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‘The scarring done will never vanish’

City urged to pay reparations to those forced off Section 14 in 1950s, '60s

Paul Albani-Burgio
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

In an emotional and sometimes wrenching meeting, dozens of people urged the Palm Springs City Council on Thursday to pay reparations to people evic-

ted from Section 14 in the 1950s and 1960s. The council loosely agreed that some form of direct compensation would be appropriate, but decided on no concrete amounts.

About 50 people registered to give comments, many of whom had experienced the evictions directly. They described how their families' hand-built homes on the

tribal land in what is now downtown Palm Springs were wiped out, and the lasting trauma that had precipitated — including, in some cases, depression, substance abuse, divorce and suicide.

“The scarring done will never vanish,” said Pearl Devers, an award-winning film producer who grew up on Section 14 and now leads an organization called Section 14 Survivors. “The apology [from the city

See **REPARATIONS**, Page 16A

EARTH DAY 2022



Dominic Martinez, 15, of Cathedral City adds detail to a part of the mural along the Chuperosa Lane Murals Path in Cathedral City on Friday. Members of the Boys & Girls Club of Cathedral City and the Cathedral City Senior Center worked together to add to the mural “Salvaje y Libre (Wild and Free)” in celebration of Earth Day. ANDY ABEYTA/THE DESERT SUN

Mayes, Garcia ready to battle for CSU Palm Desert project

Officials want state to allocate \$79M to build a student center

Sherry Barkas
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

State legislators representing the Coachella Valley are pushing for \$79 million of the state’s budget to be allocated to build a student center at the Cal State University San Bernardino Palm Desert campus.

If approved, it would mark a significant milestone toward the realization of a vision laid out by Palm Desert and Coachella Valley leaders more than 25 years ago.

“This is priority one for me,” said Assemblymember Chad Mayes, I-Rancho Mirage, with Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia, D-Coachella, echoing the statement Friday during a 45-minute press conference announcing the effort that includes a coalition of local government, business and civic leaders working together to make a standalone campus a reality.

Elected officials from throughout the Coachella Valley have long said a standalone campus would mean a greater ability to serve historically under-represented minorities, low-income and first-generation students.

The nearest four-year campuses include Cal State San Bernardino’s home campus in San Bernardino, and the University of Redlands which are at least 40 miles away and difficult to get to for those without

See **CAMPUS**, Page 10A

COD approves initial Roadrunner Motors site

Jonathan Horwitz
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

Nearly six months after College of the Desert Superintendent/President Martha Garcia announced the college would review alternative locations for its planned Roadrunner Motors program, the Board of Trustees unanimously voted on Friday to proceed with construction at the location it already owns in

Cathedral City.

The project is estimated to cost about \$35 million, up from an initial \$20 million budget that did not consider the cost of purchasing land and other factors such as inflation and what the college has called “cost overruns.”

The October decision to reevaluate plans prompted outcry from Cathedral City leaders.

See **COD**, Page 8A

USA TODAY

Biden aims to protect old-growth forests in US

President Joe Biden on Friday signed an executive order intended to help restore national forests devastated by wildfires, drought and blight, using an Earth Day visit to Seattle to press for more action on the environment. **15A**

Muzik quits city council

Kim Muzik is resigning her seat on the Indian Wells City Council, effective May 31. Muzik, who is less than halfway through her second term, said her primary residence will no longer be in Indian Wells. **3A**

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Coachella cancellations

Two acts slated to perform during Weekend 2 of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival had to drop out due to testing positive for COVID-19. Bishop Briggs said on Twitter that she will not be performing this weekend. **2A**

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Campus

Continued from Page 1A

their own transportation.

While both Mayes and Garcia said the timing is right, as legislators move through budget sessions for 2022-23 with a projected state surplus of \$31 billion, they also said it is not a slam dunk that their push for \$79 million for Palm Desert's CSU campus would be part of the final budget.

"It's a fight. There are (four) other regions that want their own university site, to be designated by the Cal State University system and their putting up their efforts as we speak," Garcia said.

The other regions include Stockton, Concord, Chula Vista and San Mateo County. Palm Desert is the only site with dedicated land that is build ready with infrastructure in place.

"We're all trying to drink from the same fountain," Garcia said. "But we think we've made a really strong case not just for the long-term effort that's under way but for the student needs of today. We've shown that there's a growing population in the region and that there's a growing student body on the campus..."

It is possible that in the end, funds will be approved but less than the \$79 million sought, Mayes said.

He and Garcia requested \$100 million last year for the Palm Desert campus and in the final week of budget negotiations between the Assembly and the Senate, that was down to \$40 million.

"By the time it got through Senate negotiations, it fell flat," Mayes said.

"We had a surplus last year. We have a surplus this year. I think the difference is that last year, the Cal State system was not 100% on board. I'm not blaming them because they have a process with their trustees and all..." Mayes said.

This year, however, "my understanding is that they are fully committed to this this year," Mayes said. "We just have to make the ask ... and do the work."

But the community needs to show its support and let legislators and all in Sacramento know this campus is needed, Mayes said.

Thursday's press conference, held in lobby of the Indian Wells Theater on the CSU campus, drew about 75 people, including educators and about a dozen students attending the Palm Desert campus. It was led by Joe Wallace, president/CEO of the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership.

Wallace also leads Priority One Coachella Valley, a nonprofit created in 2020 by the City of Palm Desert and CVEP to address "the most pressing needs" in the desert, starting with a standalone four-year university.

"Our first and most important need for economic development was identified as expanding the Palm Desert campus of California State University, San Bernardino, to enhance the college experience for the students who choose to continue their education" at a four-year campus, Wallace said.

"We're remarkably close to success, and all the right people have aligned with this effort to bring us to a successful closure of this campaign," Wallace said.

A full four-year university will help keep students in the Coachella Valley to learn and add to the local job market when finished – making it an economic benefit as well, Wallace said in a sentiment that was echoed by others.

Foundation was laid decades ago

Among those attending the press conference were Dick and Jan Oliphant, who along with Betty Barker and others had the vision and began the effort to get a four-year standalone university in Palm Desert more than 25 years ago.

Cal State San Bernardino classes



Architectural renderings of a student center building at the CSUSB Palm Desert campus are displayed at a press conference. Officials want the state to allocate \$79 million for the project. ANDY ABEYTA/THE DESERT SUN

were first offered starting in 1986 in temporary classrooms on the College of the Desert campus. In 2002, it was moved to 168 acres of land donated to the state by the city of Palm Desert with the intention that a standalone Cal State University Palm Desert would one day be built.

To date just 18 acres of the site have been built out to include three academic buildings and a 300-seat theater, all constructed with local philanthropic dollars.

The infrastructure is in place and environment impact report completed years ago, making the site build-ready for expansion.

Angelique Melendrez, a Coachella Valley native and a senior who will be graduating from the CSU Palm Desert campus this semester with a bachelor's degree in psychology, commented on the size of the campus and what it lacks.

As is, the campus does not measure up to what the College of the Desert – a two-year campus – offers, she said.

"The future students of PDC (Palm Desert campus) deserve more than what myself, my peers and our alumni have had to deal with in our two or four years at this campus," she said. "Future students deserve a dedicated space for uninterrupted study, a proper career center and more."

"Our future students deserve a place to grab a nice meal that is on campus and not one to two miles away," Melendrez said. "Our future students deserve the focus to finally be on our campus and creating an actual college environment for them, and we won't have that without the state's funding."

'This is very, very important to us'

Thursday's speakers also included Riverside County Supervisor V. Manuel Perez, Coachella Mayor Steven Hernandez, Palm Desert Mayor Jan Harnik and CSU San Bernardino Vice President Robert Nava.

"The reason that we're here today, and really this vision Mr. Oliphant and others had for this campus, was because of our students. Investing in their futures, their dreams, helping them prepare for their full aspirations as individuals, as citizens and as professionals," Nava said.

"Please know that this is very, very important to us," Nava said, in speaking on behalf of CSU San Bernardino President Tomas Morales and the university.

"We are ready to do everything we can to support you in your efforts, your lobbying – whatever it's going to take, we're ready to do. This is a top priority for us."

Mayes, Garcia, Perez and Hernandez all grew up in the Coachella Valley and spoke of the need for a four-year university.

Nearly all the students present raised their hands when Perez asked how many were from families that are immigrants.

"This student center is going to bring about laboratory services. It's going to bring about mentorship services. It's going to bring about counseling services. It's going to give you an opportunity to understand what potentially your career could be. And that's what this is all about," Perez said.

He then translated what he said in Spanish and challenged students to get involved in the fight for a full-fledged campus.

"At the end of the day it's about wins. Win. Win. Win. Advocate. Advocate. Advocate. And while we are here to advocate for you, you can advocate with us just as well. And, we need you to advocate with us because it's even more powerful when it comes from students," Perez said.

Speakers stood at a podium, flanked by renderings of the planned two-story 23,700-square-foot student center, which will include a tutoring/mentoring center, career center, expanded campus library, group study space, cross cultural center, bookstore, food services, student health center and a recreation and wellness center.

The two-story student center, which would be built in two phases at an estimated total cost of \$150 million, would be able to accommodate up to 4,000 students, officials said.

'Let's fight like hell'

"We are all here to support something very important to us; very near to our hearts," Harnik said.

Many who were part of the initial vision for a four-year college couldn't attend the event or have passed away, but "are here in our hearts," Harnik said.

"Some of the people who made this vision, who shared this vision with the City of Palm Desert, who saw the need for accessible and relevant education were our city leaders," Harnik said.

They donated the land to CSU "with the express intent of building a campus"

and built the four existing buildings with donated money.

"So, today we are asking for CSU to come together, join us in this vision and build the heart of this campus," said Harnik, who joked that if "I had a Sharpie, I would change that \$79 million to \$179 million" that was written on a rendering posted next to the podium.

"I look forward to the groundbreaking and the ribbon cutting," Harnik said, and encouraged all present to get involved with the effort to get the funds through the Legislature and Gov. Gavin Newsom, to ultimately be passed down by the CSU Board of Regents.

Mayes grew up in Yucca Valley and said he was fortunate to be able to leave and get a college education.

"I have friends who today are not living the life that they wanted to live because of lack of opportunity," Mayes said. "There are so many kids and so many students ... that the programs they want to be in are not here and they've forgone the opportunity and their quality of life later on is not going to be as good."

Now in his final term in the Assembly, Mayes said he has tried all eight years he's been in the Legislature to get funding for a Palm Desert standalone campus.

He's been successful in getting some funds, but "I wish that we could have done more. I wish that we could have pushed a little bit harder, because every year that goes by is a lost opportunity."

To all attending, Mayes said: "Let's fight like hell to make sure that we get this \$79 million and get this built. And after this is built, let's fight like hell to get the next building built."

Mayes said people can get involved with letters of support sent to him or Garcia. Mayes can be reached through his district office at 41608 Indian Trail Road, Suite D-1, Rancho Mirage, CA 92270, (760) 346-6342.

Garcia's offices are at 48220 Jackson St., Suite A3, Coachella, CA 92236, (760) 347-2360, and 1101 Airport Road, Suite D, Imperial, CA 92251, (760) 355-8656.

More information about Priority One Coachella Valley can be found at priorityonecoacv.org or by calling (760) 776-6336.

Desert Sun reporter Sherry Barkas covers the cities of La Quinta, Indian Wells, Rancho Mirage and Palm Desert. She can be reached at sherry.barkas@thedesertsun.com. Follow her on Twitter @TDSsherryBarkas

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