



Perris News

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Yarbrough Sees Challenges and Opportunities for March JPA

As he takes over the chairmanship of the March Joint Powers Commission, Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough sees both great challenges and opportunities for the agency charged with redeveloping the former March Air Force Base.

The commission, made up of representatives of Perris, Moreno Valley, Riverside and Riverside County, suffered a significant setback with the announcement that international shipping carrier DHL was pulling up stakes and leaving its hub at March.

That will cost the commission and the agency it runs, the March Joint Powers Authority, about \$500,000 in landing and fueling fees, Yarbrough said. About 350 jobs are gone as well.

But opportunities remain to recoup that loss and generate new money, Yarbrough says.

He said the commission should seek to bring businesses like commuter airlines, corporate jet customers, helicopter operators and maintenance professionals and aviation-related industries to March.

JPA representatives also will be traveling to Washington twice this year to keep lawmakers and government officials informed of new developments and ongoing work at the former military installation, Yarbrough said.

The Joint Powers Authority and the Joint Powers Commission were created in the mid 1990s when March was downsized from an active duty to Reserve Base. The March JPA functions as a municipality charged with redeveloping several thousand acres once part of the former military base. The March Joint Powers Commission sets policy for the March JPA. The commission is comprised of representatives from communities adjacent to March, which was once the home of nuclear-armed B-52 bombers.

Despite the sluggish economy, Yarbrough said he is excited about his new post. His appointment places Perris at the center of what is touted as one of the major job and revenue-producing engines in western Riverside County.

"It's our turn at the wheel and we're ready for it," Yarbrough said. "We've got a great staff, one that is lean and hard-working."

Mayor Daryl Busch is the City's other representative on the Joint Powers Commission in 2009.

Yarbrough said Perris has always supported March and the JPA.

While residents in other communities close to the base complained about noise from arriving and departing DHL flights, he said Perris residents understand that base operations sometimes create noise. It's also likely that should a commercial or private aviation company make March its home, noise would be generated from those operations.

Yarbrough said he has little sympathy for people who complain about airplanes at March.

"Airplanes fly in and out of airports and air bases," he said.

Lori Stone, executive director of the JPA, said the tough economy means developers have less money to invest and that fewer businesses are in any position to expand or relocate to March. The JPA is totally focused on jobs and economic development, she said. When an opportunity arises, it "can move quite quickly," she said.

Even with the loss of DHL, Stone said the JPA can claim some other redevelopment triumphs. The Meridian Business Park, when completed and fully operational, could bring thousands of diverse jobs to the region. A planned medical campus would also prove invaluable for Perris residents seeking good-paying employment, she said.

"It would be a huge benefit to Perris," Stone said.

Stone said Perris has always been a major supporter of March, the military, and ongoing efforts to revitalize the portions of the base the JPA inherited when the installation was downsized.

"The City has always had tremendous representatives," Stone said.



Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough takes over as chairman of the March Joint Powers Commission. "We've got a great staff," he says. "One that is lean and hard working."

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Close this Page

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