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Group shows support for DHS city manager

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DESERT HOT SPRINGS - About a dozen residents held a press conference Tuesday in front of City Hall to show support for their city manager.

Dr. Tad Lonergan, who organized the event, called recent allegations that City Manager Jerry Hanson violated the city's conflict of interest code "ridiculous" and applauded Hanson's work.

Since his hiring, Hanson has helped to streamline the work that city staff does and he has made them more accountable, said Lonergan, a Thousand Palms resident who has a family practice in Desert Hot Springs. Hanson became city manager Feb. 12.

The City Council is investigating possible conflict-of-interest charges surrounding the hiring of Hanson's son's employer for a city contract.

Hanson, who was director of public works when the contract was granted, has said that he told then-City Manager Sam Scott about his relation to Justin Hanson, who is listed on the bid as a "security consultant."

Hanson also has said Scott told him the relationship "wasn't that big of a deal."

"I feel he's done exactly what he's supposed to do," said Planning Commissioner Paul Allen, who also spoke at the press conference. If Hanson had hidden the relationship from Scott, that would have been wrong, Allen said.

Scott would not comment. During a July 11 phone interview, Scott said he sent the council a letter outlining his recollection of the incident. As of Tuesday, the city clerk said the letter had not been received.

The committee investigating the allegation, composed of Councilman Will Pieper and Councilwoman Mary Stephens, is expected to report its finding to the council Aug. 5.

While the residents at Tuesday's event support Hanson, another group led by Alex Bias is conducting a letter campaign urging residents to ask the council to place Hanson on administrative leave pending the outcome of the investigation.

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