From:	Alex Saloutos
To:	All Alders
Subject:	Public Comment - Agenda Item 64, January 13, 2026, File No. 91026 regarding policy exemption for MPD Training Grants
Date:	Sunday, January 11, 2026 10:32:59 PM
Attachments:	260111_LEGISTAR00000_MEMORANDUM_MPDGRANTS.pdf

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Dear Common Council Members:

Please see the attached memorandum regarding Agenda Item 64 on Tuesday's agenda. I am requesting a referral of this legislation and oppose it, absent a factual and objective case statement from MPD that justifies it. Based on the information presented to date, including Assistant Chief Paige Valenta's comments at the Finance Committee meeting, it appears this exception is necessary only because of MPD's lack of planning, not any structural flaw in the City's grant procedures.

Thank you for your consideration.

Alex Saloutos
Phone: (608) 345-9009
Email: asaloutos@tds.net

M E M O R A N D U M

Date: January 11, 2026

To: Common Council
John Patterson, Chief of Police
Paige Valenta, Assistant Chief of Police

From: Alex Saloutos

RE: Request for Information, Referral, and Statement of Opposition – Agenda Item 64, Legistar File No. 91026, Common Council Meeting January 13, 2026

I respectfully request that the Common Council refer File No. 91026 (Agenda Item 64 on the January 13, 2026, agenda) to a future meeting and direct staff to post answers to the questions below in Legistar before the Council takes action. Absent a compelling written case statement that addresses these questions, I oppose this legislation for the reasons set forth below and in Nick Davies's public comments. Based on the information presented to date, including Assistant Chief Valenta's comments at the Finance Committee meeting, it appears that MPD's lack of planning, rather than any structural flaw in the City's grant procedures, is the underlying issue. Without a factual basis for this change in the public record, it risks creating the appearance that MPD's lack of planning is being treated as justification for reducing transparency and accountability.

BACKGROUND

File No. 91026 would authorize the Madison Police Department (MPD) to accept training grants on an ongoing basis without individual Council approval, subject to annual budget limits.[1] The Finance Committee recommended adoption on January 5, 2026,[2] without the benefit of any of the detailed information and analysis described below.

This special exception departs from the City's standard grant policies and procedures in Administrative Procedure Memorandums 1-1 and 1-9, which require Council approval for grant acceptance and contract authorization.[3] These procedures exist for good reasons: they ensure transparency, allow for public input, and maintain Council oversight of outside funds flowing into City departments.

The fiscal note states that MPD "has had to decline such funding" due to timing constraints. At the Finance Committee meeting, Assistant Chief Valenta cited a single situation last year in which a scholarship was offered to detectives for out-of-state training, but the timing of the award did not allow MPD to seek Council approval in time.[4] This raises a basic process question: when did the detectives apply for the scholarships? That application date would have been the appropriate point

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1 Legistar File No. 91026, Resolution Text ("any grant funds received through the authority granted by this Resolution shall not exceed the annual budget for training grants set by the Department's budget"). Available at: https://madison.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7767025&GUID=B42ED177-C061-4E60-A38A-8F9EC2B3E3FB.

2 Legistar File No. 91026, Action History (Finance Committee, January 5, 2026: "Recommend to Council to Adopt – Report of Officer," Pass). See id.

3 APM 1-1, Section I.A ("All contracts must be properly authorized by the Common Council or through an official procedure before being signed"). Available at: https://www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/apm/1-1.pdf. APM 1-9, Grant Acceptance ("To accept grant funding on behalf of the City, agencies must go to Common Council for appropriation and revenue approvals"). Available at: https://www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/apm/1-9.pdf.

4 Assistant Chief Valenta's explanation was provided during the Finance Committee's January 5, 2026 meeting. See Finance Committee Meeting Video, January 5, 2026, at approximately 9:23 (comments by Assistant Chief Valenta regarding a scholarship-funded out-of-state training opportunity for detectives and the timing of Council approval). Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8fTJaiFnz4.

for MPD to initiate Council approval, contingent on the funds being awarded. If, instead, MPD waited until after the award to seek authorization, that reflects a planning issue within the department, not a structural flaw that justifies carving out a special exception to the City's standard grant procedures. Going forward, that is how MPD should handle these situations. This approach is already embodied in the City's Administrative Procedure Memorandums, including APM 1-9. Other City departments regularly seek Council approval in advance to apply for grants and, if awarded, to accept the funds, demonstrating that this process is both workable and already in use across the organization.[5] APM 1-9 explicitly contemplates combined resolutions that authorize both application and acceptance in a single action.[6] In this instance, the public record contains no indication that MPD ever sought Council approval to apply for the scholarship-funded training in advance, even though that is the standard policy and practice for other City departments under APM 1-9.

THE PUBLIC RECORD IS INSUFFICIENT

The legislation and fiscal note fail to answer basic questions that the Council and the public need in order to evaluate this proposal:

1. What specific circumstances led MPD to decline grant funding due to timing constraints? It is unclear whether this reflects a systemic issue with the City's grant approval process or a lack of planning by MPD.

2. What specific circumstances led MPD to decline grant funding due to timing constraints? Based on the available record, it is unclear whether this reflects a systemic issue with the City's grant approval process or a lack of planning by MPD. Without concrete examples with actual dates, there is no way to assess whether the problem is real, how frequently it occurs, or whether better planning is needed rather than a policy exception.

3. What distinguishes MPD training grants from grants sought by other City departments in a way that would justify different procedures? If timing constraints justify blanket pre-authorization for MPD, the same logic would apply to other departments. Either this exception should apply citywide, or there must be something unique about MPD training grants that warrants different treatment.

4. What does this legislation do to promote or obstruct transparency and accountability? The current process ensures Council review before grant acceptance. This legislation would replace that prospective review with an annual retrospective report.[7]

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[5] For example, Item 6 on the January 5, 2026, Finance Committee agenda, later listed as Item 79 on the January 13, 2026, Common Council agenda (Legistar File No. 91115), is a resolution "Authorizing the Department of Transportation to apply for a $6.75 million Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail (FSP) Grant from the Federal Railroad Administration and authorizing the Mayor and City Clerk to sign the resulting grant agreement to accept the grant (District 4, District 6, District 12, District 15, District 17)." Numerous similar items appear regularly on Council agendas. Available at: https://madison.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7769918&GUID=9FAE1496-4086-494D-A592-5CB452FA7871.

[6] APM 1-9, Grant Acceptance ("Council approvals to apply for a grant, and accept and sign a grant agreement, can be combined into one resolution if all necessary details are known at the time of the resolution."). Available at: https://www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/apm/1-9.pdf.

[7] Legistar File No. 91026, Resolution Text ("the Department will report annually to the Finance Committee in the first quarter any such training grant(s) received the previous year"). See note 1.

REASONS FOR OPPOSITION

As Nick Davies stated in his public comments to the Finance Committee,[8] this legislation raises serious concerns about transparency and accountability:

- It would eliminate public hearings on outside funds flowing into MPD and the training those funds support. The public has a legitimate interest in knowing what training MPD receives and who is funding it.

- It would allow MPD to accept funds from sources the City may find problematic and to conduct trainings on topics that may be counterproductive to public safety—all without prior Council review.

- MPD could use this privilege to influence Council policy decisions. As Mr. Davies noted, MPD could leverage a grant covering training costs on a particular technology or approach to pressure the Council into adopting related policies.

- No other City department is seeking perpetual, unilateral authority to accept grants. If you justify this exception for MPD, what distinguishes MPD from any other City department? If the answer is "nothing," then either all departments should have this authority, or none should.

VERBAL ANSWERS AT THE MEETING ARE INSUFFICIENT

If staff answer these questions verbally at Tuesday's meeting, that would not be adequate for two reasons. First, the public has a right to review information and provide comment before the Council acts. Providing answers only at the meeting denies the public a meaningful opportunity to participate. Second, good governance requires that the case for policy changes be documented in writing, not offered extemporaneously from the dais. Legislation that would exempt a department from standard procedures should meet at least the same documentation standards the City requires for routine grant requests.

REQUEST FOR ACTION

I respectfully request that the Common Council take the following actions:

1. Direct MPD and the resolution sponsors to provide written answers to the questions above.

2. Direct staff to post the answers in Legistar as attachments to File No. 91026.

3. Refer the legislation to a future meeting to allow the public adequate time to review the information and provide comment.

4. If the Council declines to refer this legislation, vote No until MPD provides a proper case statement.

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[8] Public Comment, Nick Davies, January 4, 2026, attached to Legistar File No. 91026. Available at https://madison.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=15055654&GUID=63C314F2-4976-4F50-A881-95ADD36FBFCB.

CONCLUSION

The current process works. Other departments follow it. If MPD has genuinely lost grant funding due to timing constraints, let us see the specifics. If there are systemic issues with the City's grant approval timeline, let us address them for all departments rather than carving out a special exception for one.

Transparent, well-documented decision-making benefits everyone. Taking the time to build a proper record will strengthen this legislation if the case for it is sound—and will help reveal whether the case is sound at all.

Thank you for your consideration.