

Desert Sun

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Three questions with Jerry Hanson

Staff

The Desert Sun

Editor's note: The Riverside County grand jury recently cleared Desert Hot Springs City Manager Jerry Hanson of conflict-of-interest charges. The grand jury's probe focused on two fronts. One was Hanson's preparation of a Dec. 14, 2002, engineering report for a resident and general contractor while he served as the city's public works director. The other was a February incident when the city awarded a contract to the company where Hanson's son works to install security equipment on city property.

1. Does being cleared give you a clean slate or do you think there will be some residual effect from being the subject of a grand jury investigation?

ANSWER: As you know, the Riverside County grand jury extensively reviewed the allegations made in a citizen complaint dated Sept. 23, 2003, and found them to be without merit. I would hope that the outcome of this investigation would alleviate any and all concerns, especially since both the City Council and the grand jury extensively investigated the allegations and came to the same conclusion that it was - "without merit and no further action to be taken." Having been cleared of any wrongdoing allows me to devote my time, expertise and leadership to focus on my job and, most importantly, effectively managing the City of Desert Hot Springs for the betterment of all citizens and our community.

2. What lesson, if any, is there to be learned from either the charges, the investigation or both?

ANSWER: Clearly, charges of this nature and an ensuing investigation are harmful for the cohesiveness of our community and the imperative work being done at City Hall to make our community a better place for all residents. It takes an enormous amount of time to respond to allegations and investigations - time which could be better spent on the vital responsibilities required to run the city.

Every day, myself and the city staff members diligently make great strides in a positive direction to turn this city around - only to have erroneous charges of wrongdoing foreshadow the gains we have made. An important lesson to learn is that the support, leadership and stability of our City Council is imperative to making this city thrive and prosper. Without the council working harmoniously, this city will remain in an indeterminate state. While citizens' complaints need to be carefully addressed, the council must ascertain the difference between credible and unfounded charges brought forward in the future to avoid such a misuse of valuable time on behalf of myself, city staff, the City Council and the grand jury.

3. What is the most pressing issue on your plate at the moment, the one that deserves your undivided attention?

Answer: The most pressing issue is the bankruptcy and will continue to be until it is resolved. Since being appointed city manager of the City of Desert Hot Springs last February, my highest priorities have been working to resolve the city's bankruptcy case and to protect the hardworking taxpayers of our community. Creating a plan that will deliver this city out of bankruptcy court requires a great deal of my time, the support of the community and most importantly a stable and united City Council.

In an effort to leave no stone unturned, I have worked diligently to survey all city assets and to determine whether any non-essential property could be sold to generate additional funds to help resolve this matter. The legal costs for all sides are exorbitant and might have been better spent on debt dissolution. Unfortunately, such tends to be the outcome of lengthy disputes involving unreasonable parties. I cannot correct or undo mistakes made in the past, but I am committed to working vigorously to resolve this matter while at the same time protecting the interests of our community.

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