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Rick Daniels hired as Needles city manager

New position will pay outgoing Desert Hot Springs official nearly \$200,000 to start



Outgoing Desert Hot Springs City Manager Rick Daniels has been hired for the same position by the city of Needles. / Desert Sun photo

DESERT HOT SPRINGS — Needles officials have officially hired outgoing Desert Hot Springs City Manager Rick Daniels to lead their community.

The council unanimously endorsed a \$197,000 contract, with a \$10,000 pay bump each year. The three-year contract starts Sept. 16.

It will initially be a financial hit for Daniels, who is leaving Desert Hot Springs [after an outside investigator found “insufficient evidence” to back his claims that two councilmen created a hostile work environment.](#)

He currently earns a \$217,000 base pay.

MORE: [Daniels’ resignation letter to Desert Hot Springs Mayor Yvonne Parks | Daniels’ contract with Desert Hot Springs for City Manager position](#)

“Our city has a great deal going for it, from recreation on the Colorado River, Route 66, the Historic El Garces Hotel, that is being revitalized into a regional multi-modal transportation center, an 18-hole municipal PGA golf course and a vibrant and involved community,” Councilman Jim Lopez said in a statement Wednesday.

“With all that we are doing in Needles, we really need someone vibrant and optimistic even when confronted with opposition and we found that in Mr. Daniels.”

Daniels was at Tuesday’s meeting when the Needles council voted 6-0 to hire him. He has already signed the contract, and plans to be in Needles as early as Sept. 3 to start transitioning to his new job.

In an email, he said he was looking forward to working with the council and to “making Needles the premier community on the Colorado River.”

“Joyce and I are excited by our imminent move to Needles, joining their community, and opening a new chapter in our lives,” Daniels wrote.

“We are both grateful for the lifelong friends that we have made throughout the Coachella Valley. We will only have the fondest memories of our 23 years here.”

Daniels’ contract gives him paid time off, including vacation and sick leave, that is “equivalent to that of a twenty-year management employee.” He also gets 80 hours a year of administrative leave, a city vehicle and health benefits.

In signing the contract, the city agreed to pick up most of his required contribution to the state pension system.

If Daniels is let go without notice and without one of the specified causes — such as being convicted of a misdemeanor or felony — Needles will give him a severance package

equivalent to a year's salary and health benefits. The severance package would be smaller if there's less than a year left on his contract, it states.

Daniels was one of 13 applicants the city considered.

Councilwoman Linda Kidd noted that the council was "100 percent in support of hiring Mr. Daniels."

However, Needles Mayor Edward Paget — who does not vote unless the other six council members are tied — [earlier expressed reservations about the hire after reading about the controversy in Desert Hot Springs.](#)

Paget has shared concerns about the impact another executive salary would have on the city's estimated \$40 million operating budget, which is largely devoted to running the city's utility companies. The current city manager is taking a demotion and will manage those utilities.

Lopez said the council on Tuesday told Paget they were confident Daniels' hiring wouldn't be a strain.

"We're budgeted for it," Lopez said.

Daniels in October filed a complaint with Desert Hot Springs accusing Councilmen Russell Betts and Adam Sanchez of workplace harassment.

The findings from an outside investigator, whose report was released this month, did not back the claims. But the probe did find Betts "disclosed confidential information discussed in closed session" and "likely recorded" at least one meeting.

Betts has repeatedly denied the accusations. The report was sent to the Riverside County District Attorney.

"Mr. Daniels was very candid and open with us about everything we asked him about and we found his openness and honesty refreshing," Lopez said in the statement Wednesday.

"We think he is a perfect fit and, as to his former city, we wish its city council, staff and all of its residents the very best and hope they are successful in the future."

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