

The Pueblo Chieftain

COUNTY

Pueblo mayor questioned over mediation contract

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Pueblo City Councilwoman Lori Winner has questioned whether Mayor Nick Gradisar tried to take the decision of whether the city should hire a mediator for the Christopher Columbus statue dispute out of council's hands.



A initial consideration of an ordinance to approve a mediation service contract between the city and professional mediator Fred Galves passed City Council unanimously on July 27 and was set for a final vote on Monday.

But Winner said the contract already had been signed by Galves and the first mediation meeting had been scheduled before council's final vote on the ordinance was to take place.

"This is not appropriate and goes completely against City Charter," Winner said. "This should be an approved position by council first, then either a (request for proposal) or help wanted would be next.

"This mediator was only approved on first reading ... We rarely pull from first reading, it only makes the meeting longer," Winner said. "First reading is available to allow council to research before discussion and vote."

Gradisar on Wednesday said he didn't have any intention of undermining City Council.

"Obviously, this is what I consider to be an emergency situation. We have to act quickly, and their processes don't allow for quick action," he said. "I think that's one of the reasons that

If approved, Galves will provide mediation and consulting services to the city and sit down with both those who want to see the Columbus statue taken down and those who support the statue to determine if a compromise can be reached between the entities.

Gradisar said the city probably should have made the ordinance an emergency one at the July 27 meeting so it could've been voted on then, but he said nobody raised any objection when it passed on first reading.

“So I assumed everybody was OK with it until a couple days later, stuff started showing up on social media that indicated there’s a problem,” Gradisar said. “I wish if they had objections to this they would have raised them by asking the item to be removed from the consent agenda.”

Galves was traveling to Pueblo on Wednesday and will likely be at the meeting to answer any questions council members may have of him. If the ordinance is approved, mediation sessions are set to take place this weekend.

If council shoots down the contract, Gradisar said the city can still get out of it even though it’s been signed.

“Maybe they’ve got a better plan. I haven’t heard it yet and they certainly haven’t expressed it to me,” Gradisar said. “If they do, I wish they’d share it with me.”

For over a month now, demonstrations have taken place each Sunday where the statue sits in the Mesa Junction across from the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library. Protesters have been calling for the removal of the statue, while the Italian community and those who support it insists it stay put.

Galves, who lives in California now and runs a law practice, has ties to Pueblo, having been born and raised here, according to Gradisar.

“He knows Pueblo. He knows the cultures here. He knows the history of the town,” Gradisar said. “I thought it makes some sense to have somebody who has that kind of experience with Pueblo come in and try to find a Pueblo solution to this problem and see if there is one.”

Six individuals from both sides of the issue have already been selected to participate in the mediation sessions should the contract be OK’d. Those groups picked the people who will participate themselves and all are Puebloans.

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