

desert hot springs

## Low-income development cut short by council vote

Once-approved project rejected after builders object to required wages

**BY KATE MCGINTY**  
The Desert Sun

A \$7.9 million plan to build a low-income housing unit in Desert Hot Springs came to an abrupt halt Tuesday after a heated City Council meeting.

The proposed Brisas de Paz Project was slated to be a 62-unit, low-income housing building at Flora Avenue and West Drive. It was approved by the city early last year.

Since the approval, the city has passed a requirement that contractors must pay a prevailing wage, a dollar figure that varies by classification.

The Coachella Valley Housing Coalition, the developer on the project, said it could not afford the additional \$1.6 million it would take to comply, and asked for a waiver of that prevailing wage mandate.

The request was rejected by the council, 4-1, after more than two hours of heated public comment and council debate.

John Aguilar, director of the Multifamily Housing Division of the Coachella Valley Housing Coalition, warned the City Council the project "will not go forward" with the prevailing wage requirement in place, but told The Desert Sun after the meeting he would re-examine his options.

"We're going to do everything we can to make sure the 62 families who would benefit from this development still have an opportunity to see it built," he said.

The project would create more than 400 construction jobs, and generate about \$750,000 to the city in development impact and permit fees, according to developers and city staff.

More than 30 residents in the room repeatedly broke into applause as the council asked why it had not seen numbers earlier or why contractors should be paid less than a prevailing wage.

The council could not lower its standards by approving continued exceptions to the developer, said Councilman Russell Betts, calling the request "insanity."

"With the respect for what we have done, and prevailing wage requirement being known for as long as it has been known, I think the city of Desert Hot Springs has done enough," Councilwoman Jan Pye agreed.

Mayor Pro Tem Scott Matas cast the sole vote to approve the wage waiver, citing the approval of the project before the wage ordinance was approved.