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DHS Police Chief on medical leave; city asks Sheriff's Dept for bid

DESERT HOT SPRINGS, Calif. -

The city of Desert Hot Springs police department is once again thrust into center stage. Police chief Dan Bressler is out on medical leave, and former Calexico police chief Jim Neujahr is in charge of the department.

"He was chosen by police chief Bressler in consultation with city manager Martin Magana," said Desert Hot Springs mayor Adam Sanchez. "They wanted to make sure they had a seasoned officer on staff and he was willing to commute and serve the community of Desert Hot Springs."

Twenty-two officers work for the department right now, down from 32. Many, including Bressler, took pay cuts when the city fell on hard financial times. The city budgeted Neujahr's position for just 29 hours a week. Sanchez doesn't see a safety problem.

"There's nothing to worry about we have a full capacity police department right now," Sanchez said.

City leaders continue to evaluate ways to save money while maintaining police and emergency services. Recently, they asked the Riverside County Sheriff's Department for a bid on contract services.

"We have requested that so that we can make comparisons as we go into the budget negotiations for the coming year," Sanchez said.

We contacted the Sheriff's Department, which is working on a proposal to take over policing in Desert Hot Springs. That should ready soon.

"Right now we're looking at cost effectiveness. We budgeted this year \$9 million, and we need to get it down to \$7 million and we have to reduce costs," Sanchez said.

But disbanding the city's police department remains a last resort, according to Sanchez. He says

Measure "F," a new tax on vacant land owners to be voted on in June, would save the police department. But, some people in Desert Hot Springs wonder if it's just a political move.

"They're doing it in a very underhanded sneaky way," said resident Franklin Cole. "My thoughts are they should tell the truth instead of using scare tactics."