

Audit is good, but Wilmington City Council must fix the system: Editorial

The News Journal Editorial Board Published 3:05 p.m. ET Aug. 4, 2017

News Journal reporter Christina Jedra breaks down Wilmington City Council discretionary fund spending.



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After more than a week of relentless public pressure, Wilmington City Council President Hanifa Shabazz has [invited State Auditor Tom Wagner to conduct an audit](#) of the council's discretionary spending.

Residents are in an uproar over revelations that Shabazz [funneled \\$40,000 to a nonprofit run by her predecessor](#), Council President Theo Gregory. Up to \$20,000 went to Gregory himself.

Before that grant was brought to light, Wilmingtonians were fuming that [Gregory routed \\$600,000 over four years](#) to a different nonprofit he founded, Education Voices.

What made these grants particularly infuriating is that many in the city — including other council members — knew nothing about them until News Journal reporter Christina Jedra started asking questions.

Shabazz's call for an audit is a good move, given the lax safeguards that have previously governed this money.

But an audit alone won't fix the glaring flaws in the discretionary fund process that started this whole mess. And that is what Shabazz and her fellow council members should be focused on.

Council needs to create a public, transparent process for choosing who gets these funds. And they need to make it much easier for the public to figure out how the money was doled out — currently, a citizen must muddle through filing an official Freedom of Information Act request.

Shabazz says she is committed to reforming the system. She has floated the possibility of a new website that would make the fund information more transparent.

We will be watching closely to make sure she follows through.

Since the start of this controversy, both Shabazz and Gregory have tried to make the issue about whether the community services the fund provides are worthwhile. No one is arguing that helping schools and neighborhoods is an unworthy cause.

The problem is the process.

This is not some complicated, intractable policy dilemma. It is an issue of basic good governance. Most of Delaware's public bodies that have discretionary funds have stronger protections in place.

Here's one thing we agree with Shabazz on: "We have so many important issues that need our time and attention, and this matter of discretionary spending was simply taking up too much time."

The answer, however, isn't just to stop talking about the funds. It's to fix them, quickly, then move on to the more pressing matters that Wilmington faces.

Frankly, we're tired of writing about a minor grant program when Wilmington is at war with crime, drugs and a host of other social woes.

But we won't let up until citizens get the transparent and protected discretionary funding system they deserve.

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