

Wilmington mayor releases his discretionary spending data

Christina Jedra, The News Journal Published July 27, 2017 |



(Photo: Submitted by St. Elizabeth)
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Wilmington Mayor Mike Purzycki publicly released his office's discretionary spending information on Thursday after The News Journal requested the data.

In his first six months in office, Purzycki gave \$28,000 in scholarships to 24 city high school students and \$47,525 in grants to 57 agencies and organizations, the city said.

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STORY: [Best part of her UD trip was the free arm](#)

"The newspaper's request for this information has created an opportunity for me to take a closer look at our administration's discretionary spending practices," Purzycki said in a statement. "Although discretionary spending is a relatively small budget line, I've had a chance to review not only the grants we've awarded in the past six months but what has occurred over the past four years."

He added: "I am sure that going forward we'll be re-examining our standards for use of these funds."

The News Journal received four years of data late on Wednesday, including spending by former Mayor Dennis P. Williams, but hasn't yet thoroughly reviewed it. That data is available [here](#).

City Council received criticism earlier this month after The News Journal reported members use a \$450,000 discretionary fund to give money to any nonprofit that members want with little transparency or oversight.

Former [City Council President Theo Gregory](#) used his control of much of the fund to direct nearly \$600,000 over four years to a nonprofit he founded, apparently without the knowledge of his colleagues or the public. Gregory has defended the spending and said [he has "no regrets."](#)

REACTION: [Wilmington City Council president: Discretionary fund has 'highest standards'](#)

The president has the power to override questions about his or her spending, a city official said, and the fund is not regularly audited.

City residents have [expressed outrage](#) about the fund, saying that they deserve to know how taxpayer dollars are spent and that conflicts of interests should be avoided.

"I feel as though once they get in office, they pick and choose who they want help because it helps them," said Devin Fletcher, who runs a youth music program.

Some residents have called for the fund to be eliminated or moved to another department, like parks and recreation.

Purzycki said discretionary funds serve a purpose.

"In every case where public funds are involved, there has to be a public good or benefit attached to justify the decision," he said. "However, this comes down to a judgment call at times."

The mayor defended the \$1,500 he used to sponsor a wrestling event at the Riverfront, a deal that secured free tickets for people including Chief of Staff Tanya Washington.

"We certainly did not provide a grant in order to obtain tickets for the affair," Purzycki said. "But rather, it was my decision to fund the event for economic development purposes to promote something that would attract people to Wilmington."

Purzycki added that he is grateful for the "discussion" about discretionary spending.

"In the end, my decisions around this use of public money are better informed because of the feedback I get from our citizens," he said. "Be assured I will continue to make informed, reasonable and credible decisions about our administration's discretionary spending as I will about all matters affecting city government."

Purzycki spending data can be viewed [here](#).

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