

## Message from the Mayor: Dickens Days

Finally we reach December. It is hard to believe that 2011 is nearly over. But the very good news is that Dickens Days returns for its 8<sup>th</sup> edition. This very popular month long tradition is brought to us by WOW (Westfield on Weekends). Check out their new website: <http://www.westfieldonweekends.com> for more information on the Dickens Days events. Earlier this week we celebrated start of the season with our Lantern Light Parade and Tree Lighting. It was a great night and thank you to all those that helped with making it happen and thank you to the citizens that took part in this very special annual tradition.

2011 has continued to be a difficult time for our city businesses and for our downtown merchants in particular. And regrettably we have seen a few close their doors. However, we have seen a new generation of store owners open up in our downtown and it is interesting to note, that most of these new businesses are owned by women. Congratulations to all of our new owners for continuing on with an American tradition of owning a business. Check out the Business Improvement District's website: <http://www.thedistrictwestfield.com> for more information on our downtown merchants. There's a lot going on, and so as a community, we all talk about needing to change our own future for downtown, well it starts with an effort by all of us to shop downtown on a regular basis. If people really want to send a message to Wall Street, I'd say send it with your pocketbook and shop with a local merchant. To help with that effort, we have nearly completed the renovation of the Thomas Street parking facility and construction of the new Main Street parking facility is now complete.

And as the year draws to an end, we welcomed the opening of the Great River Bridge. Mr. Joseph Trant, a long time resident was the first motorist to drive over the bridge. Congratulations Joe, your patience paid off. And with that, access to the businesses in Depot Square that have had a tough time over the last four years should be returning to normal.

### **Now for some pulse line tidbits...**

**September 13...**The caller claims that the new school will have two principals.

That's not going to happen, there will only be one principal.

**September 13...**Chapman Playground...The caller indicated that I had done nothing as a city councilor and now I was looking for a feather in my cap as mayor.

Apparently the caller missed the great decade of progress in Ward 2 over the past 10 years. Some important projects included the rehabilitation of Municipal Playground, Old Towne 1 Neighborhood Reconstruction, dozens of streets in the ward repaved and the successful votes to pass appropriations for the Great River Bridge Project and Main and Broad Street reconstruction. And for the record, the planning for Chapman started nearly six years ago, and it started with a working group consisting of Peter Miller, Leveque Associates, Anne Marie Heiser (the former Parks and Recreation Director) and

myself. Public works projects sometimes take years to go from planning to construction and I am very glad to say Chapman is now under construction.

**September 16...**The caller made reference to the city council should not be forced to make costly decisions on short notice just because the mayor says so.

The city council operates independently of the mayor's office and makes its own decisions.

**September 16...**Sidewalks too close to the street on Main Street is "death waiting to happen."

The sidewalks conform to the standards set by Massachusetts Department of Transportation and certainly if you travel around to other cities you'll notice that many of the sidewalks along busy corridors are located alongside the roadway.

**September 17...**The caller asked why there isn't a low bridge sign on the over pass on East Silver Street.

There is a sign and certainly I have heard a number of truck drivers mention that their GPS said there was enough room. Well I think if you have ever used a GPS to travel with, you'll know there is no replacement for the human brain.

**September 20...**The caller asked why bus stops are located so close together and wondered why kids can't group up.

Here's what the school department provided to me for an explanation...We base our bus stops 1<sup>st</sup> by safety, the age of the students, volume of traffic and the area in which they reside. An area like East Mountain Rd for example would have many more bus stops compared to a neighborhood bus stop because it lacks sidewalks and it has a high traffic volume.

**September 20...**The caller requested we move the WPD to the court house to provide a visible police presence.

The courthouse is not for sale.

**September 20...**The caller was complaining about teacher benefits, hours worked, etc.

The contracts for the WPS employees can be found at the following link...

<http://www.schoolsofwestfield.org/cms/one.aspx?objectId=1241023>

**September 20...**The caller was complaining that big corporations in Westfield are given tax breaks and asked who pays the bottom line.

The caller used an example that our recently negotiated and approved tax incentive program with Gulf Stream was not a great deal for the taxpayers. And then went on to indicate that they already have tax breaks on parts. The caller clearly did not read the news coverage in the Westfield News, that did a fine job detailing the benefits this agreement has for the city. I won't go back in time and detail them all, but I will say the idea that we can add over 100 new, high paying and skilled jobs to the 140 or so they already have is a huge win for our residents. Additionally, the idea that somehow we have a great

location so these companies would come otherwise is incredibly inaccurate. With the aviation industry specifically and dealing with a massive multinational corporation, they could easily pick up and build anywhere as their customer base flies airplanes is something that you need to consider. So in the end, if the project does not make economic sense here, they could easily pick up and move somewhere else.

**September 22...**The caller would like us to take down all of the overpasses in town.

With the exception of the overpass on Elm Street, (which we will correct this upcoming summer with a construction project) the overpasses will be replaced as part of the Columbia Greenway Rail Trail project. For the city to remove them all on our own would easily cost a few hundred thousand dollars. In my past career, I participated in the removal of dozens of bridges and can tell you though they look like simple projects, due to prevailing wages requirements, engineering and environmental requirements they can be very costly. With all of the issues in front of the city that I have detailed in past columns, we have many more important issues to address with our scarce resources.

**September 28...**The caller indicated that Agawam is giving their seniors another tax break and why can't Westfield.

The city of Westfield does participate in a property tax reduction program for eligible seniors. For more information on this program, contact Tina Gorman our Director of our senior citizens services department at 562-6435. Additionally, the city offers a large discount for seniors that are connected to the sewer system. And if you or your spouse are veterans, there maybe benefits available to you as well. Contact Bob Callahan, our Veterans Agent for more information at 572-6247. There are also a few other options that maybe available to you as well can be found at this web link:

[http://www.cityofwestfield.org/?page\\_id=1033](http://www.cityofwestfield.org/?page_id=1033). And lastly, contact your city council member as allowable changes in the property tax laws need to be enacted by the city council.

We have just published another edition of "around the Whip City." So please check that out at <http://www.cityofwestfield.org/?p=3894>. Don't forget to watch my TV show... "It's Your City." We are featuring Pilgrim Candle and The North Elm Butcher Block for our 2<sup>nd</sup> Holiday Season episode. It can be seen on Channel 15 on Sundays at 4PM, Wednesdays at 8PM and Thursdays at 10AM and 10PM. It can also be seen anytime at <http://vimeo.com/channels/201443>.

I would like to congratulate Mr. Dave Brill and Mr. Ray Salois for being honored as the first inductees into the Westfield Vocational Technical High School Hall of Fame for their dedication to their careers, community and former school. They were honored at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner held on November 26 at Tekoa Country Club.

I would also like to recognize our Fire Department for being recognized by the State Fire Marshal for their role in the Tornado Rescue and Recovery effort.

[http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eopsterminal&L=3&L0=Home&L1=Public+Safety+Agencies&L2=Massachusetts+Department+of+Fire+Services&sid=Eeops&b=terminalcontent&f=dfs\\_news\\_events\\_fire\\_figher\\_of\\_the\\_year\\_2011\\_11\\_17&csid=Eeops](http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eopsterminal&L=3&L0=Home&L1=Public+Safety+Agencies&L2=Massachusetts+Department+of+Fire+Services&sid=Eeops&b=terminalcontent&f=dfs_news_events_fire_figher_of_the_year_2011_11_17&csid=Eeops)

And lastly, if you still have brush in front of your house, call the department of public works at 572-6226 to schedule a pick up. As always if you have any questions call or email me at 413.572.6201 or [mayor@cityofwestfield.org](mailto:mayor@cityofwestfield.org).

Respectfully,  
Dan Knapik, Mayor