

Hiawatha Fire Chief appointment discussed

(KNZA)--The Hiawatha City Commission Monday evening was informed about a state statute that will have a bearing on who they appoint as the city's new fire chief.

City Administrator Mike Nichols said he recently became aware of the statute requiring that fire chief's appointed in second-class cities be a resident of the city or live within a two-mile radius.

Nichols said he was not aware of the statute in 2016 when the city's residency requirement for fire chief was changed from residing within a two-mile radius to a five-mile radius. The change was made to allow Ryan Shockley, who was assistant chief at the time, the opportunity to serve as fire chief should the fire department vote to have him fill that role.

On the recommendation of the fire department, the Commission appointed Shockley as fire chief in May 2018. However, the Commission voted last November to remove him from that role. No reason was publicly stated for the decision, and Gene Atland was appointed as interim chief.

Since that time, fire department members have urged the Commission to re-instate Shockley.

As result of the state statute, Nichols said Shockley, or anyone else living outside the two-mile radius, is not eligible for appointment as fire chief. "I sincerely regret the oversight, and take responsibility for such. I apologize to you, the City Commission, Mr. Shockley, the members of the fire department, and the public, for this oversight," Nichols said. "Had I been aware of this statute four-years ago, I think a lot could have been avoided."

The Commission failed to appoint a fire chief at their May 18 meeting, and City Attorney Andy Delaney told the Commission they will need to appoint someone at their June 15 meeting

The fire department will be informed about the state statute.