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Corky Larson proves to be a good choice for Desert Hot Springs

Interim city manager's find may save city dollars

Someone is finally waking up in Desert Hot Springs.

After signing several different contracts full of perks - including severance pay and 1,700-plus hours of vacation - in 20 months, former city manager Jerry Hanson this last week found his ex-employer saying "Wait a minute."

And the one variable that has changed to make this happen? New Interim City Manager Corky Larson. She deserves applause.

Last weekend, the last payment to Hanson - for \$22,722 - didn't include 400 hours of vacation and sick time that his contracts apparently called for. The city instead plans auditing all final figures to be paid to him. As Larson pointed out in a letter to Hanson accompanying his paycheck, he may not be entitled to the extra vacation and sick time for it may constitute a "gift of public funds."

Finally, someone steps in

It's about time someone tries to clean up this mess. If Desert Hot Springs is to regain its reputation and if the City Council is to best serve its constituents, it should begin with correcting Hanson's excessive perks. Larson merits credit for having the fortitude to do just that. So does the council for approving her decision.

Indeed, the city gave Hanson 400 hours of vacation every time he signed a new city manager contract, granted him a \$600 monthly car allowance while he received a monthly allowance for 200 gallons of premium gasoline, handed out a \$92,000-plus severance package while he still worked for the city, purchased five extra years for him in the California Public Employees Retirement System and delivered three raises to him in 2004. The deal to let him go as city manager gave him another 2.5 weeks of vacation during his last seven-and-a-half weeks on the job.

The city even bought him a laptop so he could work from home during those last few weeks.

Unfortunately, we still have yet to hear from most City Council members about this matter. Mayor Matt Weyuker and council members continue to remain silent on Hanson's benefits, giving the public no insight as to their reasoning. Council members Mary Stephens and Hank Hohenstein have vaguely said that Hanson was worth every penny paid. Some of those council members also have criticized The Desert Sun for raising the issue. But there now seems to be recognition that maybe it was excessive. Council members need to let residents know what they think. They have a great opportunity to do just that at the next council meeting in September when they plan to discuss the matter. That conversation should be done in public.

Let this be a new beginning

We hope that Larson's move brings a new spirit of openness and that Desert Hot Springs will be more forthcoming in discussing this matter and releasing public documents. The audit needs to be done quickly and results released publicly.

Hopefully, the council will allow Larson to continue the path down which she has taken Desert Hot Springs since becoming