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Fontana mayor in new role

Mark Nuaimi has plans to also be assistant city manager of Colton

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FONTANA - With his hands full of projects aimed at capitalizing on the city's growth, revitalizing downtown and annexing county pockets, Mayor Mark Nuaimi is taking on another role. Starting Feb. 27, he'll also be the assistant city manager of Colton. He's leaving Iteris, Inc., an Anaheim-based technology leader in transportation systems where he was senior program manager.

"It allows me to spend my entire energy focusing on my passion, which is local government and improving our region," said Nuaimi, adding that his new job will allow him to cut his two-hour commute to 15 minutes.

But Nuaimi is not the only Fontana council member employed by another municipality. Councilman Frank Scialdone is the interim police chief for Rialto, and Councilwoman Acquanetta Warren is Upland's deputy public works director.

It's unusual to have three out of five council members in those situations, political scientists say.

The argument in favor of that kind of relationship is that elected officials and city workers are familiar with city operations, said Steven Frates, senior fellow at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College. Others say it also helps the elected officials figure out what is reasonable to ask of city staffers since they will now be wearing the other hat.

But the drawback, Frates said, is that there could potentially be conflicts of interest when the elected officials consider upping the employee salary and benefits package. Salaries and benefits of one city are often compared by other cities to stay competitive.

Nuaimi was already splitting his time between the two cities Tuesday. He missed the beginning of Fontana's City Council meeting because he was at Colton's.

And because both councils meet on the same days, the Fontana City Council will consider changing its scheduled meetings from the first and third Tuesdays of each month to the second and fourth Tuesdays.

Still, Nuaimi and Colton's city manager Daryl Parrish say the new post is a good fit because both cities are dealing with the same issues of traffic along the Interstate 10 corridor, economic development, growth, annexation, water quality and endangered species.

"I need somebody that has the strength and the foresight and the intelligence to deal with challenges surrounding development," Parrish said.

Nuaimi beat out nearly 100 people in an arduous process that required hours of interviews for the post, which pays \$122,892 a year.

As assistant city manager, he will help build relationships between cities and regionally, Nuaimi said. "I think it makes me a better mayor by being local and being in the Inland Empire the whole time," he said.

Nuaimi's track record in Fontana was considered in the selection process, Parrish said.

"It's about knowing folks and knowing how the system works and I believe that experience he's gleaned from being mayor of Fontana will help us," Parrish said.