

Message from the Mayor: Fall Foliage and the Big E

Welcome to Fall or Autumn as it is officially known. It sure hasn't felt like it yet, but I assure you, like death and taxes, colder weather is inevitable. This is also the time in our region where we make the annual trek to West Springfield to experience New England's Great State Fair. I am glad to say I have already been with the family and had a great time. Thursday September 29, 2011 was Westfield Day and a great time was had by all. This year we honored Dr. James Dowd as our parade marshal. Dr Dowd, in recent years has been known as our Master of Ceremonies for our Veterans events. He is also a Marine Corps veteran, a former teacher in Westfield, served on the City Council from 1977-1989 and the School Committee from 1968-1975 among many of his achievements in a lifetime of public service. And as I recently learned he earned a black belt in 1997.

One of my major interests is helping to make our city go "Green." I have initiated a solar energy project at the Twiss Street Landfill. I am also releasing soon, requests for proposal for two more solar farms on city property. Additionally, at my direction, computers have been installed in the city council chambers for each member. In the past, City Council members would be presented with large volumes of paper documents for the evening's meetings. This same occurrence happens for the School Committee. Most if not nearly all of the paper ends up in the recycling bins under their desks. While I served on the council, this waste of paper always irritated me a bit. While at the same time, my employer at the time, had made great strides in technology to make a paperless workplace. Many of our clients required reports to be delivered to them electronically. And the state of Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection soon required that reports to them, also needed to be made electronically.

So I arrive in City Hall in January 2010, and it was like the 1990's again. Copy/scanners just made their arrival, and soon the fax machine would be a relic of the past. Well as mayor, I now found myself in the position of being the chief in charge of generating paper for the City Council. This didn't sit well with me. So in our continuous improvement mode we are in at City Hall, I am glad to report that the computers are in and there will be only one more "adjustment" meeting for the Council. The Council has been provided with electronic and paper files since their first meeting in September. For the second meeting in October the paper goes away. I know at least one other person that is real happy about this, my faithful administrative assistant Gail Yarmesky. The copy burden fell on her to prepare every other week, the reams of reports the council would be provided with. Now, we generate it once and then scan it to the members' electronic file.

Now, what does that mean in dollars and sense? Well initially not much, but consider this statistic: in the month of May this year we generated citywide 270,055 copies of paper documents. In black and white, that number was 58,384 from the city and 162,752 from the schools for a total count of 221,136. In color that number was 5,366 from the city and 43,549 from the schools for a total of 48,915. With our new technology tools we are able to track data just like this, and using this data, you can develop reduction strategies that can be measured physically and of course that translates into dollars saved. I have set a goal of a 10% reduction in the 2011 total count for 2012. By making the City Council and School Committee paperless, we are well on our way to meeting that reduction goal. The next big test for us will be the generation of the multiple versions of the city budget which is hundreds of pages long. This year, I plan to produce the budget in electronic format from the beginning and again, emphasize the need to break the paper habit.

Good news was received recently in the city, in that the Pochassic Street Bridge was advertized earlier this month for a December bid opening. Additionally we were notified that the Cowles Bridge (bottom of College Highway Hill) has been placed on the state's replacement schedule for 2015 and the route 187 project will start in 2013. All of these projects are designed to help the flow of traffic and of course replace old and outdated bridges. Additionally, three economic development projects were given the green light in Boston, Seal RYTE, Arms Brook LLC, and Gulf Stream. And lastly, our new elementary school was given the approval by the Massachusetts School Building Authority. And it is on track for a September 2013 opening.

Now for some pulse line tidbits:

August 30, 2011: *The city will move the school department to the court house because a city councilor works for the owner.* I can assure you, the school department will not be moving there and the city has no interest in obtaining the building. At present, the fate of the courthouse is undecided. I would like to see the court remain, but that remains to be seen.

August 30, 2011: *The same caller mentions that we should take buildings for back taxes.* Well, we do, in fact over the years we have come into possession a number of these properties. In fact, this year we auctioned two houses that were taken as a result of unpaid taxes. And this year, we demolished the City Cleaners building that was obtained years ago due to outstanding tax obligations. Taking of property though is really the last resort. Property is better left in the hands of taxpaying citizens and businesses.

August 31, 2011: *The caller said that the price for the Westwood is too expensive for the new school headquarters.* The owners of the Westwood responded to our request for proposal for up to 6000 square feet of office space. A decision on where the school department will go has not been made. Some people have asked why not use Moseley Street School. Well the bill to heat that building is nearly \$50,000 a month, and as a change of use it would need to meet ADA standards for accessibility. My goal is to get the school department into a space that is suitable and cost effective.

September 1, 2011: *The caller claims I spend, spend, spend.* Well in fact, I can't spend a penny without the City Council's approval. That being said, your property tax levy at my recommendation only went up 1.5% as opposed to the standard 2.5% that had been the trademark for the city for years and is the case in most cities around us. The fact that the city is a 120 million dollar business means that inherently we will spend money. The key is that we spend each penny in a manner that is in the best interest of the citizens of Westfield. If the caller would like to call back, oops, I mean email back to the pulse line or myself with a specific item of interest I would be glad to answer that.

September 2, 2011: *The caller states that Crane Avenue should be one way and Meadow Street needs a lot of work.* I would recommend the caller contact the ward councilor in Ward 4 and ask that she refer this item to the Traffic Commission for consideration. I agree that Meadow Street is in rough condition. As soon as the construction is completed in that area, I will schedule the milling and repaving of that street.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Westfield on Weekends for hosting Colonial Harvest Days again. We missed it last year and it is great to see our civic organizations planning for the return of our downtown programming. This time next year, our projects will be done, and life will return to normal. And that means all of the activities downtown will return.

I will be taping a new show next week. Tune in to see George from George's Jewelers and the New Elm Street Diner. My show can be seen on Channel 15, Sundays at 4PM, Wednesdays at 8PM and Thursdays at 10AM and 10PM. And you can now view all the past episodes at <http://vimeo.com/channels/201443#26073645>.

Also check out our new website <http://www.cityofwestfield.org/> and our newsletter. "around the Whip City."

As always if you have any questions call or email me at 413.572.6201 or mayor@cityofwestfield.org.

Respectfully,

Dan Knapik, Mayor