



Beacon



Message from Mayor Sullivan



I would like to welcome everyone to the first edition of the Westfield Beacon, the City's new newsletter.

This newsletter has been something I've wanted to issue since my term began. With all that comes with a new Mayor's Administration, it's been quite the challenge to find the time to sit down and write. Over the course of the past nine months, I've been in on hundreds of meetings with city staff; I've attended over one hundred fifty community functions ranging from Eagle Scout recognition events and graduations to ribbon cutting ceremonies and 100th birthday celebrations. We've celebrated big

milestones, like the accreditation of the Westfield Technical Academy's aviation technology program and a successful Babe Ruth World Series.

What I've learned in my first nine months in office is that nothing happens in City Hall without a team of people dedicated to raising the bar. That's not a profound observation, but that's what I've learned. The people of Westfield truly care about making our community better. Whether we're talking about city employees working to advance an important initiative, or scrambling to make sure the City

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celebrates the Fourth of July with a fireworks display, or a group of volunteers coming together to offer innovative arts and cultural opportunities, it's been a commitment to teamwork that has made these things happen. One of my main

objectives has been to build bridges across the City by opening lines of communication between citizens, businesses, city departments, community stakeholders like Baystate Noble Hospital, Westfield State University, and our service clubs. I've worked hard to repair relationships that might have decayed over the years, and to develop relationships where they might not have previously existed.

Our team at City Hall has been very busy over the past nine months, and I hope that you will take the time to read the pages that follow, detailing some of the work we've done.

This fall promises to be just as busy as the first nine months. I've enjoyed meeting so many people and learning so much more about what really goes into delivering city services. I look forward to continuing to meet some many more of you in the months to come.



“From a system of schools to fully evolved, progressive and poised for success.” That is how the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has described the Westfield School Department. We are most certainly poised for success. In the early part of my tenure, I was able to get around to all of the schools to tour them and meet students and faculty. Everywhere I went, I saw eager kids and teachers who care about their students and the role they play in their lives.

The school department has seen many successes since the beginning of the calendar year. It is my hope that these will continue, and that we will build upon what we have learned and implement positive experiences for our student community.

Kevin's Foundation has been generous to Westfield's schools in donating Automatic External Defibrillators. In March, two additional units were installed at the High School. As per vote by the School Committee, a Hands Only CPR/AED Awareness course was made a graduation requirement beginning with the class



of 2019. To that end, courses were provided to the PE classes at the high school and a two hour certification program was also conducted at the Technical Academy.

Early in the year, the community came together to mourn the loss of four community members, one a Westfield High School student. The loss of so many to a heroin overdose in a short time was a shock to our community. Out of this loss and a refusal to allow the heroin epidemic to overtake us, the Opioid Task Force was created. Our schools have been at the forefront of educating the community. With the first three heroin awareness forums conducted in the schools, the Task Force has continued the education process throughout the community with Narcan Training held on August 26 and Healing and Hope vigil held on August 31. #StateWithoutStigMA.

Leading us into the new school year is our new Superintendent, Stefan Czaporowski. Mr. Czaporowski has been very busy filling in the gaps that had existed due to many staffing changes in the Schools Department. I am happy to review some of the new faces you may see in your travels in the schools.

- Paula Ceglowski, Director of Human Resources
- Dr. Adam Garand, Adm. of Special Education and Student Support
- Joe Langone, Principal of WTA
- Charles Jendrysik, Principal of WHS
- Stacy Burgess, Principal of Abner Gibbs
- Salvatore Frieri, Principal of Munger Hill
- Jill Phelan, Asst. Principal of Highland School

I am looking forward to what the new school year will bring. With the combination of city, community and staff support, I am confident that Westfield can bring our schools to new levels of success.



Wall of Healing and Hope

This wall was created to be a symbol of remembrance for those who have lost their battle with drug addiction, while striving to send a message of hope to those still struggling. The windows are present to remind us that hope is never lost. We will continue to fight this disease and support those in need. We invite you to spend some time reflecting at this wall and to share your thoughts with other members of the community. Please feel free to write down messages of remembrance as well as those of recovery.

The wall will be used to start conversations about addiction and recovery as it travels to various locations, including schools and churches. It is a work in progress, and can be added to as it travels. We stand united as a community to support those affected by addiction.

Business Development

Prior to entering office I tried to communicate my vision of a fiscally sound and vibrant community for the City of Westfield. I want our community and local businesses to thrive by giving them the support and attention they need. Along with my economic development team, I am conducting a series of facility and operations tours with a number of employers in the city. The goal of these tours is to learn about the specific needs of these companies and have a better understanding of how they conduct business. Armed with this knowledge, my office is better prepared to facilitate their positive advancement when we meet with other businesses or our regional and state economic development partners. In addition, we learn what the city is doing well to help them thrive and what we can be doing better.

The city's economic health is tied to that of the region. It is for this reason that the city works closely with our regional and state business development partners. We coordinate regularly with the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council, The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and the Governor's office. In fact, it was through constant communications with the Lieutenant Governor that a funding shortfall of 1.6 million dollars was able to be closed and the important Pioneer Valley Transportation Authority (PVTVA) Transit Pavilion project was kept on track. The construction of the Transit Pavilion is expected to be completed in March of 2017 and it is the first new construction in the downtown district in several decades.

The PVTVA's Transit Pavilion is just the first component of a 3-part Urban Renewal Plan (URP) that will bring an element of revitalization to our beloved downtown. By working

closely with the City Council, my office has identified and allocated significant capital funds to the Westfield Redevelopment Authority (WRA) to allow them to acquire the 4 remaining properties that comprise the Elm Street Urban Renewal Area. It has been nearly 30 years since the Newberry's department store fell victim to fire and has led to the steady decline of the now vacant block on Elm Street. The goal of the WRA is to acquire the last properties before the end of the year and then move forward with a Request for Proposal (RFP) for private development of a mixed use building on Elm Street and a parking facility on the southwest corner of the city block.

The focus of business development has not been limited to the downtown area and a number of industrial expansion projects have come to fruition. Advance Manufacturing has just completed a 17,000 square foot expansion to meet their growing precision manufacturing business needs. They recently invested over 3

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million dollars and increased their workforce by 10 full-time jobs. Boise Cascade has also completed their 6.6 million dollar expansion. The end product of their investment resulted in the growth of their facility by 96,000 square feet and the addition of 19 jobs in our city. Lastly, there is a logistics company in the city that is currently undergoing the permitting process to undertake a 14 million dollar expansion project that will increase their use of the railroad infrastructure that is integral to our city's economic strength.

Going forward, I will continue to support local businesses in Westfield and facilitate in any way I can to help

them grow. Additionally, I will engage my team to attract new businesses to our community to expand our economic base. Some of the things we will see in the near future include a comprehensive study, the Economic Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT), with the assistance of Northeastern University. The data from this project will help me and my team focus on where to place our efforts for business expansion. I will be conducting additional business facility tours. The results from the first round of tours have been extremely beneficial and I feel it will be very advantageous to continue along this path.

I was able to attend the ribbon cutting ceremony for the second large-scale solar project in the city, CED Westfield Solar. This project went live on September 20th. It is a 2.6 megawatt project that turns the sun's rays into electricity located on a 12 acre parcel off of Russellville Road. This is a long-term project that has involved a number of city departments and is now a reality. I am looking forward to attending the 13th annual Massachusetts Alliance for Economic Development (MassEcon) Economic Impact Awards luncheon on November 22nd. Two local companies, Jarvis Surgical and Prolamina have been selected to receive this prestigious award for their recently completed expansion projects. Only 3 projects in Western Mass projects were selected and these 2 companies are part of an exclusive group of 18 projects across the state. We in the city are very proud of Jarvis Surgical and Prolamina and their accomplishments.





Financial Update

Meetings to discuss city finances and budgeting dominated my schedule for the first six months of 2016. When you think about it, every meeting I have, in some way or another, revolves around the question, “how best do we allocate our limited budget?”

Westfield is very lucky to have an experienced and talented team of finance professionals managing our accounts. While juggling hundreds of different responsibilities, Auditing, Treasury, Collections, Assessors, Purchasing, Law, and our Information Technology teams have impressed me with their ability to work together. As I acclimated to my role as Mayor, I leaned on each of them for advice as we worked through what felt like an avalanche of decisions that needed to be made quickly in order to prepare a City budget for fiscal year 2017.

Most daunting was the fact that contracts with 20 different collective bargaining units were set to expire on June 30th. After several months of negotiations, I am pleased to say that we reached what I believe are fair agreements with each group. Westfield has a solid reputation as a good place to work. We aren't the highest paying municipality, but we certainly aren't the lowest. We don't offer the lowest health insurance premiums for employees in the area, but our rates are fair. This round of contract negotiations, like any, involved compromise. Our collective bargaining units agreed to adjustments

in contribution percentages as a way to help the City begin to address our unfunded post-employment benefits liability (OPEB). I'd like to thank our bargaining units for what I feel like were fair and healthy negotiations this round. Many times, negotiations can get bogged down, by either side, by unwillingness to compromise. I am pleased to say all bargaining groups understood the fiscal reality of our City. We will all fare better when we balance our expenditures and have enough set aside to address our most critical priorities.

It didn't take very long for me to shed the “new guy” label in City Hall. Over the past nine months, we have filled vacancies in several departments, including Building, Law, Community Outreach, and others. We have additional vacancies to fill, at Barnes Regional Airport and in Human Resources. I have taken each vacancy as an opportunity to re-evaluate how best we can fill these roles. Often times, we are looking to restructure duties to allow for cost savings prior to bringing someone new on-board. That philosophy will continue in every area.

One of our successes in this restructuring has allowed for us to become more aggressive in collecting back taxes and reducing a backlog of delinquency. The City has a solid history in the collection of taxes, but by stepping up our efforts, financial leaders had set a goal of collecting \$500,000 in back taxes over the course of three years. With the assistance of our Law Department, we are approaching that goal in the first year. Collecting delinquent taxes is not only helpful to our bottom line and cash flow, but it's also good for our development prospects. Too often over the years, we have been approached by developers interested in certain properties only to lose them when they learned of large outstanding tax liabilities.

Additionally, I have instructed our employees to think more creatively about how we might finance some of our operations. Gone are the days when we can ask the City Council to borrow funds against future general government revenues to pay for infrastructure and other important projects. This year, I was pleased to work with the Auditor, Treasurer, Purchaser, and Fire Chief to advance the construction of the long-awaited and desperately-needed reconstruction of the Little River Road fire station. Going back 10 or more years, Fire Officials, Ward Councilors and citizens in Ward 5 have been advocating for this improvement. After failing to find sufficient capacity in our general fund debt service and with growing receipts from City Ambulance services, it became apparent that we could fund a big chunk of this project with non-tax revenues. The remaining gap was filled with unspent proceeds remaining after the Senior Center project came in below estimates. This project can serve as a model as we look to address other projects in the future.

Even with all that good news, we are still operating on a shoestring margin. I was pleased that we were able to send \$1.2 million to our Stabilization Fund at the close of the 2016 Fiscal Year, and this important ‘rainy day’ fund now sits at over 7 million dollars. Even though this level of capitalization has not been seen since 2010, 2017 remains a big challenge. I look forward to continuing to work with our financial team and department heads to make sure that we are deploying our resources efficiently and in a way that is consistent with the priorities we all share.



Roads to Prosperity: A Public Works Update



Among the most persistent complaints the Office of Mayor receives focuses on the condition of our roads and other public infrastructure. With over 185 miles of public roads and a significant amount of private ways, achieving a state of good repair remains an incredible challenge. Over the first few months I've spent in this office, together with the City Council, our Engineering Department, and the Department of Public Works, we've made improving our roads a priority. Below are some of the basic philosophies we are following in order to more efficiently deploy our limited resources.

#1 Use our Chapter 90 State Assistance to Repair Roads

This year, I am pleased we will be using the full \$1.2 million we receive from the state entirely on road repair. In prior years, we've used this money to fund engineering and design services or on extending the bike path. This year, we will be paving Franklin Street, from Summer Street to Allen Avenue; the northernmost portion of Montgomery Road; and the entirety of Southwick Road. We've developed a similar plan for 2017.

#2 Systemize pavement management to address deterioration before it becomes a bigger problem

Scheduled preventive maintenance on our roadways significantly extends the useful life of our pavement projects. The Department of Public Works, with the Engineering Department, has developed a plan for preventive maintenance by utilizing crack seal and other technologies. We've also accepted delivery of a new infrared patching truck that will allow us to more effectively manage pothole repair.

#3 Identify opportunities to use in-house labor to perform projects

DPW Director David Billips has placed a new emphasis on using in-house staff to perform larger projects. Traditionally, the City has contracted with outside firms to perform all or most paving or major construction projects. This year, his staff has (1) installed a new water line along Ponders Hollow Road from Tannery Road to Shaker Road; (2) replaced failing stormwater systems and repaved a portion of Pineridge Drive; (3) milled and repaved a portion of City View Road, from Butternut Road to City View Boulevard; and (4) led a team of volunteers in the installation of a new playscape at Whitney Playground. All of these projects have helped the City to stretch a dollar more effectively addressing our long list of priority needs.

#4 Focus on functionality

My philosophy relative to road and infrastructure improvements is to get back to the basics. Our City has seen some incredible projects over the past decade, from the Great River Bridge to Park Square, from Feeding Hills Road to the Columbia Greenway. This week Secretary Jay Ash, from the state's Office of Housing & Economic Development, visited Westfield and said, "Your City is sparkling." From someone who has visited more than 200 of the

state's 351 cities and towns, I took that as a high compliment. Maintaining these improvements is expensive but a high priority. In order to continue to stretch the dollar, I have directed city leaders, as they develop any new improvement projects, to focus on function rather than decoration.

#5 Give Downtown Time to Thrive

For the past ten years, Downtown Westfield has felt like an almost permanent construction zone. It is my hope that the public portion of construction in the downtown area will be complete this fall. Our businesses, property owners, and citizens deserve an opportunity to see what they can do with construction-free streets and parking lots. While work will continue on the PVTA Intermodal Pavilion and additional building demolition throughout the fall and winter, returning a sense of normalcy to the downtown is important.

#6 Plan to Work, Work to the Plan

We will continue preparing for additional construction projects in the coming years. Work is likely to begin on a state project on Little River Road this fall. The upper portion of Western Avenue has been slated for state funding in 2018, the Columbia Greenway extension from Main Street to the Westfield River will be under construction in 2019, and the state is anticipating replacement of the bridge at Southwick Road and South Maple Street beginning in 2020. Some of these projects will impose challenges on our City. I will work with City Councilors, business owners, and neighbors to ensure that questions are addressed well in advance to ensure we limit anxiety and keep our community well-informed.

