

Desert Sun

Estimated printed pages: 3

August 27, 2005

Section: Local

Page: B4

Pieper admits he voted against conscience in Hanson contract

Nelsy Rodriguez

Staff

The Desert Sun

By Nelsy Rodriguez

The Desert Sun

What happens in closed session stays in closed session - usually.

Desert Hot Springs City Councilman Will Pieper broke closed-session confidentiality in an interview with The Desert Sun, admitting that he originally voted not to approve City Manager Jerry Hanson's 2003 contract, but later changed his vote to show uniformity among the council members.

Pieper told The Desert Sun that he originally voted not to approve the employment contract because the then-city attorney, Charles Green, told the City Council he felt the contract was too lucrative for Hanson and not in the best interest of the city.

Pieper voted "No," along with Councilman Gary Bosworth and Mayor Matt Weyuker, Vice Mayor Mary Stephens and then Councilman Greg Ruppert voted to accept it. Hanson's contract was approved by a 3-2 vote in the closed session, Pieper said.

Having already lost the contract approval issue, Pieper said he asked for a re-vote and changed his vote to a "Yes," hoping that the City Council would appear unified as it came out of the closed session.

But Bosworth, who in an interview with The Desert Sun, corroborated Pieper's original vote, refused to change his. The action was reported out of closed session as a 4-1 vote.

"I asked ... for a re-vote because I thought that city managers should be elected by a unanimous vote," Pieper said. "I just think it gives more confidence in the city manager."

Interim City Manager and former City Attorney Corky Larson said it is not uncommon for a City Council to take a second vote after a closed session item has been passed so the City Council could re-vote and appear more unified.

Closed session items are restricted to personnel and litigation issues and land negotiations. No minutes are taken and any documents handed out during closed session are destroyed, Larson said.

Pieper is running for re-election in November alongside Bosworth, who also publicly discussed closed session issues with The Desert Sun.

In a column published in the Aug. 9 edition of The Desert Sun, Bosworth too came forward about the closed session in which Hanson's contract was passed. In his "Valley Voice" column, Bosworth said the City Council voted to pass the contract against the recommendation of then-City Attorney Charles Green. Bosworth said the column was in response to a column written by Mayor Matt Weyuker published in the Valley Breeze, a Desert Hot Springs bimonthly newspaper. In that column, Weyuker wrote that Green's legal firm was involved in "framing" Hanson's contract.

Bosworth said in his column that Weyuker's column was opening the city to possible litigation by "defaming" Green.

Green has declined to comment on the column to the newspaper, citing attorney-client privilege and confidentiality.