

Two newcomers enter race to represent fast-growing north Palm Desert on city council

Months remain for candidates to file for November election, first with 5 districts



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Smith would use life experience, legal skills to tackle challenges

Smith, who has lived in Palm Desert for a decade, came to the valley in 2013 as she was dealing with drug and alcohol addictions. She spent her initial time in the area unhoused, staying at the Coachella Valley Rescue Mission in Indio and later graduating from CVRM's [Gateway Program](#) that offers specialized vocational training.



Anyse Smith. Courtesy Of Anyse Smith

Smith later worked as CVRM's housing manager, overseeing federal grants and managing several transitional living homes. She also collaborated on housing programs for the Coachella Valley Association of Governments while gaining a law degree at California Desert Trial Academy in Indio.

Now as a licensed attorney, Smith teaches legal writing at her alma mater, and she also works for a nonprofit called [Starting Over Inc.](#), which is focused on helping those dealing with homelessness, substance abuse and recidivism across Riverside County.

"I know how it feels to be on the other side of the table," Smith said in an interview. "I get to represent people now as an officer of the court, and I don't take that for granted. ... I think that having the compassion and the empathy that I do for this community directly comes from my experience."

Regarding her campaign priorities, Smith said she wants to preserve and enhance the "exceptional" quality of life in Palm Desert, particularly with the considerable growth occurring in the area she would represent.

"I think there are a lot of exciting projects happening right now in north Palm Desert, and for me, as a community advocate, I think it's important to make sure that north Palm Desert residents have a voice in the development that they're seeing in their own neighborhoods," Smith said.

With the area slated for such growth, Smith pointed to some specific affordable developments, such as [Vitalia](#) and [Palm Villas](#), that gained council approval in recent years that she said will help people get out of the homelessness she's encountered.

"At the end of the day, when it comes to really having an impact on homelessness, I think that the prevailing thought now, and the data backs it up, is the root cause of homelessness is a lack of affordable housing," Smith said. "There's no community in the desert that is immune to that, or will continue to be immune to it if we don't tackle that particular issue."

"We thought for a long time that homelessness was caused by addiction, alcoholism, mental health issues, and you have people who are unhoused who are experiencing those things" Smith said. "That can be a precipitating cause of homelessness ... but the root cause of it is a lack of affordable housing. And so I appreciate the efforts of the council to be proactive in addressing this issue."

Smith also described herself as an advocate for sustainability and environmentally friendly policies. She said she wants the city to continue its work with Sunline to expand its route offerings for the north end's residents, saying it can be "tricky" to get around the area on the bus.

"It is a transportation equity question at the end of the day, and anybody in north Palm Desert or any part of the city should be able to get to where they're trying to get easily with Sunline or some other form of public transportation," Smith said. "Whether it be to work or to school or to doctor's appointments, it shouldn't take hours and hours to not get a very far distance."

She added she sees "a lot of opportunities for growth and improvement" for the city's parks, particularly with the pair of new ones in the pipeline. She also commended Civic Center Park, saying she would come to Palm Desert from Temecula for Fourth of July celebrations growing up.

"When we talk about parks, we're talking about green spaces, but we should also be talking about more pedestrian walkways and more bike paths and things that really let us get outside and get moving, because that's important to the overall health and well-being of a community," Smith said.

Regarding the potential sales tax increase, Smith noted many cities in the valley have already successfully put such proposals to their voters. She said the hike may be necessary for Palm Desert to keep providing the quality of services it does, given sales taxes are one of the city's largest revenue sources.

Smith said while her path to running for public office has been "very nontraditional and challenging," her life and community experiences have prepared her to run for the District 3 seat.

"I think my record demonstrates, as a longtime community advocate, and now attorney working on behalf of Coachella Valley residents, that I know how to tackle challenging issues, and step up for the community," Smith said.

The city council races will conclude Nov. 5, the day of the state's general election.

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