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Chief asked to quit

West official cites leadership

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WEST — West Police Chief Jerry Hugo said the City Council offered no reasons to him when it asked him to resign last week after almost seven years heading the department.

"They didn't give me any specifics," Hugo said in a brief interview Monday at his home in the nearby town of Leroy. "They just want me to resign and fade into the sunset like in an old western movie."

The council gave no public explanation for its decision made in an executive session following a regular meeting last Tuesday night.

Although Mayor William Pareya and other council members weren't commenting on details Monday, Councilman Ernest Uptmore said the city had become dissatisfied with Hugo's leadership of the four-man police force.

"There were little things over a long period of time," Uptmore said. "We felt he didn't have the control over the police department that we needed."

Uptmore cited four general areas of concern about Hugo:

- Officers were "operating on their own and not being told what to do. When a situation would come up, he would not be aware of it."

- Police cars were spending too much time outside the city limits. Uptmore said officers sometimes responded to Interstate 35 accidents and grass fires outside the city limits, and officers often took their coffee breaks at a store just outside the boundaries. City officials stress police officer "visibility" in the community.

- Citizens often called City Council members instead of the police department to get help on certain problems normally handled by police. Uptmore said they

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felt they would get quicker action that way.

- The City Council, on a request from the West Chamber of Commerce, asked Hugo to have occasional police foot patrols in the downtown business district, to discourage shoplifting and bolster the police department's rapport with the community.

"The motion passed and we sent a letter to the City Council, but I don't know what the city ever did with it," said Michael Sulak, who was chamber president when directors made the request in September 1986.

Uptmore said the council had asked Hugo to implement the foot patrols, but it never was done.

Uptmore said the City Council met with Hugo and two of his attorneys late last year, but the alleged problems persisted. He indicated Hugo would be fired if he did not resign.

"This is probably it," Uptmore said, "because we had our meeting several months ago, and we felt we gave him every opportunity. Jerry's a nice guy, and everybody likes him. This is probably the hardest thing we've had to do."

"West doesn't have any big problems, but we just don't want any to start," he added.

Hugo, who is recovering from a car accident he had on his way to the Tuesday council meeting, disagreed with the suggestion that downtown West should be patrolled on foot.

"We have one man per shift," he said. "It's kind of hard to run foot patrols when you have to do dispatch" and talk to people who come to the office.

Sgt. Tommy Dulock will serve as acting chief for six months, and then the council will decide whether to offer the permanent job to him or someone else, Uptmore said.

Dulock has been with the department more than 10 years and was a sergeant in 1981 when he expressed interest in being appointed Favors' replacement.