

Message from the Mayor: Looking Back and What's Ahead

What a winter it's been so far. This week we await the arrival of yet another "Plowable Event." Before I became mayor, winter for me was a time of skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling. Now though, I see it more in the amount of money it takes to clean up. Like Ross Perot said so many years ago about the giant sucking sound of NAFTA stealing our jobs, that's literally what a snowstorm is to your city's budget. I think in my ten years in city government annual tallies ranged from \$400,000 to as much as \$1.6 million. If this winter keeps up, we'll be looking at well over a million dollars when all said and done.

But enough about that stuff. As we get ready to leap into 2011, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on the accomplishments that were 2010. First off, when I ran for mayor I said that I wanted to do a few things. Well here's what I said: I would once again open the door to the public; it's been open since the day I arrived January 4, 2010 and it will be until I leave this office. Provide to the city council a budget that provided for our core services and funded projects that we needed to get done. I'm very happy to say, that among the much appreciated programs I funded was the reactivation of the bulk pick up program. Also we removed a record amount of dead trees and repaved more roads than we have in years.

I said I would also open up the budget process to the public and the city council. In the spring of 2010 I hosted a number of public forums and invited every city council member to each department head meeting. I plan to do the same thing this year as well.

And after many years of haphazard budget cutting, our city budget had no focus. To move the city forward, I needed to make sure that our most basic responsibility to the taxpayers were met. That of verifying that your city finance system was still sound. We've had a lot of changes in the last few years, and I needed to ensure the systems and personnel were in place to get our city moving forward again. So I asked the Massachusetts Department of Revenue to perform a financial management review. Representatives of the MADOR spent much of the summer visiting us and reviewing our operations. The good news is, we came out with a good finding. And our technology effort was praised as being a shining star an excellent model for other cities to follow. This report will soon be available on our city website. We do have a few improvement items to work on and we will start on that this year. The MADOR team took the time to relay to me a personal note saying that the level of cooperation, openness and hospitality shown to them by our city finance team was second to none.

I said I would do a monthly television show; I did twelve shows this year. The show airs on channel 15, Sundays at 4PM, Wednesdays at 8PM and Thursdays at 10AM and 10PM. They should be available on You Tube soon. I said that I would do a monthly newsletter. Well seeing as we were a bit short staffed, I opted to do a monthly newspaper article for the WEN. Thank you to them for allowing me the space. I will, however, begin the monthly electronic

newsletter effort this month. The first edition should be available in February. This effort, I am proud to say is a joint venture with Westfield State University.

I said I would accomplish site selection for a new senior center. In December I announced that the new center would be built on property that the housing authority owns on Noble Street. Some people have asked why we don't put the center downtown as part of a redevelopment effort. The easy answer is that the seniors didn't want it there. The next reason is the cost. The site under consideration is a publicly owned site without any buildings on it.

I said that I would retool the city's economic effort so that we were no longer considered the best location in the region for big box warehouses. I have heard the residents of the north side loud and clear, enough of the big boxes. That being said, we are still under contract with Target Corporation. At this time, I do not know if they will ever build it, but we are under contract to make improvements in the route 10/202 corridor. We start that effort this year with the Arch Street reconstruction. I said that I would work to transition our property on Turnpike Industrial Way into an environmentally friendly business park. The plan was presented to the city council and has been in their hands for a few months now.

I said that I would get the Elm Street Revitalization effort restarted and I have. As of today, we have engaged in a contract with an environmental consultant that is tasked with the job of getting me the cost of final clean up for the whole site from Church Street to Arnold Street. Additionally, I have as of this writing requested funds from the city council to begin tearing down blighted buildings in the city's core. Recently with city council funding, we demolished the warehouse to the old Lampson furniture building. This will pave the way for a new and expanded Thomas Street Parking Lot. In the coming months, the city cleaners and casket company buildings will see the wrecking ball.

The one effort that I am most proud of is the successful acceptance by the Massachusetts School Building Authority of the city's effort to build a model elementary school. And as a bonus, all of our requested buildings, the high school, Voc-Tech, Munger Hill, Papermill, Highland and Southampton Road were all accepted into the Green Repair Program. The Green Repair Program is a Federally funded effort that provides cities and towns with money to repair windows, boilers and rooftops. With the new school and the Green Repair effort, this will ensure that our physical plant for our school department will be in great shape for the next twenty years.

Additionally I had a study done to review the cost of repairing our city buildings. The city council was given that report at their last meeting. I will soon be releasing a request for proposal for an energy services contracting consultant to assist in the effort to repair our city buildings. Following the model of surrounding cities that have used this system, needed repairs to roofs, boilers, HVAC equipment and windows are paid for with savings gained by being in the program. This is a great way to get the work we need to do to extend the life of our public buildings, reduce the cost to the taxpayers and getting our city "Green." This report will be available soon on our website.

With going Green in mind, I have authorized a proposal for developers to build a 2 megawatt solar power station at our capped landfill. This I hope will lead to a revolutionary relationship with the Gas and Electric so that we can construct additional solar stations throughout the city either on private or public land and buildings. The G&E has been working hard this year to get into position to allow for these kinds of projects to occur in Westfield. I would like to thank the General Manager, Dan Howard and the members of the Municipal Light Board for embracing a "Green City" initiative. That's good for all of us.

Some other notable achievements include the successful reconstruction of the Westfield River Levee so that it complies with FEMA standards for flood protection. As an added benefit we have added an accessible access way so that all our citizens can access the River Walk. With the help of the city council, I have financed a road construction master plan for the next ten years. That was the focus of a previous Mayor's Message. With the help of the city council, we have fully funded all the design phases of the Columbia Greenway and have entered into a relationship with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation so that we now have a partner for future construction. Also among the highlights was the successful completion of two ARRA grants. One was for the reconstruction of Maple Street and the other one provided for energy efficiency work in three of our schools. Both grants were over \$130,000 and were stalled going nowhere when I arrived.

And with our kids in mind, during my watch the city applied for design and construction funding for an approximately \$750,000 reconstruction of Chapman Street Playground. This much needed facelift will add a modern pavilion with bathrooms and a water spray park. Construction will start later this year. And one particular effort I am most proud of relates to the effort I personally spearheaded to upgrade our Voc-Tech shops. With assistance with funding from the city council and the mayor's COMCAST technology account, much needed and long overdue safety upgrades were made to a number of shops and state of the art technology was provided to a number of shops so that the students will be provided with the best in industry learning experience second to none.

If you get the idea that it has been a busy year, you'd be right. But we really are just getting started. As 2011 unfolds in front of us, I will share with you're my goals and initiatives. Stay tuned, many more good things are in store for our city.

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

Respectfully,
Dan Knapik