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Bixby city clerk claims she's target of council

BY TIM STANLEY World Staff Writer

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BIXBY — A city employee at the center of a recent dispute between the City Council and the former city manager is charging that an action that will soon leave her jobless is a case of the council finishing what it started.

The employment of City Clerk Cheryl Sasser, whom former City Manager Micky Webb claimed he was ordered to fire by the council, will officially end July 7, because of a decision this week to combine her office with the city Treasurer's Office.

Sasser is on leave with pay until then, officials said.

City officials say the move, which also eliminated two other positions, is about saving money — more than \$100,000 a year — and is not related to the Webb saga.

Webb, who resigned May 26 as part of an undisclosed settlement, accused the council in April of directing him to fire Sasser and other employees in violation of the city charter, which gives hiring and firing authority to the city manager alone.

Sasser's attorney, Chris Camp, said: "The council's abolition of the city clerk position is simply carrying out what the council illegally directed Micky Webb to do. Indeed, it certainly suggests, if not outright verifies, the truth of Webb's allegation that he was directed by the council to fire Sasser."

Camp, who also represented Webb, said Sasser is contemplating a lawsuit.

City Attorney Phil Frazier, however, said: "There's no connection to the Webb situation at all. Combining these offices simply marks a change in direction for the city that will allow it to save money and improve service."

He said the idea was not the council's but that of the city treasurer and acting City Manager Becky Byers, who studied the logistics and probable savings.

"There are duties the clerk is performing that rightly should be under the treasurer," Frazier said. "This will streamline and improve service."

He said state law allows for the combining of the offices and duties.

Mayor Ray Bowen said the move should be viewed as part of an ongoing effort to address a decline in sales-tax revenue.

"We've been trending downward since last fall, and in May we had a 17 percent drop," he said. "That's when we really upped our push to find ways we could cut costs."

Bowen added that "there is absolutely no connection" between the move and Webb's situation.

Webb had set a predisciplinary hearing for Sasser in April, but after he said he was pressed to fire her, he refused to hold it.

He also accused the council of violating the state's Open Meeting Act because the alleged executive session actions were not on the meeting's agenda and were not voted on publicly.

The next city manager will be Blu Hulseley, who was introduced this week at a press conference. He is scheduled to start work next Wednesday.

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