

City employees used without council approval on private project

Although South Valley Sanctuary is a needed, and a very worthwhile project. It is important that the rules for donation are followed. City Council minutes reveal the possibility of over 2000 hours of city employee time, not approved by West Jordan City council was spent on this project.

Important to mention, that this is a private organization, and Penny Atkinson (Assistant City Manager) was also the Chair person in charge of the Sanctuary, and was in the position at West Jordan city to, and very possibly did, direct city employees to work on this project during City paid time. This would also indicate conflicts of interest problems.

West Jordan City management maintained for several months that 150 hours (attach newspaper article) was spent on this project. This was later revealed to be 2315 hours of city employee time.

It appears there are NO minutes to approve any City worker time at this private project.

Minutes from 08/18/98 Regarding South Valley Sanctuary

Councilmember Plouzek said he didn't feel he was questioning the operation of the Sanctuary. Someone came forward to the press and questioned the use of City personnel which they believed were unauthorized use of City personnel to complete the building or do portions of the building. This was first brought to him at the Good Neighbor Fair when someone came up to him and said "I seen City equipment over at the Sanctuary doing work". He didn't believe so, so he approached a City employee and asked if he had been doing work over there who stated yes he had been doing work over there. Councilmember Plouzek stated that the employee said the Director at the Sanctuary had also been asking City employees to do work there. Then he received a call from a newspaper man who said he had seen two City trucks working on handrails well after the Sanctuary was finished. He felt that was all the citizens are saying is "Are we spending City money beyond what was authorized?" He said there have been City employees in the past asked to leave the City, or released, or fired for stealing from the City.

Minutes from 02/02/99

Penny Atkinson: "If the Council now wanted to consider that road, the cul-de-sac and the utilities there as part of the Sanctuary, then yes, there were probably over 2,000 hours spent helping to complete the Sanctuary and that was not including the 2-3,000 hour's Gary Cox and she spent building that facility."

Deseret News Edition

Deseret News Archives,
Friday, February 5, 1999

Is sanctuary issue over in W. Jordan?

Officials aim to learn from errors, move on

By Don Baker Deseret News staff writer

WEST JORDAN -- Like that squalling kid you hope is finally going to sleep, council members put the troublesome issue of city hours worked on the South Valley Sanctuary to bed this week.

Now they just hope the darn kid will stay there.

The council revisited the sanctuary issue again Tuesday night after receiving a staff report that indicated city crews had spent 2,315 hours between January 1995 and September 1997 doing various jobs at the shelter for victims of domestic violence.

While that number appears to conflict with the estimate of 150 hours provided by city officials last summer, the council generally agreed the sanctuary was a worthwhile project that benefits the entire Salt Lake Valley.

But council members also continued to debate whether West Jordan administrators had violated their own policies by ordering -- without formal council approval -- a large expenditure of city employee time on a facility owned by a private nonprofit corporation.

City Manager Dan Dahlgren joined former Mayor Max Hogan in defending the use of city resources. They argued inclusion of the sanctuary in the city's strategic plan for several consecutive years was sufficient to give council approval for the spending.

"It was done under your direction as part of the strategic plan," Assistant City Manager Penny Atkinson told the council. "I thought I was following your directions."

Atkinson, who also heads the sanctuary board of directors, attributed the large discrepancy in the latest number of hours reported to "road work and infrastructure" she maintains was authorized by the council.

The report notes, however, the 1,600 hours reported by the streets division was for work done inside the sanctuary fence -- not the access road to the sanctuary approved by the council.

"I take full responsibility" for using city workers on the project, Atkinson said. "Punish me. Fire me. Do whatever you need to do to me. But please move on."

Councilman David Plouzek said he can't understand why city administrators simply didn't ask the council for its formal blessing.

"I'm sure if it had been brought back before the full council, it (the use of city manpower) would have been approved," he said. "What's the fear? We surely didn't approve the additional hours."

Councilman Gordon Haight agreed the staff was only carrying out the council's direction in committing resources to the shelter.

"If you want someone to blame," he said, "blame the City Council at that time."

But Councilman David Newton said the council has to be more careful with how tax dollars are used.

"If we're going to use city manpower, we've got to have control over the monies spent," he said. "Hopefully, we've learned from this process. Hopefully we won't make the same mistakes again."

Agreeing the council must shoulder a share of the responsibility, Councilman Jay Bowcutt said he is nevertheless "disappointed in the number of hours we were told earlier last year" in regard to city work on the sanctuary.

"We were led to believe it was 200 to 300 hours," he said. "But had I known about the 2,000 hours, I still would have approved it."

Bowcutt joined Councilman Brian Pitts in calling for an end to the ongoing sanctuary furor.

"The issue is not the sanctuary," said Pitts. "The issue is whether we could have run a tighter ship. I think that's been acknowledged."

Noting some "course corrections" are in order, the councilman said city officials need to learn from their mistakes and settle their differences so West Jordan can get on with business.

© 1999 Deseret News Publishing Co.

[Return to Archive search](#)

[Return to front page](#)

Deseret News

Deseret News Archives,
Sunday, August 16, 1998

Pro bono work on shelter said to be improper

Residents challenge W. Jordan donation

By Don Baker, Staff Writer

A group of West Jordan residents is challenging a decision by city officials to use city workers and equipment for work on a nonprofit shelter for victims of domestic violence.

Calling itself the SOC (Save Our City) Committee, the group says it wants a public accounting of the time, equipment and what may be hundreds of hours of labor the city has provided without charge to the South Valley Sanctuary.

"The SOC Committee questions the propriety of West Jordan donating funds, labor and materials to a private venture" without a specific authorization from the City Council, said committee member Norman Riggs.

A three-story shelter that will house about 68 people, the sanctuary was built at a cost of \$1.6 million.

City Manager Dan Dahlgren and his assistant city manager, Penny Atkinson, said they stand by their decision to use city resources at the shelter and both say they consider the sanctuary a "city project."

Critics disagree, saying they question the validity of a so-called city project where the city has no direct control over or responsibility for the sanctuary, its budget or its board of directors.

But Atkinson, who has played a major role in making the shelter a reality, does have direct ties to South Valley Sanctuary.

In addition to chairing its board of directors for the past two years, Atkinson has been the main fundraiser for the nonprofit corporation that runs the facility.

She maintains the furor over city involvement at the sanctuary is a nonissue and contends her personal political enemies have decided to make the women's shelter "a target" because it is so closely associated with her.

Riggs said the group's criticism of the project has nothing to do with Atkinson personally but is focused on whether city officials have spent taxpayer funds without getting council approval.

Noting he served on a legislative task force that helped draft legislation assisting domestic violence victims, the West Jordan man said he strongly supports the mission of the shelter and is not criticizing the sanctuary or its staff.

City records indicate only one or two votes in which the council specifically authorized city crews and equipment for work at the sanctuary. In one case, the council agreed to install curb and gutter to help finish the shelter.

But council members are divided on the issue of whether there was some kind of unspoken "understanding" that gave administrators blanket approval to use city resources on the facility.

City workers themselves estimated hundreds of man-hours worth \$10 to \$12 an hour were spent working on the sanctuary, and several indicated a figure of 500 hours is "very conservative."

Both Dahlgren and Atkinson vigorously dispute those figures.

"I can guarantee you there were not that many hours of city employee time" expended at the shelter, said Atkinson. "It was more like 150 hours."

But no one will ever know for sure, since the city did not keep time or equipment-use records for work at the sanctuary.

Included in the work were painting, landscaping and interior work.

Atkinson and Dahlgren maintain any resources expended at the sanctuary were used with the council's awareness and blessing.

But Councilman David Plouzek strongly disagrees.

"We didn't know city workers were being used on city time . . . and we didn't vote on it. We authorized curb and gutter, and nothing else."

Councilman Jay Bowcutt also said he was only told that employees were volunteering their time.

"I wasn't aware of us approving the use of (city) manpower" for the sanctuary, he said. "I don't remember approving anything other than the cash we gave."

The newest council member, David B. Newton, said he wasn't aware until recently that city employees were still working on the sanctuary after he was appointed to the council late in April.

"But it would concern me if we're doing things that haven't been authorized," he added.

Councilwoman Margaret Grochocki disagrees with her council colleagues.

"We all knew about it," she said. "We've all been involved. That project has been going for years.

Grochocki, who works for Salt Lake County, said, "Coming from the public sector, the question has never come in my mind as to whether it was proper or not" for the city to support the sanctuary. "I'm angry that this has even come up." Councilman Gordon Haight said he also was aware of city employees working on the sanctuary.

"I think the city was really involved in getting that thing finished," he said. "It was about the same as we did on the juvenile justice center."

Councilman Brian Pitts has been on vacation and was not available for comment.

Dahlgren and Atkinson maintain the city's support of the women's shelter was evident in the West Jordan strategic plans adopted in 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997. Each of those documents placed completion of both the sanctuary and the juvenile justice center high on a list of city priorities.

While strategic plans do provide a conceptual outline for the city's goals and work program for any given year, they do not carry any authority to spend money or allocate other resources.

City records do show the council authorized almost a quarter of a million dollars in city contributions to buy the land (\$110,000) and build and furnish the shelter (\$118,888).

In addition, the city provided loans of \$25,000 and \$94,000 to the center to help put the facility in operation. About \$64,000 is still owing and payable by Dec. 31.

One minute entry that loosely supports the administration's view was a general resolution passed last December calling on other communities to join West Jordan in financially supporting the domestic violence shelter.

"But I think they (administrators) have interpreted the resolution as a blank check," said Riggs, a former school district superintendent in Sun Valley, Idaho, and Union, Ore. "I don't think the city ought to operate that way.

"It should operate on specific requests to the council for people, material and dollars," he added.

Dahlgren suggested critics of the city's involvement with the sanctuary "have not perceived this as a public-minded project" and don't realize West Jordan officials originally conceived of the shelter years ago as a city facility.

While the shelter eventually evolved into a non-profit private corporation, the city manager said the sanctuary remains closely tied to West Jordan.

"I don't look at it any different than a park project," he said.

Kathy Hilton, a former city councilwoman who has also chaired the sanctuary board and currently serves as its secretary, doesn't share that perception.

Speaking at Tuesday's council study session, Hilton made it clear she's unhappy that the shelter is being unfairly linked to other controversies plaguing the city.

"The sanctuary is not under the umbrella of this city," she said. "It has nothing to do with this city . . . and I wish the city would please pass that on."

Mayor Donna Evans said that while she also supports the sanctuary and believes it meets a critical community need, it's also important for the council to review any requests for city aid "within the context of our budget" and approve them by council resolution .

"There are a lot of good causes, but if all of us allocated resources to our own pet 'good projects,' there would be nothing left to provide city services," she said.

Riggs said the SOC Committee, which has grown to 10 members, is "looking at how the city spent money on the shelter, the soccer complex and its vehicle fleet."

© 1999 Deseret News Publishing Co.

[*Return to Archive search*](#)