

# Amid Charges of "Extortion," Fitchburg Alders & Community Clash Over Boys and Girls Club Funding

*BGC CEO vows hundreds of community members will speak up at Tuesday meeting*

By **Robert Chappell** - Oct 28, 2016



An effort to change the way the City of Fitchburg funds the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County is drawing heavy fire — including charges of pay-to-play and extortion — from community advocates.

As it has for the past four years, the City of Fitchburg's 2017 proposed executive budget includes an allocation of \$50,000 to the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County to transport and feed kids at its Allied Drive location. A proposed amendment sponsored by Alders Julia Arata-Fratta, Dorothy Krause and Dan Carpenter would remove that funding from the budget and place the money, along with \$10,000 allocated for Badger Prairie Needs Network, into a fund administered by the eight-member Community Economic Development Authority (CEDA), which would then decide how to allocate that money.

Both Arata-Fratta and Krause are members of the CEDA, meaning they would have some say over how the money is allocated to community groups.

Boys and Girls Club of Dane County CEO Michael Johnson said Krause reminded him of the influence she has over BGC funding when he declined to make donations to her personally and to her political campaigns for Fitchburg Common Council and Dane County Board of Supervisors — a charge she denies.

"I may have said something that he misinterpreted," she said. "But I can't even recall what that would have been. I know he's been incredibly publicly paranoid about what he considers his money. He's incredibly protective of his money. That's probably his job, which I don't envy."

"This is not paranoia," Johnson said. "This is retribution. She's trying to do a quid pro quo."

Johnson also said the amendment amounts to "extortion" because he declined to give a donation to Krause or her political campaign.

"He's saying I am trying to extort money from the Boys and Girls Club," Krause said. "And I'm like, dude, how do you make that jump? He's got something going on in his head, and I don't know what."

Neither Johnson nor the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County make donations to or endorsements of any political campaigns, Johnson said.

Going back as far as 2011, Krause has asked Johnson and others for donations to support her personally and to fund her election campaigns for her seats on the Fitchburg Common Council and the Dane County Board of Supervisors. She even went so far as to send Johnson a screen shot of her personal bank account, apparently to demonstrate her frugal lifestyle, Johnson said.

"What elected official sends a nonprofit leader her personal bank account? Who does that?" Johnson asked.

### **Funding "not at risk"**

Proponents of the move say they do not intend to lower BGC funding this year, but the change would come with no guarantees.

"We are seeing a lot of needs in the community for good projects," said Krause. "To just put things in the budget for various groups, we wanted to be able to look at things. (CEDA) is the most appropriate group to vet things before they go into the budget."

She noted that allocating funds for nonprofits in the City's operating budget is "sloppy," especially for groups seeking smaller amounts of money.

Fitchburg mayor Steve Arnold agrees with that point, even though he opposes the amendment.

"We really don't have a process to deal with these (grant requests) in an orderly and transparent way," he said. He added that allocating funds in the operating budget is "transparent, but not orderly."

"If we were to get ten of these requests, we'd have a huge time sink on our hands," he said.

Still, Arnold said he feels the amendment represents a policy change that should be dealt with by council resolution, not during budget deliberations. Further, Arnold noted that the City currently has no staff resources to administer the fund called for in the amendment, nor has anyone established rules or processes for how funds will be applied for and allocated.

"That needs to be set up before any money is transferred into a new fund," he said.

Arnold said he didn't think the amendment was intended to reduce funding for the Boys and Girls Club.

"I do not think the funding is the point of this," he said. "I don't think it's at risk. I think these are good intentions being advanced in maybe not the best way."

"They keep saying that," said Johnson. "They tried to take my funding last year" with a similar amendment, he said, which was ultimately not approved.

Johnson said the amendment as proposed sets up "a system that pits nonprofit organizations against each other."

Without the funding guaranteed in the budget, Johnson said the BGC would have to eliminate jobs, wouldn't be able to feed Fitchburg kids every day, and wouldn't be able to transport kids from the 19 schools currently served at the Allied Drive BGC location.

Johnson said he has spoken with Arata-Fratta and other alders and that he supports a new amendment that would add \$50,000 to the budget to seed the new CEDA fund rather than moving current allocations to the CEDA. The new amendment would also set up a process through which community groups could apply for city funding and criteria for awarding grants.

Still, Johnson said he intends to bring "three or four hundred" community members to the Fitchburg Common Council meeting at 7:30 pm Tuesday to voice their support for maintaining the current funding.

Written by [Robert Chappell](#)