

Open Letter to the Citizens of Westfield:

On June 30, 2009, the City Council took the unprecedented action of allowing the Mayor's fiscal year 2010 budget to become law without taking a vote to ratify it. We believe that the Citizens of Westfield deserve an explanation. The following key points are a summary of the debate the council had relative to the budget deliberations.

Point One:

The City Council requested in March that it be an integral part of the Mayor's budget planning process. We were assured during the public meeting at South Middle School that we would have, at the least, a member of the Council's Finance Committee involved with union negotiations and any other significant matters needed to prepare our FY 2010 budget. None of this happened. The City Council asked the Mayor to submit the budget on April 16, 2009 and we received the budget on May 21, 2009 – effectively cutting our budget review process time by 50%.

Point Two:

The Council believed, in these difficult economic times, the City was not in a position to finance raises between 3% and 6%, to approximately 1500 employees. The union contracts were negotiated, in good faith, two years ago. However, the raises accounted for approximately 3.1 million dollars and this needed to be addressed because all contracts negotiated in good faith are contingent upon appropriations. This coupled with the significant reductions in State aid to Westfield left the Council with the conclusion that now is not the time to appropriate full raises. Some unions did come forward with suggestions, in an attempt to help, but were never given feedback on financial goals for those concessions. We also learned that the administration never created a uniform plan of action to “formally” ask all Unions for concessions.

To balance the budget the Mayor stripped department accounts of money used to pay for services, supplies, and expenses that fund the “operations” of the departments. In effect, the result could be that we can pay our employees, but we will not be able to afford the expenses to effectively run each department for the entire fiscal year.

The budget numbers from the State show that they are already behind some 200 million dollars per month in tax collections from the projections that the fiscal 2010 budget was based on. This leads to the conclusion that the budget challenges for next year will be even worse (short of an economic miracle). Mayor Boulanger's budget allocations may have set us up for a drastic budget situation for fiscal 2011; potentially leading to extensive layoffs across departments and additional reduction in services from the City.

These factors lead to our decision to not ratify the budget that Mayor Boulanger presented. If there had been a coherent plan from the administration along with involvement from the City Council, we believe that we would be better prepared for the financial future. In the end, the budget Mayor Boulanger presented needed significant re-work with regard to proper allocations and given the time constraints we felt no other action was available.

Signed,

Westfield City Council, President
Charles W. Medeiros

Westfield City Council - Finance Committee:
John P. Liptak, Chairman
Richard Onofrey, Jr
Christopher Keefe