The local prosecutor recused himself from the case, prompting Gov. Rick Scott to appoint special prosecutor Angela Corey, who charged Zimmerman in April with second-degree murder.

SANFORD, Fla. (AP) -- Saying he's lost the trust of officials, a city manager fired a central Florida police chief who was criticized for his agency's initial investigation of Trayvon Martin's shooting death at the hands of a neighborhood watch volunteer.

Sanford City Manager Norton Bonaparte said in a Wednesday statement that he relieved Chief Bill Lee of duty because he "determined the Police Chief needs to have the trust and respect of the elected officials and the confidence of the entire community."

"We need to move forward with a police chief that all the citizens of Sanford can support," Bonaparte said. "I have come to this decision in light of the escalating divisiveness that has taken hold of the city."

The initial lack of an arrest following the death of Martin, an unarmed black teenager, by

neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman in February led to protests across the nation and spurred a debate about race and the laws of self-defense. Zimmerman's father is white and his mother is from Peru.

The local prosecutor recused himself from the case, prompting Gov. Rick Scott to appoint special prosecutor Angela Corey, who charged Zimmerman in April with second-degree murder. The 17-year-old Martin was fatally shot following a Feb. 26 altercation with Zimmerman, who claims self-defense and has pleaded not guilty.

Lee took a leave of absence in March and offered his resignation in April. The city council rejected Lee's resignation by a 3-2 vote. Several council members indicated they wanted to let a Department of Justice review of the police investigation play out before making a final decision.

In a statement, Benjamin Crump, an attorney for Martin's parents, said the parents respected the city manager's decision.

In May, Rick Myers took over as Sanford's interim police chief, saying he wanted to heal the emotional wounds caused by Martin's death. He has said he would reach out to people in Sanford who feel they've been ignored by the police.

Bonaparte said he had been in contact with the Police Executive Research Forum about the search for a successor to Lee.

"I believe that there are many law enforcement officials who will find accepting the opportunity to serve as Sanford's Police Chief a welcome challenge for their careers", the city manager said. "I expect the search for a new chief to take several months."

Lee will get three months of severance and one week's salary, in addition to any earned time off, under his contract.

"I wish Chief Lee all the best in his future endeavors," Bonaparte said.