert Sun

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## Holstege criticizes 'Marilyn' protesters

### Mayor: Group 'co-opting the Me Too movement'

Erin Rode | Palm Springs Desert Sun  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Palm Springs Mayor Christy Holstege on Thursday addressed what she calls "the misinformation shared in public comment" section of the Palm Springs City Council meetings over the past few months about the controversial "Forever Marilyn" statue.

Opponents of the "Forever Marilyn" statue have expressed their anger and frustration about the statue's placement on Museum Way.

The general public comment section allows individuals to comment on items that are not on council's agenda that night.

Typically, councilmembers do not respond to these comments, and councilmembers are barred from discussing or taking action on non-agenda items during council meetings.

But after about half a dozen people made comments criticizing the city's decision to place the statue on Museum Way on Thursday, Holstege responded to these criticisms during the council meeting for what she called "the first and last time," including whether the statue had originally been confirmed to be placed in the new downtown park, the preferred location for opponents of the Museum Way location.

"I was on the downtown park

See **STATUE**, Page 5A

## SAFE PASSAGE



Michelle Mariscal, an ecologist for the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority, walks into the Harbor Boulevard Wildlife Underpass in La Habra Heights on June 30. About 7,000 vehicle crashes a year on California highways involve large wildlife, such as deer, according to 2018 data. Projects like the La Habra Heights underpass help keep both animals and humans safe. PABLO UNZUETA/FOR CALMATTERS

## State pledges \$61M to protect wildlife, drivers

Marissa Garcia | CalMatters

It'd be just another normal day, nearly 17 feet above Highway 101 in Agoura Hills.

A southern alligator lizard and a western toad hide from the heat in the greenery of restored native vegetation. Mountain lion cubs pounce on rocks and spring into the nearby canyons. The sun glints on the feathers of a golden eagle soaring overhead.

This is the scene environmentalists hope will

someday become reality on a massive overpass above the ten-lane freeway that cuts through the Santa Monica Mountains near Los Angeles.

The project known as the Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing is one step closer to happening now that Gov. Gavin Newsom has signed a budget that includes \$7 million to help build it — and another \$54.5 million for similar projects in other parts of

See **WILDLIFE**, Page 6A

## Palm Springs trims Coachella Valley Economic Partnership funding

James B. Cutchin | Palm Springs Desert Sun  
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Palm Springs City Council voted unanimously Thursday to cut its annual funding to the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership — the only valley-wide economic development organiza-

tion — by \$50,000, 40% of its current membership fee.

The decision means the city will now pay \$75,000 of the \$125,000 in annual membership fees paid in prior years. Palm Springs' annual \$200,000 contribution to the CVEP-administered Palm Springs Innovation Hub Accelerator —

or iHub — campus will remain unchanged following the vote.

The city will pay half of the membership fee to the CVEP up front, with the remaining \$37,500 paid subject to a six-month detailed review of the organization's contribution to Palm Springs' economic development.

"The decision to reduce the general support for CVEP is disappointing but not debilitating," CVEP CEO Joe Wallace told The Desert Sun via email. He added that the organization would need to make adjustments to its budget to

See **FUNDING**, Page 2A

MORE INSIDE CALIFORNIA, 11A



### Fire forces forest closure

Flames and plumes of smoke rise above Frenchman Lake as the Sugar Fire, part of the Beckwourth Complex Fire, burns Thursday in the Plumas National Forest. A nearly 200-square-mile area of the forest was closed Friday due to the blaze. NOAH BERGER/AP

USA TODAY

### Montana bear killed after woman fatally attacked

Wildlife officials said they killed a grizzly bear Friday that had pulled a California woman from her tent and killed her earlier this week in the middle of a small Montana town. The bear was shot by federal wildlife workers wearing night vision goggles three days after the fatal attack. The victim was identified as 65-year-old Leah Davis Lokan of Chico. 17A

### Bank robbery reported

Riverside County sheriff's deputies are investigating a bank robbery that occurred on Highway 111 in Indian Wells Friday afternoon. The suspect fled the scene before deputies arrived, sheriff's spokesperson Sgt. Deanna Pecoraro told The Desert Sun. 3A

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# Funding

Continued from Page 1A

absorb the revenue losses.

Many of the council member's concerns revolved around differences in amounts paid to CVEP by each of the Coachella Valley cities.

Councilmember Dennis Woods, who was the most critical of the organization, said that Palm Springs residents didn't get any "bang for the buck" on its contribution to the CVEP.

"To throw this kind of money at a program that has no results or outcomes for the city of Palm Springs for and for its residents and for jobs and for diversification is not doing the job," Woods said.

Other councilmembers were less critical of the spending.

"We have a budget that is 10 times the size of other cities in the Coachella Valley," said Mayor Christy Holstege.

"We also use the labor of Coachella Valley residents to get the income that we get in (transient occupancy tax) and sales tax because the workers are staffing those businesses," Holstege said, "many from the eastern Coachella Valley or from other cities who may not be able to afford the level of economic development that we are able to afford."

The decision ran counter to a Palm Springs city staff report which recommended that the full \$325,000 in membership and iHub fees be allocated to the CVEP from the city budget. That analysis — presented at Thursday's meeting — found that, although economic development was too large of a task for one single organization to "move the needle" on alone, the CVEP and iHub were nevertheless "valuable programs in the very early stages of building out an economic development landscape."

Six of the nine Coachella Valley cities make annual payments to fund the CVEP. Palm Springs had previously paid the most of any desert city with its \$325,000 in combined fees. Palm Desert, which allocates \$305,000 to the CVEP, will now be the highest-paying city. Indio pays \$75,000 annually, according to the CVEP, while Cathedral City pays \$25,000. Indian Wells and Desert Hot Springs each pay \$10,000 in annual membership fees, according to the organization.

La Quinta and Coachella do not currently participate in the CVEP, although they have in years past. CVEP Vice President of Innovation Laura James suggested at the Thursday meeting that concerns about the organization being too Palm Springs-centric had prompted those cities to opt out.

Rancho Mirage has historically been a member of the CVEP, but cut its annual \$10,000 membership payment last year amid COVID-driven belt-tighten-



Coachella Valley Economic Partnership CEO Joe Wallace speaks during a summit in 2019. JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN FILE

ing. The variation in amounts paid by different valley cities has caused occasional "friction" throughout the CVEP's history, according to Wallace, who said the differences can largely be explained by the differing levels of service that his organization provides to each city.

While CVEP receives the most funding from Palm Springs, estimates from the organization in the Palm Springs staff report indicated that 42% of the total amount of Palm Springs funding is paid directly back to the city in the form of rent on the CVEP's headquarters and the Palm Springs iHub location. Wallace said that during a "normal" year, where his organization would host activities such as convention center events, even more of the Palm Springs funding is channeled back to the city.

"When you add it all up," he said, "we almost pay them back all that they give us."

There are three iHub locations in the Coachella Valley, in Palm Springs, Palm Desert and Indio.

Wallace said that the cities of Palm Desert and Indio both cover the rent and utilities for their iHub locations, meaning that his organization pays nothing back to those cities like it does in Palm Springs. Palm Desert's allocated amount also includes \$80,000 per year to cover CVEP coaching services for distressed local businesses.

The CVEP head added that he is scheduled to speak to the Rancho Mi-

rage city council on July 15 about renewing their membership and thinks it likely that the city will agree to do so.

"If there is a silver lining to what happened," Wallace said in reference to the Palm Springs funding cut, "it is in the potential for some the cities that are not investors to remedy that by committing some funding for regional economic development efforts."

The Palm Springs city staff report highlighted a range of contributions by the CVEP to the local business landscape. These included ongoing services such as local business mentoring, business educational seminars and participation in groups such as the Palm Springs Economic Development and Business Retention Task Force, among others.

The report also highlighted accomplishments by the organization, such as raising \$3 million worth of personal protective equipment for local businesses, helping establish entrepreneurship and cybersecurity programs at the California State University Palm Desert campus and forming a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing a four-year California state university to the Coachella Valley.

The CVEP also raised \$60,000 to fund the opinion page editor position at The Desert Sun after the publication lost funding for the role from its parent company, Gannett.

Despite the organization's accomplishments, the Palm Springs staff re-

port said that the CVEP largely operated independent of any "broader strategic approach to economic development" — a situation which the report suggested could limit its effectiveness.

Wallace said he largely agreed with that assessment and that his organization would benefit from a broadly coordinated economic development strategy between the Coachella Valley cities.

"It would be wonderful if the region had a manual on what they want and what they are willing to support for the long term," he said.

Wallace noted that such a document had been created in the aftermath of the financial crisis more than a decade ago, but that it was largely been abandoned in subsequent years. He added that the creation of a Joint Powers Authority similar to the one created to fund the Greater Palm Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau would be an effective way to both accelerate economic diversification in the region and end debate about how much was contributed to the effort by each participating city.

"If you look at how much money is spent trying to get more tourists in versus diversifying the (Coachella Valley) economy, it's a 30 or 40 to one ratio," he said. "I'm not saying they shouldn't spend on tourism, but if they want to diversify, they need to have a parallel effort that is equivalent."

James B. Cutchin covers business in the Coachella Valley. Reach him at james.cutchin@desertsun.com.



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