



October 13, 2011

WESTFIELD DEM, WARD 3 RELEASE: MATT SONTZ

**SONTZ, WESTFIELD WARD THREE CANDIDATE,
DISCUSSES FIRE DEPARTMENT**

I am Matt Sontz, the Democratic candidate for Westfield Town Council for the Third Ward. Our Fire Department provides essential protection for us. We need to provide our Fire Department with the personnel and equipment they need.

The Town Council's policy in dealing with our Fire Department has caused Westfield's fire rating to be lowered. That means our town will likely have to pay higher insurance premiums, which means we will have to pay more. It may also mean an increase in our individual homeowners' insurance premiums. There is no benefit to anyone in having less fire protection while paying more to the insurance companies.

Although Westfield has a fully operational ladder truck parked in the North Avenue Fire Station, it is not staffed and is not used. A ladder truck is necessary to allow firefighters to access higher floors to make rescues and to access roofs to vent heat, which is essential in slowing the spread of fire. The Ferraro's fire in our downtown required the response of multiple ladder trucks. It is shocking that ladder trucks from other towns could respond, but the Westfield ladder truck sat idle in its garage across the street!

The "two in/two out" rule exists for firefighter safety. That rule requires firefighters to enter a building in teams of two. If a team goes into a building, then another team has to be outside ready to assist them if necessary. It is essentially a buddy system for the firefighters' protection. The Town Council only staffs our two fire stations, North Avenue and Central Avenue, with three firefighters each. That means when a fire truck with three firefighters arrives at a fire, the firefighters must make a dangerous decision: violate the "two in/two out" safety rule to save someone or respect the safety rule and wait for another fire truck to arrive with more firefighters. No firefighter should have to make that kind of decision. He or she should have the proper support immediately.

We have to find ways to properly staff our fire department. Among the options we should be considering that will both provide necessary fire protection and stay within our means are: Supplementing our paid fire department with volunteers, which is expressly permitted and envisioned in our Town Code, finding grants and other sources of revenues to support our fire department, and cutting wasteful spending on things such as the Town Council's policy of giving full time pensions to part-time employees.

Our Town Council needs a change, a new perspective, and new members to aggressively confront our challenges. I hope you will support me in this endeavor. Please support me with your vote on Election Day, which is November 8, 2011. You can read more about my campaign and the issues by visiting: www.mattsontz.com.