

Timing of Boys and Girls Club Audit No Coincidence, Johnson Says

By **Robert Chappell** - May 26, 2017



Michael Johnson, center, with Boys and Girls Clubs of Dane County members

City officials insist that it's a coincidence that a financial audit of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Dane County began just weeks after the group's CEO publicly pressured Mayor Paul Soglin to fund a violence prevention plan in his 2017 executive budget.

Michael Johnson, the Boys and Girls Club CEO, isn't buying it.

Last year Johnson joined members of the Focused Interruption Coalition to create a 15-Point Plan to reduce gun violence in the City, and Soglin verbally committed \$3 million in funding to implement the plan last year. However, Johnson said, he "got wind" that Soglin did not plan to include any funding in his executive budget.

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"We pretty much had a behind the scenes meeting with the Mayor, and said, 'Hey, you know given all the stuff that's going on in the city, if this is not in the budget, we're gonna pretty much oppose everything that you're putting in your budget and challenge you publicly. And we don't want to do that,'" Johnson said.

Weeks later, in October, Deputy Mayor Gloria Reyes let Johnson know that \$400,000 was in fact included in the budget, Johnson

said.

And then, Johnson said, in early November, he received notice that the Boys and Girls Club would be audited by the City — which came as a surprise.

“In the eight years I’ve been here, I’ve never heard of the city doing a financial audit on the Boys And Girls Clubs,” Johnson said. “They might have done them on other centers, but I know they’ve never done it on us.”

Johnson isn’t worried about the outcome of the audit, which he said has been completed, though a report has not yet been issued.

“I run a tight ship. So I know financially he’s not going to find anything,” he said. “Out of 1.5 million nonprofits (in the United States), only 25 percent of them get 4 stars from Charity Navigator. We’re one of the 25 percent of the organizations that get that. Eight years of clean audits, they’re not going to find a thing.”

But City officials said the mayor isn’t involved in scheduling audits, and the timing is pure coincidence.

“In terms of how or when those monitorings are done or when they’re scheduled, the mayor has absolutely no role in that,” said City of Madison Community Development Office Director Jim O’Keefe.

“Community and Neighborhood Centers that receive Community Development Block Grant funding are regularly audited,” said Mayoral Aide Katie Crawley in a statement. “There are several neighborhood centers that were audited in 2015 and late 2016. The 2016 audits are still in progress.”

The “several” neighborhood centers audited in 2015 included Vera Court and Bridge Lakepoint, City of Madison Community Development Office Director Jim O’Keefe said. They are operated by the same organization.

O’Keefe said there’s good reason that Johnson hasn’t heard of other audits being done — the City had fallen behind on its monitoring obligations and has only been “regularly” auditing community centers for two years, and in that time has audited only two community centers.

O’Keefe said the federal department of Housing and Urban Development requires what he called “monitoring” of any agencies that receive Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

"HUD requires us to provide regular audits," he said. "We were actually, due to some staffing issues, slipping a bit, from HUD's perspective. In monitoring that (HUD) did of the City, they asked us to get back on track in monitoring of CDBG recipients."

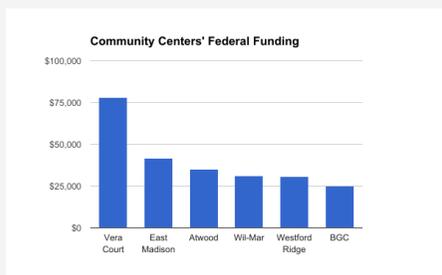
To that end, he said, the City committed to auditing two or three community centers per year, in addition to other CDBG recipients. They first chose to audit the Vera Court and Bridge Lakepoint community centers, which are operated by the same organization, in 2015, and chose the Boys and Girls Clubs in 2016 — with no influence from the Mayor, O'Keefe said.

"We've begun with those centers that have received the largest portions of funding from federal dollars," O'Keefe.

However, based on that standard, the Boys and Girls Club should have been the last organization audited, not the second.

According to the City of Madison website, the Boys and Girls Club receives \$25,000 in Community Development Block Grant funding – the least of any community center.

Vera Court and Bridge Lakepoint jointly receive the most CDBG funding with \$78,000, and at least four other neighborhood centers receive more CDBG funding than the Boys and Girls Clubs.



The Boys and Girls Club does, however, receive the most overall government funding among community centers — in addition to the \$25,000 in CDBG funds, the BGC receives \$176,112 in City funds.

Still, if the amount of federal funding is the standard and the City audited two or three centers each year, the BGC audit should have taken place in 2019 or 2020, not 2016, just weeks after its CEO publicly pressured the Mayor to fund violence prevention programs.

Johnson said the audit is "retaliation" and "an intimidation tactic."

"The Mayor should not be immune from challenges of people of color or non-profit leaders. I think typically what happens in politics when people speak up for themselves, (government officials) try to take low blows other ways," he said. "That's been my experience, that when you challenge him behind closed doors or you questions things, these are the kind of games that are played."

Johnson's allegations come amid another public spat over the funding for the Focused Interruption Coalition's 15-Point Plan.

None of the \$400,000 allocated in this year's executive budget has been spent. Following two shooting incidents last week, Soglin publicly said that the City had "deployed" citizen responders to one of the crime scenes, and those responders had taken on an investigative role — neither of which was true.

In fact, Focused Interruption Coalition member Anthony Cooper and Johnson were already en route to the scene when Reyes, the deputy mayor, called to alert them of the shooting — and they were there solely to support the victim and his family, not to investigate or act as informants.

"He put our lives on the line" by implying they were acting as police informants, Johnson said later. Reyes later said the citizen responders had no investigative role, but the mayor has yet to walk back his statements.

Soglin has joined alders Maurice Cheeks and Matt Phair, who assisted in creating the 15-Point Plan, in drafting a resolution to allocate \$75,000 to formalize the Focused Interruption Coalition's role in peer support to prevent violence and to respond to incidents when they occur. In a "verbal agreement" struck this week, Nehemiah Urban Development corporation will contract with the City and the Boys and Girls Club will act as fiscal agent for the effort.

The resolution is scheduled to come before the City's Finance Committee on June 6.

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