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Under glare, Hanson calls it quits

Blames media 'witch hunt' for early exit

Brian Joseph
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Recoiling from what he calls a news media "witch hunt" that's been hounding him for months, Desert Hot Springs City Manager Jerry Hanson has announced he will retire Aug. 1 instead of hanging on as a part-time city manager while the City Council searches for a permanent replacement.

"I do not believe that I can effectively serve the council or the city under the current circumstances. Whether I like it or not, I have become a polarizing issue instead of the city manager," Hanson wrote in a June 30 letter to the council.

He gave his resignation notice June 8.

His June 30 letter, 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 not been charged with any crime or wrongdoing, states that a reporter from the Times contacted him and asked questions about his effectiveness as city manager.

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

City Attorney Corky Larson, who will temporarily step down as city attorney to become interim city manager after Aug. 1, announced Hanson's change of plan at Wednesday's City Council meeting.

Hanson, who did not attend the meeting, was not available for comment Thursday. City spokeswoman Teresa Thompson said he was on vacation until next week.

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

HANSON'S LETTER

[Read the full letter](#)

TIMELINE

- **March 18:** City Manager Jerry Hanson fires Police Chief Roy Hill.
- **March 24:** Reports of Hanson's \$322,000 2004 earnings from W2 reported in media after leak.
- **April 8:** Lawyer for police chief says his client was fired for blowing the whistle on Hanson's severance pay and land holdings.
- **April 16:** Desert Sun reports questions about Hanson's land holdings in an area he negotiated about for the city.
- **April 19:** City council votes to ask county grand jury to look into possible conflict of interest in land holding.
- **April 29:** Hanson writes resignation letter, announcing retirement date.
- **June 5:** Councilman Gary Bosworth's complaint about Hanson with Fair Political Practices Commission becomes public.
- **June 6:** Hanson announces Aug. 31 retirement and new contract that allows him to earn as much as \$127,000 part-time.
- **July 6:** City Council approves Hanson's request to cease being interim city manager on his July 31 retirement date. He cites media questions as a major reason for the request.

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request and to name Larson the interim city manager.

"City Manager Hanson is going to be a hard act to follow because he's just done so much for the city," Larson said Thursday. "It's really just a steadying of the ship because Jerry has made it clear" he doesn't want to be city manager anymore.

"We should have a new city manager in place in a couple of months," she said. "We have advertisements out now."

Larson said she was not intimidated to be entering a job that comes with so much media scrutiny.

"You just come on and look with your magnifying glass. All you'll find is warts," she said.

Vice Mayor Mary Stephens said she talked to Hanson on the phone Thursday morning.

"He was perfectly OK with our appointment" of Larson, Stephens said. "She, too, will be stable" for the city.

Stephens, who is running for mayor in November, said Hanson never said it but she sensed with his retirement announcement that he was feeling "a bit of relief now, so he can move forward.

"He's in a tough position," she said. "He's got The Desert Sun, the (Riverside) Press-Enterprise, three television stations, and he's trying to do his job, too. Quite honestly, if I were him, I would have done the same thing."

Credibility under fire

Last month, Hanson signed two new contracts with the city, his ninth and 10th since becoming city manager in February 2003. At the time, he said his title had changed to "interim city manager" and that he would move to a part-time schedule beginning Aug. 1, slowly phasing out of the city manager job while the council searches for a permanent replacement.

But since then, Hanson, whose 2004 pay and land ownership have been under fire, has received more and more questions from newspaper and television reporters about topics ranging from the firing of a popular police chief to his \$322,000 earnings in 2004, to his severance package that was paid though he did not leave his post.

The City Council has requested that a Riverside County grand jury consider Hanson's landholdings on Pierson Boulevard and whether his negotiation of developer payment for improvements on the road running past his property for the city constituted a conflict of interest.

The grand jury has not returned a formal report on the issue.

At least two council members said they knew of the land holdings, which were reported on Hanson's required annual financial disclosure form. Others did not know of them. But no Desert Hot Springs council member said he or she would have voted differently had they known of Hanson's holdings.

L.A. Times queries

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- ▶ City representatives walk fine line when acting as private citizens
- ▶ COP chief resigns under threat of dismissal
- ▶ Complaint filed against Hanson by Bosworth
- ▶ Council opens itself up to investigation
- ▶ DHS City Council went about grand jury probe the wrong way
- ▶ Closed council meeting riles public
- ▶ Council to vote on grand jury probe
- ▶ Official seeks truth in property dispute
- ▶ City manager scrutinized over land buy