

Richmond auditor finds no data misuse - Richmond auditor says finance director's accusation of misused taxpayer data is unfounded

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Richmond City Auditor Umesh Dalal said Wednesday he has reviewed allegations made by a city official about his staff's handling of taxpayer data and found them to be without merit.

Instead, he attributed the issue to a misreading of his office's decision to use a late property tax bill received by one of his office's employees to investigate why residents don't always get their tax bills on time.

"So we traced that case and the facts of that case through the process," Dalal said, adding that his staff was disturbed by the claim that it had acted inappropriately.

During a budget hearing Monday, Finance Director John Wack said he had "reason to believe (the auditor's) staff has inappropriately used taxpayer specific information," when pressed by council members for an explanation of why his office was not cooperating with a review of the city's tax collection efforts.

Wack and administration officials have since declined to elaborate, but they met Tuesday privately and both sides said they had largely resolved their disagreement surrounding the contested audit.

Dalal said that during the meeting, Wack also provided two emails to back up the accusation of misused data.

Dalal explained his side of the situation in an email Wednesday afternoon to City Council members, saying his staff member's tax information was used with permission and with the approval of managers overseeing the audit.

"I stand by my staff," Dalal said in the message. "I am very disappointed that the Finance Director did not have the courtesy to consult with me prior to publicly attacking the credibility and integrity of my staff."

Asked if the administration had a response to Dalal's email to council members, Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney's press secretary, Jim Nolan, said in a statement: "We appreciate the city auditor addressing the concerns of the finance director, and we look forward to both departments working together to find a solution toward our common goal - identifying the best processes for the Revenue Administration Unit to collect the outstanding taxes owed to the city."

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- Caption: Richmond City Auditor Umesh Dalal NED OLIVER/TIMES-DISPATCH Richmond City Auditor Umesh Dalal NED OLIVER/TIMES-DISPATCH Richmond Finance Director John Wack doesn't want a review by the city auditor. Under state law, auditors can access tax records only if a locality asks for a review. NED OLIVER/Times-Dispatch Richmond Finance Director John Wack doesn't want a review by the city auditor. Under state law, auditors can access tax records only if a locality asks for a review. NED OLIVER/Times-Dispatch

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