

SLTRIB
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Not so fast

Sometimes, like it or not, the government needs a little help from the citizens it represents to get its work done right.

An example: A group of Wasatch County residents, believing the state Attorney General's Office left unanswered too many questions about the \$4.6 million renovation of an old school, decided to do some probing of its own. What these involved citizens discovered — nearly \$2 million in cost overruns that can't be recouped — vindicated their suspicions. And it should give the state's top legal investigators a well-earned case of indigestion.

County residents Tracy Taylor, Dan Stephens and Deb Anderson weren't satisfied with the Wasatch School District's explanation of how its original \$400,000 plan for a modest new school district administration building grew into a multimillion-dollar remodeling of the 100-year-old North School in Heber City.

The trio quite properly alerted the Attorney General's Office, which, after looking into their concerns about contracts between the district and an architectural company, declared it found nothing illegal; it was merely a "loose arrangement."

The residents, however, were not convinced. They delved into records, using the state Government Records Access and Management Act, which says citizens

have a right to take a look at public records. They confirmed what the AG's office already knew, that checks were cut by the district without a signed contract, and subcontracts were let without the proper bidding process.

But new information discovered by the residents group using good old-fashioned sleuthing shows that the district paid out \$1.8 million on invoices that lacked specifics about labor and materials costs. Without itemized invoices, the district has been unable to recoup losses from the architectural company's overruns.

Correctly, if a bit late, the Attorney General's Office says this new information deserves another review. For their part, Taylor, Stephens and Anderson deserve credit for being vigilant citizens who wouldn't accept a decision of a government agency when they were not satisfied it was the right one. They might not be able to undo the damage done by the district's sloppy, and possibly illegal, handling of the project, but at least they have the satisfaction of forcing the district to be held accountable for poor decisions.

The school district, under a new superintendent, now admits to the cost overruns and says "... if the district had known the outcome at the beginning, it would have taken a different approach."

That probably is true, too, of the Attorney General's Office.