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City manager's hiring is contested in U. City

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UNIVERSITY CITY • The hiring of City Manager Lehman Walker is at the center of a lawsuit filed Tuesday that contends the mayor and City Council selected him last year in violation of the state's Sunshine Law.

The suit was filed in St. Louis County Circuit Court by five University City residents who want the court to void Walker's appointment. They also want the City Council to be declared in violation of the Sunshine Law — the state's opening meetings and records law — and enjoined from further violations.

The suit asks for civil penalties and attorney fees.

Mayor Shelley Welsh on Tuesday denied any Sunshine Law violations or unlawful actions.

"Under the city charter, the

City Council has sole authority and responsibility for hiring a city manager, period," Welsh said. "I knew Mr. Walker knew the city well and that the city was facing very, very tough circumstances. I knew he would be a very good city manager."

Six of seven council members voted for his hiring. Walker is paid \$130,000 a year.

Walker, with master's degrees in both city planning and public administration, had worked for University City for 11 years as director of planning and development and then of community development. He left in November 2009 to take a job with the city of Evanston, Ill.

The suit alleges that city officials deceived residents by saying a search would be or was being conducted to fill the city manager post. It says Walker had been selected before a search was begun and that the mayor had re-

ceived his résumé before she was elected.

After the council voted to hire Walker on July 12, Welsh sent him an email at 6:42 p.m. It stated: "The deed is done."

"The city manager's job was never posted or advertised as planned, no questionnaires were ever distributed to citizens, no search firm was ever contracted with and no search was ever conducted," a statement from the group that filed the suit said. "No meeting was held seeking public input."

Paulette Carr, one of the plaintiffs, said Tuesday: "Mayor Shelley Welsh and the City Council had the responsibility to select the best person for the city manager's job and do so in a lawful manner."

Other plaintiffs are Mark Donohoe, Tamara Donohoe, Steve McMahon and Tom Sullivan.

