Editorial

Don’t be intimidated

GOVERNMENT GRANT money should be allocated to the best projects to meet the needs of a community. Political connections should not be a criterion. And funds should not be handed out to those who threaten and intimidate.

That’s why the behavior of community activist Saleem Bey and his followers in their pursuit of a $175,000 North Richmond grant is unacceptable.

As Richmond Councilman Nat Bates aptly put it, “Unfortunately, people feel that they’re entitled to it. Some people feel like if you can do enough intimidation you get what you want.” But, “We can’t just give money to people to spend the way they want.”

In this case, there are clear procedures to ensure that money is properly spent to meet the needs of the community, a poverty area of about 5,000 residents that includes part of the city of Richmond and adjacent unincorporated territory.

The money comes from a mitigation fund created when permits were issued for the West Contra Costa Sanitary Landfill transfer station. The money is to be used to clean up and improve the neighborhood.

A seven-member task force comprised of three City Council members, a county supervisor and three community members reviews the grant applications. Final approval of the expenditures must be approved by the full City Council and the county Board of Supervisors. It’s a responsible oversight system that ensures community input yet protects against misuse of money.

Out of the process, $175,000 was allocated for an “eco-academy,” which would include job training for young residents and possibly windmill technology manufacturing. The money was given to Neighborhood House of North Richmond, a prominent 501c3 to set up the program.