

Westfield DEM, Ward 3 Release: Matthew Sontz

Crossing Guards Should Be Restored

I am Matt Sontz, the Democratic candidate for the Westfield Town Council for the Third Ward. It was just about this time last year that many of us in the Third Ward learned a shocking truth: our children were crossing Central Avenue without a crossing guard! The town council decided in the summer to cut every crossing guard on Central Avenue as a cost saving measure. The crossing guards at Sycamore/Central, Grove/Central, and Park/Central were gone. The crossing guard at Clover/Central was scheduled to be removed as soon as the infamous Central Avenue pedestrian crossing was operational. Parents were not given an opportunity to object or even to take their children to the intersections before school started so that they could instruct their children how to cross those busy intersections.

Many residents, including myself, attended town council meetings to voice our opposition to the Central Avenue crossing guard cuts. We felt that it was unconscionable that in an almost \$40-million budget, the town council felt that Central Avenue crossing guards, at a cost of approximately \$10,000 each per year, were considered to be the most expendable. During one particular meeting, the town council questioned me as to where I would find the funds for the Central Avenue crossing guards. I advocated that the town council should stop providing full-time pensions for part-time employees. I told them that the savings from not making the pension contributions for those part-time employees could be used to fund at least one of the crossing guards. The town council refused and defended its decision to fund full-time pensions for the part-time employees instead of Central Avenue crossing guards. So I took the fight from town hall to our neighborhoods. I circulated a petition to restore the crossing guards at Sycamore/Central

that was signed by almost 100 Manor Park residents. The support for restoring the crossing guards was overwhelming. Within two weeks of my presentation, the crossing guard at Sycamore/Central was restored!

The town council also reversed itself as to the crossing guard at Central/Clover and decided not to remove that crossing guard when the Central Avenue pedestrian crossing became operational. This was certainly because of the inherent danger to children of crossing at that strange mid-block location. Astonishingly, after repeatedly telling everyone that there was no money in the budget to restore the crossing guards, two had been restored and both within budget. I questioned the town council about where this found money came from but received no logical answer. I again advocated that the town council cease providing full-time pensions for part-time employees and use the savings to restore the crossing guard at Grove/Central or Park/Central. My suggestion fell on deaf ears. To this day, the children crossing at Grove/Central and Park/Central cross without the safety of a crossing guard. Central Avenue is perhaps the busiest and most dangerous road with respect to traffic in Westfield. The decision to remove the Central Avenue crossing guards was wrong. The decision to not restore all of them is wrong. As a councilman, I will fight to restore all of the Central Avenue crossing guards. I will also fight to restore many of our basic services that have been lost in the name of budget cuts such as the use of the Westfield Fire Department's ladder truck. 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 mattsontz.com.