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DHS manager resigns, cites questions

Staff reports
The Desert Sun
July 7, 2005

Desert Hot Springs city manager Jerry Hanson told the city council that he did not anymore want to serve as interim city manager after his retirement date of Aug. 1, citing intense media inquiries into his management style, his contract and his land holdings in the city.

"Whether I like it or not, I have become a polarizing issue instead of the City Manager. I am now having to spend a majority of my time on damage control, media requests and trying to shore up a demoralized staff," Hanson wrote in a June 30 resignation letter.

The council, in closed session, voted unanimously to approve Hanson's new resignation request.

City Attorney Corky Larson, who announced the action in closed session after the vote on Hanson's request, will begin serving as Interim City Manager on Aug. 1.

The letter from Hanson, obtained by The Desert Sun, indicates his concern about reporting being conducted by the Los Angeles Times.

In the letter, Hanson, who has been praised for successfully leading the city out of bankruptcy and has been accused no wrongdoing, states that a reporter from the Times contacted him and asked questions about his effectiveness as a city manager.

"I recognized several of his sources or was able to associate specific names to occurrence or events he mentioned. His sources consist primarily of former city employees, current disgruntled city employees, some political aspirants, the media and council appointees."

The reporter "verbally confronted me," Hanson wrote in the letter, listing questions about his land holdings in the city, his 2004 salary of more than \$322,000, his negotiations with a residential developer in the city, the unemployment fraud charges being investigated by the district attorney and the firing of the city's popular police chief.

In the letter, Hanson says he lays out the Times' questions to council "for your broader understanding and a sense of the 'witch hunt'."

The Times reporter, Hanson wrote in the letter, asked him about investigations by the county

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District Attorney and the Riverside County grand jury, the Fair Political Practice Commission.

These investigations have been reported in The Desert Sun's coverage of Desert Hot Springs and Hanson's contract.

"I respectfully request that the Council appoint an Interim City Manager or City Manager on Aug. 1, 2005," Hanson wrote in the resignation letter.

This resignation supersedes an earlier letter, dated April 29 and approved by council.

Under that deal, Hanson would have retired by the same date, but would have stayed on as Interim City Manager to train his replacement.

The city council hopes to have a new city manager in place by Labor Day.

Toni Eggebraaten will serve as acting city attorney when Larson becomes city manager.

"I sincerely thank each of you for your support and understanding," Hanson wrote to the council. "I applaud you and all the great accomplishments of the last couple years."

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