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# Largo Ousts City Manager Largo Confirms Stanton Ouster

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LARGO - The door closed Friday night for Steve Stanton.

Largo's city commission voted 5-2 to uphold its Feb. 27 decision to begin the firing process for its city manager. After listening to six hours of presentations and public comment during Stanton's appeal, all seven commissioners repeated their earlier votes.

Stanton said he was fired because he revealed his plans to become a transgendered woman named Susan.

He would not say, though, whether he planned to file a lawsuit against the city. Stanton was asked if he was disappointed.

"I am," he said. "But it shows the difficulty of evaluating this type of situation. I was optimistic, but realistic that it would be hard to slow down the train. It is closure. And it was an opportunity to inform and educate people. They listened to information they did not have the first time."

Voting to uphold the firing were Gigi Arntzen, Mary Black, Vice Mayor Harriet Crozier, Gay Gentry and Andy Guyette. Voting against were Rodney Woods and Mayor Pat Gerard.

After Stanton spoke and four others addressed the commissioners to educate them on transgender transitions, more than 70 people from Largo and throughout the state spoke in either support or rejection. That process was delayed for a few minutes by a bomb scare that Police Chief Lester Aradi termed a hoax.

Then the city commissioners shared their thoughts.

"Honesty, integrity and trust," Guyette said. "Without trust, there's no longer a foundation for any relationship." Gerard said recent weeks have "been a tax on our integrity," and said things had been said by everyone - including her - that never should have been.

"If this is going to be the end for the city and Steve Stanton, I just want to thank him. It's been a pleasure."

Earlier in the evening, the commission heard Stanton's termination appeal along with hours of public comment.

"What I am asking for is for you to give me a chance to show you I can do the job," Stanton, 48, told the commission. "Dealing with Susan will be no different than dealing with Steve."

"Look past the gender issue and judge me as the same person I was four weeks ago."

The hearing drew 230 people, less than half the number that attended the Feb. 27

meeting. About 100 people signed up to speak.

The hearing began at 6 p.m. with Stanton's presentation, which took one hour and 40 minutes.

The presentation focused on how difficult it can be for the commission to make decisions and react to Stanton's sex-change transition without the proper information.

"If you don't have information, you don't know what to say," Stanton said.

So, he provided information to the commission with a panel of four:

Margaret Stumpp, a transgendered woman, said her transition as chief investment officer for Quantitative Investment Management Associates, a subsidiary of Prudential Financial, was a "nonevent" in a company committed to diversity. She said the embarrassment and lost business some feared "never materialized."

Walter Bockting, an associate professor at the University of Minnesota, which has a transgender clinic, said co-workers "struggle with using proper pronouns and names" during what is usually an intense two-week adjustment period. But he was positive about the sex transition process and said he regretted that the commissioners acted to fire Stanton without being fully educated on the issue.

Former St. Paul, Minn., Deputy Mayor Susan Kimberly, a transgendered woman, urged Largo to allow Stanton to "do the job as a woman ... just as he has done it as a man."

Daryl Herrschaft, deputy director of the Human Rights Campaign Workplace Project, said more and more highly successful companies have plans to deter discrimination against transgendered people.

Reporters from CNN, "Inside Edition" and "The Daily Show" covered Friday's appeal.

Stanton's firing began last month after he announced his planned to have a sex-change operation. Commissioners voted 5-2 to start the termination process.

On March 8, Stanton filed an appeal in hopes of keeping his job and \$140,000-a-year salary.

Had he not appealed, the commission could have scheduled a final vote to terminate his contract, which provides for 12 months' severance pay if fired for any reason other than a felony conviction, ethics violation or other "gross misconduct."

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