

Islip Arts Council overbilled Suffolk

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The Islip Arts Council improperly overbilled Suffolk County \$15,444 for various concerts in 2012 and 2013 as well as portions of salaries for council staff that were also funded by other groups, Comptroller Joseph Sawicki disclosed in a new audit.

Because of the findings, the county has withheld \$6,109 in claims made by the council on its 2013 contract, and Sawicki said the nonprofit group is negotiating a repayment plan to return the remainder.

"Any agency that asks for taxpayer funds bears the responsibility of ensuring that proper accounting procedures are in place," said Sawicki. He said the council was "very cooperative" during the audit, but "there was no excuse for overpayments. That was simply sloppy bookkeeping."

The agency received more than \$107,000 in funding over the two years for concerts that were held at Heckscher State Park, featuring the New York Philharmonic, and for events at the Bayard Cutting Arboretum, the Bay Shore Band Shell and the Sayville Common Ground.

The audit found the council improperly charged the county \$2,553 for the 2012 fall concerts and programs when the same expenses were also reimbursed by the East Islip Public Library, as well as \$1,698 that was also reimbursed by a group called the Reflective Garden at the Common Ground and the Natural Heritage Trust.

The comptroller also found the council improperly charged the county \$1,915 for the 2013 concert series for expenses that were reimbursed by the same library and Reflective Garden as well as the Bay Shore Business District Association. The county also disallowed \$7,428 for the 2013 concert series because percentages of wages attributed to the county were miscalculated and some of the wages were also paid by other groups. Among the jobs involved in the incorrect payments were concert coordinator, program director and an intern.

Council officials said they agreed with the findings, and have made changes -- hiring a new audit firm and modifying payroll procedures.

Council officials also said their entire 2014 grant totaling \$50,000 involved only the annual Philharmonic concert at Heckscher Park, which listed personnel costs, but did not allocate any payments to council staff or other jointly funded events to avoid problems of splitting costs.