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ness, left them with no choice but to seek relief. City officials say they've done all they can to respond to Gordanier's complaints.

Hills City Manager Steve Brock acknowledged Mayor Nancy Bates and city staff have met with the couple a number of times to discuss their complaints, which have included alleged harassment by police and failure to provide public documents. He was not surprised to see the Gordaniers' lawsuit, which hasn't officially crossed his desk though it was filed Jan. 22 in Oakland County Circuit Court.

"He's talked about it for years," Brock said.

Gordanier has appeared at council meetings a number of times over the past year, asking the mayor to meet with him to resolve his issues. While several meetings took place, he said he filed the lawsuit when the city's

talk didn't lead to any action.

"The incidents are so numerous and ridiculous in nature, it came to the point that we were not willing to accept the argument of the city that it was just a series of unfortunate coincidences," Gordanier said in a press release issued Monday afternoon.

The fire

In an interview last month, the couple made it clear they'd had no negative contacts with police, firefighters or the city before their house fire in June 1998. They were hosting dinner guests and sat down to the table around 9:55 p.m., when Teresa went to put some meat drippings into a trash can in the garage.

She opened the door, and flames roared back at her.

"We ascertained the fire was too out of control for us to put out," Mark Gordanier said. "We chose to evacuate and then try to

get a hose and put it out."

While Mark and one of the guests worked on the fire, Teresa called 911. She said the dispatcher declined her directions because the trucks all had maps.

"They were warned on the phone there might be difficulty finding our home," Mark Gordanier said. "We were way back in the woods."

The Gordaniers' home, which has since been rebuilt, is on 10 acres in Woodland Hills Park in central Farmington Hills.

Mark isn't exactly sure how much time elapsed before he made a second call to the fire department. The fire had disabled electrical service, which rendered the well pumps and, thus, the hoses inoperable. A dispatcher told him the trucks were having trouble finding his home.

People stationed along the driveway confirmed the trucks were driving by, and Teresa ran

after them, to redirect them. Once trucks got to the Gordaniers, the fire was out in a matter of moments. Initially, the family was just grateful the fire was out and everyone escaped without harm, even the family pets.

"We were very, very happy (the firefighters) were there," Mark said. "We were more concerned about our children, who were in a state of shock."

Suspensions raised

Trouble didn't start brewing until the Gordaniers were asked questions that led Mark to believe he was under suspicion. Later, an investigation by an arson specialist showed the fire was accidental, caused by a wiring short in a power mower, said Jay Schwartz, an attorney who represents the couple.

When Mark realized he might be in trouble, he demanded that firefighters get out of his house and said he would return to the house in the morning. After a couple of verbal confrontations with police, the Gordaniers left and Mark did come back to the house the next day.

A detective questioned him for 45 minutes at that time.

Much later when the couple received documents for which they sued under the Freedom of Information Act, they learned several firefighters had documented the Gordaniers were behaving in a suspicious manner from the moment they drove up, that Mark was ranting, raving and incriminating himself.

A few months later, out of what Mark calls "pure curiosity," the Gordaniers attended the fire department's open house and saw a map that showed their home in the wrong location. When they later asked for a copy of that map, they say they

received a different version.

"To this day, they've never given us a copy of the map they saw," Schwartz said.

Harassment alleged

The Gordaniers filed suit under the Freedom of Information Act to obtain copies of the maps. Mark believes that problem led to a series of more than a dozen incidents, which he also claims to have documented through FOIA requested documents, video and audio tapes. Among them:

- At least one police officer's identification of Mark as the guy with an "attitude problem" with police;
- Failure to adequately investigate the theft of the couple's wedding rings, as well as complaints called in from their dog grooming business; and
- Doubling of the state equalized value of their home after it was restored. The SEV was reduced when Mark complained to the tax tribunal.

In one incident, Mark alleges a police officer called to deal with an irate customer who had refused to pay for extra services charged on his credit card.

The officer threatened us with arrest for filing a false police report because the customer said he didn't threaten us," Mark said. "That's what pushes me over."

City attorney John Donohue said Gordanier hasn't been happy with any of the responses he's received.

"He has a series of complaints we looked into and cannot find the police department has acted improperly," he said.

Police Chief Bill Dwyer adamantly defends his officers. "This is one of the most professional departments in the state of Michigan," he said. "We've

won awards for our community policing programs. We've always been concerned about service to citizens."

Last year, the Gordaniers and their attorney met with Dwyer, Brock, city attorney John Donohue and Fire Chief Rich Mariniucci to air their complaints. While they alleged a pattern, Brock doesn't see it.

"The issues he's raised, we've tried to have a dialogue about and allay his concerns," he said. "The lawsuit will certainly limit our ability to talk through the issues."

Brock said the city has tried to provide the information the Gordaniers requested.

"A couple of things he asked for, we didn't think we were legally obligated to provide," he said. "I investigated every one of the concerns he brought to me. In some cases, there were very clear answers."

In their most recent discussions, though, Brock wasn't sure what would make Gordanier happy.

"I didn't get a real idea what (Mark) was looking for," Brock said. "I really don't know what he's seeking in his lawsuit."

The Gordaniers hope their \$10 million lawsuit will finally push city officials into action.

"I want this to stop this vendetta against me and my family," Mark said. "And I want the incestuous relationships in city hall broken, so under a normal checks and balances system, these incidents will not be allowed to grow."

"I'm confident unless this is stopped, we will have a Rodney King-level incident in Farmington Hills," he added. "That's our broader, bigger picture. We feel compelled to do something to stop it."

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