

John Volz: Lack of transparency, poor decisions by NID

Other Voices

John Volz

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With its [decision to donate public funds to the Nevada County Historical Society](#), Nevada Irrigation District management has once again demonstrated a lack of transparency.

NID Policy #1070 allows the district to grant funds to nonprofit and community organizations. The policy outlines a process for NID to choose which organizations qualify to receive funds:

The district may fulfill requests for contributions for nonprofit/community organizations when the organization can show their direct relationship to watershed health, water quality, agriculture or natural resources.

Examples of nonprofits which have received funds from NID in compliance with this policy are high school agricultural programs and the South Yuba River Citizens League, for its annual efforts to clean up the Yuba River. This year, at the Nov. 8 board meeting, NID staff recommended that the Nevada County Historical Society receive funding. The historical society is a wonderful and worthy organization, but one that clearly does not meet the criteria set forth in NID policy.

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Policy #1070 sets aside a total of \$7,500 for annual donations. NID gifted \$1,485 to the Nevada County Historical Society this year, and has since requested another \$5,515 for 2018 to remodel the society's kitchen. NID staff justified this donation by saying that the society provides important maps that benefit NID. Really? This clearly is outside the scope of NID policy; one wonders if staff have even read the policy.

Furthermore, Nevada County Historical Society representative Dan Ketcham is the appraiser of record for NID. Mr. Ketcham has been paid many thousands of dollars (over \$60,000 since 2016) for his work on the Centennial Dam and other projects. The fact that NID staff requested funding for an organization whose representative has financial ties to the district, and that said funding would represent nearly 70 percent of funds budgeted for donations in 2018 — without considering other worthy organizations — once again demonstrates lack of transparency and poor decision making.

The board had the opportunity to listen to public concerns regarding this issue, but chose to ignore those concerns and the intent of the policy by going ahead and voting to gift district funds to the historical society.

Boards of directors develop policies to guide management as well as their own processes to ensure that the best choices are made for the organization and its constituents.

The decision to fund the Nevada County Historical Society kitchen is yet another example of NID's board not following its own policies and lacking transparency about a funding recipient's financial ties to the district.

Lastly, I commend Directors Weber and Morebeck for following the criteria set forth in board policy and voting against this request.

Unfortunately, the remaining directors approved it.

John Volz is a candidate for NID Division 2. He lives in Chicago Park.

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