

Candidate Questionnaire 2009

Name: Daniel M. Knapik

Elective Office Sought: Mayor of the city of Westfield

Age: 42

Date of Birth: 9/1/67

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Westfield MA

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Occupation/Employer: Environmental Consultant
Environmental Compliance Services, Inc.
Agawam, MA

Education: BA / Fairfield University / Fairfield, CT - 1989

Elective Office Held: City of Westfield/City Councilor from Ward 2 – 2002-present

Memberships: National Environmental Health and Safety Training Association
National Fire Protection Association
National Safety Council
Safety Council of Western New England
Corporator, Westfield Athenaeum
Corporator, Amelia Park Children's Museum
Slovak Citizens Club
St. Stephen's Society
Sons of Erin
WESTFIELD LODGE OF ELKS **BPOE 1481**
Founding member Downtown Performing Arts Committee
Former member of Westfield Red Cross Disaster Response Team

Why are you running for office:

I am a candidate for Mayor of the City of Westfield because I want to make our government responsive to its citizens and position this city financially, so that we can **BOLDLY** move into the 21st century. I will work to ready our schools for the next generation, provide sound fiscal and personnel management, provide proactive leadership in attracting economic growth and jobs to our City, and I will work every day to make our neighborhoods vibrant, our citizens better engaged, informed, and proud of our hometown.

What are your qualifications for the post:

I believe that my eight years in city government and a twenty year career in business has given me the qualifications needed to be mayor. The city council experience for four terms, has enabled me to learn from the ground up, the complexity of our city's government. As chairman of the legislative and ordinance sub-committee for the last six years, almost every aspect of city government has come through my committee. The members of the subcommittee have to be knowledgeable and prepared for every meeting as we recommend to the council at large our action preference. Most importantly though, is that this experience, has provided me with an opportunity to develop the relationships that a mayor needs to be effective.

Westfield has a weak mayor, strong city council form of government. Additionally, many city departments are overseen by appointed boards or commissions. In order for a mayor in Westfield to be successful, he or she needs to provide a clear vision for the city and have a good working relationship across all the boards, commissions, and departments in order to get that vision implemented. My number one priority as mayor is to provide to our citizens the best level of service from our government.

My constituent focus is derived from over 20 years of being in a service business. In a service business, the client is the number one reason that we stay in business. Over 20 years, I have made a living working with clients, helping to solve their regulatory compliance problems, especially in hard financial times. In government, the citizens, employees, and the city's children are your clients. Constituent service has always been my number one priority in business and as a ward councilor and it will continue as mayor. The city's government needs to work for its people.

As a small business owner, I have been on the front lines of business planning and development for twenty years. As chairman of the city council's legislative and ordinance subcommittee the last six years, I have been the council's chief negotiator on economic incentive programs that are available for new and expanding businesses. Our committee has successfully negotiated at least a dozen agreements that have created hundreds of new jobs for our citizens.

Building upon this success and my own business experience, upon my election, I will immediately reactivate the long-dormant Industrial Development Commission and tap key business leaders to staff this commission. Together, we will map out a strategy to attract cutting-edge businesses with good paying jobs to our great city. I am committed to making Westfield a premier location and regional leader in attracting environmentally-friendly businesses. I have worked in the Agawam Industrial Park for ten years, which is home to over 30 environmentally-friendly businesses that employ over 2000 people. As Mayor, the Chief Economic Development official for Westfield, I will work to develop a similar industrial park in this city.

With effective leadership, our city will endure this economic downturn and emerge stronger. We cannot and will not wait for someone else to solve our problems. We must rely on ourselves- our schools, our families, our business community, and our resolve- to work toward a better Westfield.

What are the key issues facing your community:

The number one issue is our fiscal health. Our city budget presently, in my opinion, does not balance. The fiscal year 2010 budget presented to the council by the mayor, was not ratified by the council. The most significant reason being that the mayor cut too deeply into expense accounts to make up for a loss of approximately 3.5 million in state aid. That coupled with rising personnel costs, has left us with a situation that the city departments will run significantly short in budget line items needed to purchase equipment, supplies, and overtime among other items. We've already seen a nearly \$200,000 short fall appear in the fire department overtime account and we are only four months into the fiscal year.

The second key issue is our elementary school situation. We presently closed the Moseley School and lost two grades at the Juniper Park School. In my opinion, the Juniper Park grade reduction did not have to happen. The city council on a number of occasions requested to be part of the negotiations with Westfield State College. Unfortunately, the mayor never accepted our assistance, leaving us with an elementary school situation in disarray. If I had been the mayor, I would have immediately addressed the issue with the college and would have had the city council be part of our negotiating team. The college is looking for a partner in downtown development; well as mayor my number one job is to look out for our citizens, so I'm sure we could have reached some common ground. The closure of two grades at Juniper is unacceptable to me. As mayor, I will immediately begin to address this situation as the lease agreement with Westfield State College will need to be renegotiated soon. Additionally, the state school building authority will be working with the school department to address the elementary problem. Our options may include multiple building rehabilitation or new construction and closure of additional schools. In the end, our city budget will need to accommodate a likely 35% share of the cost.

Do you support the partnership formed between the city and WSC, especially in reference to student housing downtown?

Yes. I believe that one critical part of the success of a revitalized downtown is the presence of the college and the student housing piece. I am concerned that with the declining state revenue picture, and actually construction by the college and its partners maybe many years away. One of the many lessons that I have learned being in city government is that major project funding and expectations of quick construction rarely happen. Main Street/Broad Street reconstruction has been on the drawing board for over 9 years, it finally has been funded. This WSC partnership could very well suffer a similar delay. I prefer to take a more broad view of downtown development, so that we don't have all our eggs in one basket.

This includes, the continuing program of rebuilding our oldest neighborhoods that ring the downtown. It has proven in the past that when cities invest in their neighborhoods that these become attractive places to live and that provides a stable environment and a readymade shopping base in your downtown. There are already a few thousand people living everyday in or near our downtown and we need to make sure that we do everything we can as a city to protect their investment. I bought and rehabilitated a 100 year old house a couple of blocks from the downtown.

I live downtown revitalization every day. I wouldn't have done that if I felt we couldn't solve this problem.

More importantly, is private investment. I am a supporter of the Falcone Main Street Project. I will work closely with their development team to ensure we get this project started and finished. This project will rehabilitate a large section of Main Street. It will also add needed jobs in the area and provide significant tax revenue. This project is likely to spur additional investment as well.

I also support full funding of the Columbia Greenway Project. I have been a supporter since the very beginning. I used my position as the chairman of the legislative and ordinance committee to negotiate an access lease to the rail line for the Gas and Electric Department that will pay the city approximately \$140,000 for long term maintenance of the trail over the life of the lease. Completion of this trail will add to “foot traffic” in the downtown. From the research I’ve seen on these projects, the Greenway is unique and likely will be a top draw for trail tourists to our area.

What are your views on the PVEC and the HD distribution center in reference to property tax incentives that already have been approved by city officials and the potential quality of life issues on the Northside of the city?

As a city council member, I have voted in favor of both financial incentive agreements. As for the quality of life issues, I have been clear in my campaign that I will not support the location of additional big box warehouses beyond those that the city has an agreement with (Target most notably).

For most of the 20th century our economic engine was the downtown area and East Main Street. But in recent years the north side has become the economic engine of the city. It is essential for any new business be compatible with the growing residential population. The potential revenue gained by the PVEC will take great pressure off the city budget, allowing us some time to reconfigure our north side business model away from Big Box Warehousing to a more neighborhood friendly focus. I will work to site a neighborhood friendly business park on city owned property off of Turnpike Industrial Way. I have heard the residents’ concerns and I am willing and ready to work together with them to help improve the quality of life on the north side.

Gov. Deval Patrick’s top fiscal adviser is warning of a “perfect storm” of budget problems, raising the possibility of another round of emergency cuts to cities and towns. Should the schools or police be immune from cuts or should all departments share the burden.

In Westfield, we have seen a decline of state revenue to the city of over 4 million in the last 20 months. The mayor’s budget this year did not fully fund the police for the full complement of officers. Some projections have the police down from 3-6 positions as the year progresses. In my opinion, having served on the council for 8 years and being the voice of the people for the downtown, our police patrol force is already too short on staffing even when at a full complement. I will not support any reduction to the police department.

The school department faces many challenges itself. As the state has reduced its funding to the city over the last two years, the city’s contribution above state required minimum funding has declined significantly from a high of approximately 5.5 million 8 years ago to a number close to 2.3 million today. I believe that our school department cannot support additional reductions in aid. I will not support any reduction in aid to the school department.