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Top city official defends salary

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Report: Desert Hot Springs manager reported earnings of \$322,809; base salary is \$132,000

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The Desert Sun

Desert Hot Springs City Manager Jerry Hanson is defending his \$322,000 city earnings in 2004.

The earnings, reported on a W2 form that was allegedly leaked from City Hall, include \$106,000 in severance pay, even though Hanson has just signed a new contract. They also include about 700 hours of accumulated vacation/sick/leave time that he cashed in.

Hanson - who, in addition to being the city manager is also the director of redevelopment and the city engineer - earns a base salary of approximately \$132,000.

The Desert Sun does not have a copy of the W2 form but spoke with Hanson about his earnings level. He later issued a press release.

Hanson, who as city manager is in effect the CEO of the city, defends the amount, saying he cashed in about 700 hours of accumulated vacation time and also received half of a \$220,000 severance package that was part of his just-expired contract. The package would be due upon his leaving - whether he's terminated or leaves himself, he said. The City Council agreed to pay out the severance package to get it off his contract, Hanson and city officials said.

"I have so many jobs to take care of," Hanson said. "A normal city would have three or four people doing what I do. I felt like saying 'I'm worth every damn penny.' "

Hanson said he works about 60 or 70 hours a week.

"I work so many hours that it's used to offset my time," he said of his vacation/sick/annual leave time.

Hanson said he believes the leak came from "misplaced and uninformed, blind loyalty," involving "personnel changes over the last week."

Last week, Hanson fired Police Chief Roy Hill, much to the disappointment of the police department.

Hill had received a 100 percent vote of confidence from his officers, and the Police Officers Association issued a statement denouncing his termination and requesting the City Council reinstate him.

Sgt. Eddie Cole, president of the Police Officers Association, declined to comment.

Councilman Hank Hohenstein said Hanson would receive the severance money whether he was fired or left the city on his own.