



Staff Report

City Council

Item No. 2.A

Meeting Date: May 8, 2024

From: Charles McClendon, City Manager

Title: Public Opinion Polling Findings

RECOMMENDATION:

This item is presented for information, discussion and direction only.

BACKGROUND:

At their meeting on August 3, 2022, the City Council of Cathedral City voted to place a local funding measure (Measure K) for parks and recreation on the November 2022 ballot. Had it been approved by voters, this measure would have cost property owners 15-cents per building square foot annually on single-family residential units to allow Cathedral City and the Desert Recreation District (DRD) to:

- Provide safe and clean parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities in Cathedral City
- Maintain and improve neighborhood park safety
- Maintain safe drinking water and improve water conservation
- Enhance youth drug and gang prevention programs
- Provide affordable after-school and senior programs
- Address homelessness in local parks
- Make a wide array of recreational programs available in Cathedral City
- Provide funding to develop a community recreation center

Because it was a single purpose tax measure, provisions in California state law imposed a super majority requirement on Measure K, meaning a two-thirds majority was needed for adoption. The measure received majority support from Cathedral City voters but did not reach the required two-thirds level for adoption:

- Yes 6,980 55%
- No 5,808 45%

The City Manager appointed a committee of residents to review unfunded needs in the community, explore possible solutions and potentially make recommendations to the City Council. The committee first met and began their work on October 26, 2023. They received

a presentation from Financial Services Director Kevin Biersack on the City's current financial status including information on where revenues come from and where money goes according to the current adopted budget. Discussions included the large portion of the general fund budget that goes to personnel, both city staff salaries and benefits and the costs of contracted services, and the large portion of the general fund budget that goes to the police and fire departments. These conditions make it very difficult if not impossible to reallocate existing funds to cover the identified unfunded needs in Cathedral City. The committee also discussed the effect of the approximately \$6 million spent on recovery from the damage caused by Tropical Storm Hilary, which does not include an estimated additional local contribution of up to \$6 million for street repairs which will be required to repair damage cost by the storm and subsequent clean-up work.

The second meeting of the committee was held on November 16, 2023. The primary agenda item was a presentation by staff from the Desert Recreation District. The presentation covered the history of the annexation effort and the outcome of the 2022 Measure K. The discussion then turned to what the DRD can bring to Cathedral City immediately upon annexation, which is all the recreation programming that can be provided without a community recreation center using parks, schools and other facilities. Parks maintenance standards, the park ranger program to prevent undesirable activities at parks and other benefits of the DRD assuming responsibility for parks maintenance were also discussed. Finally, the committee looked at what a community recreation center might cost and how it might be programmed.

The next meeting was held on December 7, 2023. The agenda included a presentation by Engineering and Public Works Director John Corella on the city Pavement Management Plan. Committee members were very interested in the funding gap between what is needed to maintain and improve the condition of the streets and the funding that is available via traditional funding sources including state SB1 funds and the local maintenance of effort funds. The City uses grants, Measure A and gas tax funds to supplement those sources as they are available, but still falls far short of the funding needed in any given year. This results in some of the streets with the lowest pavement management index having to wait for repair work due to the great cost differential between having to completely rebuild a street compared to a slurry seal to extend the life of a street that is in better condition.

Also on December 7, the committee heard a presentation from Fire Chief Mike Contreras outlining the need for better response times for emergency medical services and an innovative plan to add a fourth ambulance staffed with two personnel to respond to medical calls for service in circumstances where emergency medical dispatch has determined that a two-person response will meet the identified need. This will leave the more costly fire engine response available for other calls where that is required and improve ambulance availability and response time across the system.

The final meeting of the committee was held on January 11, 2024. The agenda included a review of the previous presentations and followed by a discussion of ideas from committee members for addressing the identified funding gaps. Discussion included the applicability and limitations of grant funding, public private partnerships and single-purpose tax measures. Ultimately, the committee members coalesced around recommending a general purpose, half-cent sales tax (transaction and use tax) to the City Council. It was noted that a half-cent tax would raise about the same amount as the original Measure K would have raised – approximately \$5 million per year.

The City Council heard the report of the resident committee on January 24, 2024 and directed staff to proceed with further discussion on a possible ballot measure, including conducting polling in the community to evaluate the viability of a potential measure.

DISCUSSION:

The city awarded a contract to a professional survey research firm, FM3, and a survey instrument was developed, including potential ballot language, and the polling was conducted in March 2024.

Richard Bernard of FM3 will be present at the study session to provide a summary of the findings of the public opinion polling conducted in Cathedral City.

FISCAL IMPACT:

A budget amendment to provide funding for the survey research contract in the amount of \$42,500 was approved by Council on February 28, 2024.

FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN:

Goal B - COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

Objective: Cathedral City roads, gateways, public spaces, and other infrastructure are well planned, designed, constructed and maintained.

B-11 City Council to support a measure to provide funding for parks and recreation services through the DRD and other resident priorities including streets and enhanced Fire Department services.

Goal E – SAFETY

Objective: Cathedral City is safe for all who live, work, visit, and play in our community.

Goal C - FISCAL STABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Objective: Cathedral City has economically prospered by facilitating the investment of private dollars in high quality development which benefits the community. We remain financially solvent by instituting prudent fiscal policies and transparent financial practices.

ATTACHMENTS: