2 Palm Springs candidates take the lead in fundraising

First to announce, Bernstein and deHarte collect cash, endorsements ahead of November council election

Paul Albani-Bergio
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

The first two candidates to announce their plans to run in the Palm Springs City Council election have also been by far the biggest fundraisers so far. Campaign finance reports for the six weeks ending July 20 show District 2 candidate Jeffrey Bernstein and District 3 candidate Ron deHarte each with commanding fundraising advantages over their competitors.

Bernstein took in just short of $75,000 while deHarte took in about $52,000 according to the filings. Both of their fundraising totals were far greater than the next highest incumbent District 1 candidate Grace Garnet, who took in about $10,000.

Along with the most money, all three have gotten endorsements from high-profile political and business figures, including CNB, downtown restaurant owners and some of the current council members.

Bernstein's fundraising campaign is focused on helping underrepresented communities, with a heavy emphasis on bringing more resources into the city. His campaign has raised almost $75,000 so far, with a goal of raising $100,000 by the end of 2024.

DeHarte's campaign has raised over $52,000 so far and is focused on bringing jobs to La Quinta. He has been endorsed by the city council and has the support of Mayor pro tem Dennis Woods.

Gazging back, millions of years

A look at the night sky from Rancho Mirage Observatory

Nicky Loomis
Special to Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

On a recent Thursday under the nasty spell of yet another excessive heat warning, Eric McLaughlin and Lauren Zuckerberg assessed the rising night sky as we stood on the deck of the Rancho Mirage Observatory. Tonight, our enemy was clear: clouds. Summer clouds, the kind that lingered in the night sky, blocking stars. "We're in a holding pattern until Vega appears," McLaughlin said to Zuckerberg. McLaughlin, Rancho Mirage's city astronomer and Zuckerberg, the Observatory program coordinator, were trying to align the telescopes off the brightest star of the season, Vega. They had logged the three computerized Celestron telescopes and the fourth manual Orion telescope onto the terrace and were busy in the "homing phase" of the evening trying to find tonight's stars.

"So, I got Vega but it's barely there," McLaughlin said as he peered through the telescope. "Let's see if Spica shows up." They spoke to each other as though they were greeting guests arriving to a party via one-by-one. In that case, there would be pure joy in the round free stargazing event for groups of at least three.

Report: Rental ban would cost La Quinta millions. Some are skeptical

Tom Coulter
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

With La Quinta voters set to decide in November whether to prohibit short-term vacation rentals in residential neighborhoods, a new report commissioned by the city says a ban could cost millions in tax revenue and visitor spending, as well as hundreds of jobs.

But proponents of a ban argue the findings—which the city council discussed during its meeting last week—overestimate the potential impacts of the ballot initiative, which would phase out rentals in those areas.

The report also estimates a ban would cause the loss of 530 local jobs affiliated with the rental industry and the tourism that comes with it.

If the initiative wins approval, La Quinta could see a $9.5 million reduction in annual tax revenues by 2023, including $4,900 each from noted Palm Springs philanthropist Harold Matzner and Gene Autry's widow, Jackie Autry. That's less than the city says a ban could cost millions in tax revenue and visitor spending, as well as hundreds of jobs.

Don Shedd, an organizer with the Neighbors for Neighborhoods citizens group that pushed to get the ban on the ballot, called some of the predictions in the report "saber speculation." If the initiative wins approval, La Quinta could see a substantial drop in economic activity, with an estimated $52 million decrease in yearly visitor spending and a $9.5 million reduction in annual tax revenues by 2023, according to the report conducted by Frost and Sullivan, a market research firm.

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La Quinta residents who want the city to limit short-term vacation rentals hold signs during a press conference in early 2021. (JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN)
Though you may not see as many shooting stars this summer the weekend of Aug. 12, Rancho Mirage Observatory in Rancho Mirage, Calif., is open for visitors. For these two, their brilliance shows up in understanding the nuances of the Federal Tax Credit.

The roof hatch is open in preparation for the stargazing event at the Rancho Mirage Observatory on July 21.