



# City of Palm Springs

## Office of the City Council

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May 24, 2019

Hon. Chair and Members of the Riverside County Board of Supervisors  
County Administration Center  
4080 Lemon Street  
Riverside, California 92501

Re: Responsibility for Addressing Homelessness

Hon. Chair and Members of the Board:

The City of Palm Springs is writing to you to immediately and urgently request action by the County of Riverside Board of Supervisors on the homelessness crisis affecting our region and the City of Palm Springs. As the summer approaches, and our community is already experiencing triple digit heat, the Palm Springs City Council urges the County of Riverside to meet its legal and ethical obligations to address homelessness in the Coachella Valley. The community and our homeless residents need access to safe shelter immediately before we face loss of life in extreme temperatures, which has occurred in past summers while no County shelter is available.

As you know, State law provides that, as subdivisions of the State, it is the County's responsibility to provide relief and support for persons experiencing homelessness. (Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code, § 17000; Tobe v. City of Santa Ana, (1995) 9 Cal.4th 1069 ("If inability of homeless persons in city to afford housing accounted for their need to camp on public property, their recourse lay not with city, but with county, to which legislature had allocated responsibility to assist destitute persons.") Thus, while it is the County's legal responsibility to provide for the homeless, the City has been shouldering this cost, meaning that City taxpayers are paying twice, both for our County taxes and then to the City to fund the gaps left by the lack of County services. The County's responsibility for addressing homelessness was just recently confirmed in the case of Clinton v. Cody, (May 8, 2019) 2019 WL 2004842, in which the Court of Appeal held, "Section 17000 establishes the 'overarching "macro" policy' of the state mandating that each county provide aid and relief to its indigent population". (Id. at \*6.) The Court of Appeal went on to clarify that "*counties, not cities*, have a statutory obligation regarding housing for the indigent". (Id. at \*8.) Therefore, there can be no doubt that it is fundamentally a County responsibility to address homelessness.

Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley have a high proportion of homeless residents in the County of Riverside. For a long time, the Coachella Valley has provided a higher burden of services and costs addressing homelessness for the entire County. For example, Coachella Valley non-profit organizations provide 63% of all of the shelter beds for the entire County.

Homelessness is rapidly increasing throughout the State and in Palm Springs. At the 2019 Point in Time Count, Palm Springs had 196 unhoused people counted. This is nearly one third of people who are homeless in District 4 (612). Homeless individuals in the Western Coachella Valley make up 56% of all the homeless individuals in District 4.

By way of background, the County closed Roy's Desert Resource Center in the summer of 2017. Since that time, the entire Western Coachella Valley community, a population of over 150,000 people and 346 unhoused people at any given time, has been without a functioning shelter. Roy's provided an important place for respite for those people experiencing homelessness that no longer exists. The nearest shelters are over 30 minutes away by car, and over an hour by bus and often inaccessible for our residents.

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The City of Palm Springs dutifully contributed over \$100,000 per year toward the operation of Roy's, along with many other of our neighboring cities. When Roy's was closed, in the months leading up to its closure, the City paid to keep Roy's open during the day, with a case manager and an employment specialist and paid for services to rehouse people in other locations. The City had very good results with this program, and was awarded a grant from Desert Healthcare District to enable the city to continue to provide employment and case management services as a result of the City's success at Roy's.

At the time the County closed Roy's, the community was told that our homeless population would receive alternative shelter options immediately. However, we are now going on our third summer since the closing of Roy's without plans to provide either day or nighttime shelter by the County. Nor has the property been converted into a mental health in-patient facility, as we were told would happen.

The County has provided only one crisis housing/mental health team of two people for the entire Coachella Valley. In the 2016, the Palm Springs City Council authorized the hiring of a crisis housing/mental health team for the Palm Springs community and then doubled the number of teams after that, thanks to matching funding from the City and the Desert Healthcare District. That effort proved effective in providing services to the homeless population, including benefits and housing compared to what was provided previously. This crisis housing/mental health team was paid for by the Palm Springs taxpayers.

In addition, the City has continued to partner with the Desert Healthcare District to address homelessness. The District has funded a \$2 Million grant, and the City received approximately \$500,000 of this to add a second crisis housing/mental health team and pay for employment/case management services. Those services are provided through Martha's Village at the Well in the Desert location. This was done without any County financial support.

Likewise, the Coachella Valley Association of Governments has moved forward with a housing first model, and contracted with Path of Life. Palm Springs and other Coachella Valley cities contribute \$103,000 each, per year. The County contributed \$360,000 this year for the CVAG Housing First program, which is significantly less than it contributed to support Roy's. Indeed, Desert Healthcare District is now contributing more than the County is for these much needed services.

The City of Palm Springs is currently spending approximately \$1 Million a year on homelessness and homelessness services for the City of Palm Springs. We would like additional information about the amount of funding that the County is providing to the entire Coachella Valley for all homelessness services. Desert Healthcare District has allocated \$2 Million for homelessness in the past couple of years. Meanwhile, while the County initially funded \$6 Million for Roy's shelter, the County allowed it to close. Furthermore, the County used to contribute \$857,000 annually for operations of Roy's. Yet, the County is currently funding the Housing First program, the replacement of Roy's, at nearly one-third of the level of past funding.

The City of Palm Springs has requested, at a minimum, that the County provide a plan to address day and nighttime cooling centers for extreme weather. The City already funds a daytime cooling/heating center run by the Well in the Desert, in the amount of \$75,000 per year, and plans to provide more as necessary. Despite this, the County is not providing an overnight, or daytime, cooling center.

According the State Auditor's February 2018 report, Riverside County had a fund balance of \$120,621,000 in Mental Health Service Act funds, including \$28,525,000 in reserves as of fiscal year 2015/16. The County's reserve balance was the second highest in the State, second only to Orange County. For the County to close Roy's in 2017 and not provide any alternative overnight shelter during the summer, with this amount of funding is inexplicable. The County also has the legal ability and staffing capacity to apply for billions of dollars in State funding for homelessness, housing, behavioral health, and social services, and the City of Palm Springs relies on the County to distribute State and County resources equitably to our region.

Unlike the County, the City does not receive Mental Health Service Act funding. Notwithstanding, the City and its officials have worked closely with our State Legislators to seek \$10 Million in funding for homelessness. We are unaware of any such efforts by the County in this regard, though the County has a better ability to advocate for State funding for the homelessness crisis facing the City of Palm Springs and our region.

Therefore, the City of Palm Springs calls on the Riverside County Supervisors to meet their obligations to address homelessness in the City. The residents and voters of Palm Springs are calling on the County to better meet its obligations under the law. While the City is willing to be a partner in this worthwhile endeavor, and continue to take care of our homeless residents and neighbors, the City needs to see immediate action on the part of the County before the extreme temperatures of summer.

Sincerely,

City of Palm Springs City Council



Robert Moon, Mayor



Geoff Kors, Mayor Pro Tem



Christy Holstege, Council Member



Lisa Middleton, Council Member



J.R. Roberts, Council Member