



Written by

[Erica Felci](#)

The Desert Sun

Aug. 10, 2013 | [12 Comments](#)

Desert Hot Springs City Manager Rick Daniels finds support in Needles



Despite the Needles mayor's reservations about inking a city manager contract with Rick Daniels, several leaders there plan to set aside his rocky ending at Desert Hot Springs and endorse the hire.

Two more Needles council members said Mayor Edward Paget didn't represent the majority when he told The Desert Sun that his city should "take a second look at what's going on and make sure we're doing a thorough background check."

RELATED: [Needles' mayor says city should rethink Rick Daniels hire](#)

Paget made his comments after Desert Hot Springs released a 93-page report showing "insufficient evidence" to validate Daniels' claims that two Desert Hot Springs council members created a hostile work environment for him.

Daniels Daniels Daniels Rick Daniels, City Manager for the Desert Hot Springs City Council October 27, 2011. / Wade Byars, The Desert Sun

Needles Councilmen Shawn Gudmundson and Terry Campbell said they'd support Daniels' hiring when the contract is presented to the council Tuesday.

Details of that contract were expected to be released Friday, but the city clerk said it was being kept private until the council could review it.

Tuesday's meeting agenda shows the Needles council will discuss the city manager post in both closed and open sessions.

Paget previously indicated his city would offer a base salary of about \$130,000 — a significant cut from the \$217,000 base salary Daniels has been earning in Desert Hot Springs.

Any pay reduction would potentially impact Daniels' long-term finances, as public pensions are usually based on how much a person earns when they retire.

“After days of doing my own due diligence, I feel comfortable with moving forward with Mr. Daniels as our manager,” Gudmundson said in an email that echoed earlier comments by Needles Councilwoman Linda Kidd.

“When Mayor Paget publicly stated we should rethink his hiring, he did not have the majority of this council's support in his statement. This council knows how it is to have opposition or naysayers as we just went through two union negotiations, and the sale of our hospital.”

As mayor, Paget doesn't get a vote unless the other six council members are tied. On Tuesday, he plans to ask his council to reconsider its choice.

Daniels this week declined to discuss the contract negotiations.

“Needles is a wonderful community by the river. It's got great potential,” Daniels has told The Desert Sun. “Both Joyce and I have been impressed by wonderful and positive people.

“I think it would be a great opportunity. The whole thing is their prerogative. They need to feel comfortable. I'm sure that things will be fine.”

Under the proposal to hire Daniels, Needles would demote the existing city manager to an assisting leadership role that oversees the city-operated utilities.

In an email that referenced “detractors and 99% ers,” Needles' Councilman Campbell also backed Daniels as his choice.

“This a relatively conservative town and not symphathetic (sic) towards the Anarchist who are socialists,” he said in an email.

After leading valley agencies dedicated to economic development and the Salton Sea's restoration, Daniels joined Desert Hot Springs six years ago as the top executive at city hall.

He began searching for a new job in October, when he filed a seven-page complaint accusing Councilmen Russell Betts and Adam Sanchez of creating a hostile work environment.

An outside investigation that cost the city more than \$77,000 concluded there was not enough proof to substantiate Daniels' claims.

But the investigator concluded that Betts "disclosed confidential information discussed in closed session" and "likely recorded" at least one meeting.

Betts has repeatedly denied the accusation. The city's report has since been sent to the Riverside County District Attorney.

Meanwhile, city leaders in Desert Hot Springs are trying to move on by setting the groundwork for a new city hall administration. The council meets Aug. 19 to discuss the candidates for the interim role.

Whoever is chosen will be asked to lead the city until after the November election.

Erica Felci is a political reporter for The Desert Sun. She can be reached at (760) 778-4644, erica.felci@thedesertsun.com, or @EricaFelci on Twitter.