



# City of Westfield



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## **An opportunity to give the taxpayer a much needed break**

Given the current financial climate in our state and our country, it is very unusual for a Mayor to provide good news to his constituents when it comes to property taxes. However, given some good financial planning, hard work from many very qualified people, and the City taking advantage of some opportunities, it is my pleasure to announce just that type of good news to the residents and businesses of Westfield. I will be submitting an amended request, asking the City Council to apply an additional \$1.33 million from the Certified Free Cash account to offset our Tax Levy.

I am pleased to announce that by all indications and calculations, the citizens of Westfield should see no increase in their property taxes for the upcoming tax year.

This announcement is the result of diligent financial planning which has already allowed the City of Westfield to deposit \$1.2 Million into the City Stabilization fund this fiscal year, an initial deposit in fiscal 2018 of \$600,000 into the City OPEB account to help offset future debts of the City (by far the largest deposit ever made to this account).

In establishing a tax rate, and preparing for the fiscal 2018 budget, the Auditor, Treasurer/Collector, Assessor and Purchaser have provided invaluable, creative, and economically sound advice. Contract negotiations with all unions have been amicable, proactive and led to some new ground being covered. Monies have been saved in areas such as Health Insurance contributions and Severance to ensure our future remains on solid footing. Creative ideas from both sides of the negotiating table have not only solidified employment numbers and savings to the City, but put us on a path to insure our employees are properly trained and compensated.

I may only have been in office for one year, but I have learned an incredible amount about responsibly managing a City of our size, while representing the needs of all citizens.

As you may have heard and read, when submitting the financial package to the City Council last month in anticipation of their setting a tax rate, I had suggested we use just over \$1 Million of free cash to assist homeowners in reducing their upcoming tax bills. This would have resulted in the City utilizing less than half of the tax increase we are authorized to use under state law, but still would have resulted in an increase to the individual property tax bills (albeit, much smaller than if the full increase were imposed). However, after meeting with Finance Subcommittee Chairman, Councilor Bob Paul, and the President of the City Council, Councilor Brent Bean, I was encouraged and supported to use the full \$2.3 Million of free cash it would require to remove any potential property tax increase.

Managing the City's budget requires a constant balancing act. There are never-ending needs, like technology upgrades for our schools, trash trucks, and police equipment, and living in New England means we could wake up tomorrow needing to dig out from a costly blizzard. However, I remain ever-mindful, and conversations with constituents and City Councilors constantly remind me, that Westfield residents and businesses are facing the same slim operating margins as the City. Balancing these concerns, it was agreed the time for property tax relief is now.

I feel confident that the state of our City will remain strong for the upcoming year. The forecast for the projects which are underway or about to begin remain financially sound and well managed. Our bond rating should remain stable given the deposits to the stabilization and OPEB accounts. The savings we hope to see within our collective bargaining contracts should materialize in the next few years. and I firmly believe that if emergency funding is needed, the Council will be cooperative in allowing me to use our City's Stabilization Account.

Please be forewarned, this type of a free cash expenditure may not be possible in the upcoming years, and this is not a present simply for the sake of bringing a little Christmas cheer. This announcement comes on the heels of prudent financial planning and sacrifices which Westfield has been practicing for several years. I am proud to be your Mayor, and proud of the work this City has done.

Brian P. Sullivan

Mayor