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October 26, 2007

Lucrative contract for manager raises some eyebrows in NLV

"It was simply to protect him from upcoming political pressure from council, seeing that there are three people running for mayor."

By Mike Trask

Las Vegas Sun

"If he gets fired tomorrow, he gets paid for (four) years. It's not right for the taxpayers who would have to foot the bill."

North Las Vegas City Manager Gregory Rose doesn't want to get a pink slip in the coming months.

But if he does, his new severance package - which could pay him as much as three -quarters of a million dollars - would certainly help ease the pain.

That lucrative deal has some people seeing red .

"We've gone through so many managers who haven't lasted that long," resident Bob Borgersen said. "They are either stuck with him or have to pay a lot of money."

In the past 20 years, North Las Vegas has had five city managers.

Rose's new contract, approved 3-2 last week by the City Council, runs through September 2011.

Under its terms, if the council fires Rose before the end of September 2009, he is entitled to the full salary due him through the remainder of his contract - nearly four years' pay at this point . If he is fired after that , he receives one

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year's salary as severance.

During discussion of the issue, council members who supported Rose's contract extension argued it was important to lock him into a long-term contract to prevent other local governments from luring him away.

"I desired to stay," Rose said. "It's making sure there's good protection for myself and my family if everything doesn't work out."

Rose, who has served as city manager since 2003, when he was promoted from assistant city manager, will earn \$194,000 this year and receives annual cost-of-living raises.

Councilmen William Robinson and Robert Elliason, who voted against the contract, described the severance provisions as a good deal for Rose - and a bad one for the city.

"If he gets fired tomorrow, he gets paid for (four) years," Robinson said. "It's not right for the taxpayers who would have to foot the bill."

The two councilmen and some residents consider the contract outlandish, noting that although Rose's dismissal anytime soon seems unlikely, the deal nonetheless leaves the city facing an unnecessarily high cost if that were to happen.

Compared to the contracts of other municipal managers in Clark County, Rose's pre-2009 severance package is generous. The one year of pay he would receive if fired after September 2009, however, is in line with what his counterparts would get if they are let go for any reason other than a criminal conviction or "moral indiscretions."

Las Vegas City Manager Douglas Selby would get a severance package of between six months' and a year's salary, depending on how long he held the job. Clark County Manager Virginia Valentine would get a year's salary if fired. Last week, Henderson hired Mary Kay Peck as city manager. She would get a year's worth of her \$225,000 annual salary if fired.

All the managers' severance packages also include benefits.

North Las Vegas Mayor Mike Montandon and Councilwomen Shari Buck and Stephanie Smith voted in favor of the contract. None returned phone calls seeking comment.

The terms didn't surprise some public administration experts, who noted the "golden parachute" is common in both the public and private sectors.

"Any executive is going to negotiate (that) up front," said Jerry Newman, a professor in the School of Management at the University at Buffalo.

Robinson, Buck and Smith are all running for mayor in 2009. Union representatives from the fire and police departments spoke in favor of Rose's contract, leading some to speculate that politics played a role in the vote.

Others agreed that politics might have influenced the decision, although not

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necessarily because mayoral candidates were trying to curry favor with the politically potent unions.

"It was simply to protect him from upcoming political pressure from council, seeing that there are three people running for mayor," said Richard Cherchio, organizer of the North Las Vegas Alliance of Homeowners Associations and Concerned Citizens.

Rose admitted having most of his bosses in the mayoral race crossed his mind when negotiating the contract and severance package. In addition, two council seats will be contested in 2009.

Some in North Las Vegas vow to make certain that the contract is an issue in the 2009 campaign. Resident Josephine Bryant is among those who say the issue won't be forgotten.

"I hope nobody votes for them when Stephanie Smith or Shari Buck run s for mayor," Bryant said.

William Robinson,

councilman who voted against manager's contract

Richard Cherchio, organizer of the North Las Vegas Alliance of Homeowners Associations and Concerned Citizens

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