



A *One Coachella Valley* Approach for Health and Wellness is Highest District Priority *Board advances expansion to Eastern Coachella Valley*

COACHELLA VALLEY – Feb. 20, 2018 – The Desert Healthcare District Board of Directors convened a Special Meeting yesterday to consider potential options to fund the expansion into Eastern Coachella Valley, increasing its ability to help meet the health and wellness needs for all Valley residents. With polling indicating that nearly 75 percent of residents in the east favor expansion, the District is fully committed to its highest strategic priority – expansion to a *One Coachella Valley* approach for the region, extending its ability to connect all residents to health providers, facilities, programs, and services.

“No one is healthy unless everyone in the community is healthy,” said Board President Les Zendle, MD. “It’s about expanding and transforming to help better meet the needs of *all* Coachella Valley residents. Identifying and securing the funding option for the expansion into Eastern Coachella Valley is one of the last critical steps in the process of our *One Coachella Valley* approach.”

At yesterday’s Special Board Meeting, the Board voted to establish an amount for self-funding to assure the process moves forward to the ballot in November 2018. The Board furthered the motion for initial investment at a minimum of \$300,000 per year, with the goal of matching the \$4 million that is invested annually on average in the current District territory. If the expansion initiative is approved by the East Valley voters, two new board members would be appointed from the east, increasing the Board of Directors to a total of seven. This would be followed by a 2020 election process that would divide the District into seven voting districts with representation in accordance with demographics, including population and geographic factors, of the entire area.

The expansion funding sources must be quantified to fulfill the Riverside County Local Formation Commission (LAFCO) application process, including the amount of revenue, commencement and duration. For well over a year, the District has performed extensive analysis and evaluation of a variety of funding streams, both public and private; this effort was led by a District Ad Hoc Committee (New Providers, Facilities, Programs, and Services).

A packed room of local government representatives, community stakeholders, staff from community-based organizations from throughout the entire Valley weighed in on the discussion with heavy support for the expansion and the *One Coachella Valley* approach. The theme of nearly all the public comments was that it is more important to expand together and increase funding resources over time.

Assembly Bill 2414 by Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia was written to authorize the expansion of the District to the Eastern Coachella Valley; it was signed into law by Gov. Brown September 2016. The law outlined the process that must be followed to move through to the ballot later this year in November. As required, the District submitted its initial application to LAFCO on time Jan. 5, 2017; LAFCO required that, to complete the application, the District must identify the funding source(s).

Upon submitting the initial application, the District and County met in May 2017 to negotiate a potential source of revenue to fund the expansion – a property tax increment allocation. In June 2017, the District received a communication from the County CEO’s Office indicating opposition to the request. LAFCO requires that a letter of resolution be submitted by the County for the process to continue.

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To date, the County has not provided this final documentation. A mid-summer date of July 31 looms as the deadline for the County to place the measure on the ballot so that the East Valley residents can vote on the expansion.

The District's service area would expand from 515 square miles and more than 200,000 residents in the west Valley to a new total of 2,275 square miles and adding roughly 240,000 more residents from the east. It would encompass the remainder of Palm Desert (east of Cook Street), the cities of Bermuda Dunes, Coachella, Indian Wells, Indio, La Quinta, Mecca, North Shore, Oasis, Thermal, Vista Santa Rosa and other unincorporated areas of Riverside County.

"With polling of both east and west Valley voters indicating that 75 and 85 percent of residents, respectively, in favor of expansion, the District is fully committed to extending our ability to connect all residents to health and wellness services," said District/Foundation CEO Herb K. Schultz, who cited the voter surveys conducted for the District by Probolsky Research.

Through the polling, extensive research and analysis, as well as significant community input, the District is working to implement the expansion that will help reduce the health disparities that exist from west to east. The Local Health Care District law allows significant flexibility for healthcare districts to provide and support a variety of health-related facilities, services, and programs.

"We see the health needs in the east and want to expand to meet them," explained President Zendle. "We envision a *One Coachella Valley*, where we could accomplish so much more for the all residents of the Coachella Valley."

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About Desert Healthcare District/Foundation

The Desert Healthcare District is local government agency formed in 1948 whose mission is to achieve optimal health at all stages of life for all District residents. The District includes more than 200,000 residents and encompasses the cities of Desert Hot Springs, Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, Palm Desert (west of Cook Street), and unincorporated areas of Riverside County. The District/Foundation is one of the largest funders in the Coachella Valley, granting more than \$4 million annually on average to nonprofit, community-based and provider-based organizations. These funds are used to assist residents – especially the underserved – in accessing vitally needed resources, such as primary and behavioral healthcare, housing, food, and transportation resources.