

# MAYOR WEGER'S REPORT TO RESIDENTS REGARDING COUNCIL CONCERNS

## SEPTEMBER 22, 2016

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your Mayor. It is an honor to serve the residents of Willoughby Hills. As Mayor I always try to make the best decisions for the residents and employees of our great City. As some of you may know, there has been some negative press recently and I would like to have an open dialog with you to communicate the background information surrounding these issues.

- **THE HIRING OF FIRE CHIEF DISANTO**

**The hiring, firing, suspension and compensation assignment of the Willoughby Hills Fire Chief cannot be done by the Mayor alone, but need the approval of Council by our City Charter.**

The hiring process that was followed in this case:

- 18 candidates were interviewed for the position of Fire Chief.
- Seven of the 18 candidates were either full or part-time currently working at WHFD.
- A job offer was made to an outside candidate, but was declined due to starting salary.
- Robert DiSanto was my next candidate choice. He had worked in a part-time capacity for ten years with the City of Willoughby Hills and eighteen years on Cleveland Fire Department. Over the years I have witnessed Mr. DiSanto performing his job and he is a good firefighter and paramedic. I selected Mr. DiSanto because of his positive attitude and vision to move the Department into the future. Mr. DiSanto was also recommended by the former WH Fire Chief Richard Harmon, as his preferred candidate for the open Fire Chief position.
- I presented Mr. DiSanto's resume and credentials to Council for their confirmation. This memo outlined the interview process by four individuals versed in Fire Science and employment. At no time did I say that Mr. DiSanto had been vetted in this memo.
- Council asked for all of the other candidate resumes and credentials and for the employment package proposal for Mr. DiSanto, which I promptly provided.
- Council placed the approval of the compensation package for the Fire Chief on the 5/26/16 agenda (Ordinance 2016-31). During that Council meeting, Council went into Executive Session to discuss the hiring. Council returned from Executive Session, waived the three readings and welcomed Bobby DiSanto as the new Fire Chief for the City of Willoughby Hills.
- Two weeks following the hiring, Civil Service Commission brought to my attention that certain credentials that were previously requested of Mr. DiSanto had not yet been received. It was Civil Service's notification to me that prompted me to initiate notification to Council, the Law Director and our HR Director. I was in communication with Civil Service as they continued the vetting process. I was totally open with Council.
- Any statements that have been made that WH was in danger as a result of the appointment of Mr. Robert DiSanto, as Chief of the WH Fire Department, are absolutely false. Mr. DiSanto possessed the State required minimum qualifications to be Fire Chief. The main issue before us is his failure to be truthful on his application.

I share the responsibility that Mr. DiSanto's credentials were not fully vetted prior to his hiring. I feel Council is equally responsible since I, nor they alone, can hire a Department Head by Charter. Given what I witnessed in his work at Willoughby Hills, I did not foresee any issues, which I find regretful. I believed that receiving his credentials from the Cleveland Fire Department was a formality and may take a while to receive. Council had an obligation to ensure Mr. DiSanto was vetted, but never called or included any member of the Civil Service Commission into their Executive Session to ask questions. I think any reasonable individual would agree that I have done my job appropriately and there are certainly not grounds to ask me to resign, or call a vote of "no confidence" against me.

- **PAY INCREASES FOR PART-TIME POLICE, FIRE, POLICE CHIEF AND CITY HALL STAFF:**

Certain members of Council have accused me of not supporting our Safety Forces. That is totally untrue. I highly value each and every individual in our Police and Fire Departments that work so hard to protect and serve every person in our community. I also value our administrative staff at City Hall who work so hard for our residents.

Our Finance Director prepared, and Council approved, a balanced budget that provided for our Safety Forces and all City Hall administrative staff to receive a 2% pay increase effective 1/1/16. When I prepared the ordinance for the salary increase based on the approved budget, I proposed a 3% salary increase, knowing that it would not be retroactive and would not take effect until April, 2016. Council denied the ordinance, replacing it with their ordinance which provided for a 3% salary increase only for the Safety Forces, and nothing for the City Hall administrative staff. I vetoed their ordinance based on my belief that I wanted to treat all employees equally with the same respect. As Mayor, I was able to give employees within their pay range the 3% salary increase and I did. As Mayor, I was not able to apply the 3% salary increase to the Safety Forces and three City Hall administrative employees since they were already at the top of their pay ranges. I then presented to Council a proposal for a 3% pay increase for all Safety Forces and the remaining three City Hall administrative employees, but Council refused to pass this legislation, wanting only the Safety Forces to receive the increase. Since two of the three City Hall employees are the oldest full-time City Hall employees, I did not want to segregate them or have an age discrimination concern, particularly since there were no reasons documented that showed that these individuals were not as deserving as the others being considered. Certain members of Council refused to consider all individuals and accused me of not supporting our Safety Forces. This is not true. The result of Council's action prompted employees to seek unionization, which otherwise may have been averted. I want ALL individuals to be considered as they all serve our city. Discrimination as a political bias is not fair.

- **THE FIRE DEPARTMENT WASHER/EXTRACTOR PURCHASE:**

Councilman Plecnik witnessed a firefighter hosing down his fire gear, rather than using a washer. He made a motion at a Council meeting and accused me of not providing for the needs of the department. Chief Harmon had the money in his budget to purchase a washer, but felt it was unnecessary, given the fact that the gear is normally washed twice a year. Chief Harmon worked with the City Laundromat, a local small business in Willoughby Hills, that had new, high tech machines. The Laundromat owner seemed very anxious to help out by offering a system whereby they would launder the gear on a regular basis at a reasonable cost. Chief Harmon and I felt this would benefit the City and support the local economy.

A few days after our visit, I received a phone call from the owner. He had received an inquiry from the Council President, asking about guarantees and water temperatures and liability for untimely delivery. He informed me that he did not want to "get into the politics in Willoughby Hills" and he would prefer that we go elsewhere.

At that point, Chief Harmon said he would look into a commercial washer that could do the job. Shortly after, I was given a Purchase Order to Key Bank to sign for a washer, purchased at Lowe's.

When Chief DiSanto started, he did not agree with Chief Harmon's assessment of the washer and proceeded to purchase a washer/extractor from a different vendor for \$6,575. The washer purchased by Chief Harmon will be used for other station laundry, rather than turn out gear. When Council accuses me of "purchasing the washer" or "not giving our safety forces the equipment they need", it is truly ridiculous. I strongly support our Fire Department's needs and allow our Fire Department Chiefs to make the decision on the equipment that they require.

- **THE “BALANCED BUDGET”:**

When Council publicizes having the City’s first balanced budget, please know that this is truly the hard work of our Finance Director. He prepared it on my behalf. On March 10, 2016, Council adopted the “balanced budget”, knowing that the City had to find approximately \$350,000 in additional funding for the upcoming State Route 91 Resurfacing Project, which resulted in a budget deficit. Those are the facts.

Also, when the “Council Report” claimed that “spending has actually gone down for our safety forces”, it is incorrect. The actual amount of money spent for safety forces over the past nine years is as follows:

- 2008: \$4,967,436.05
- 2009: \$4,796,232.44
- 2010: \$4,852,302.37
- 2011: \$5,323,887.38
- 2012: \$5,676,161.45
- 2013: \$5,315,448.05
- 2014: \$5,138,264.67
- 2015: \$5,359,429.23
- 2016: \$5,733,600.00

Again, another example of how I support our Safety Forces.

The true facts are that in 2008, the City’s carryover, which is the City’s savings account was approximately \$20,000 and the City’s books were in such disarray that they could not be audited when I first came into office. From 2008 to 2015, because of strong financial management, the City increased its carryover from \$20,000 to approximately \$1.4m. Please do not simply listen to a politician who is looking for higher office, but rather review the Ohio State Auditor’s Reports.

I wanted to provide you the TRUTH so you have the WHOLE story. If you would like to discuss further or ask any questions regarding this communication or any other City concern, please contact me at 440-946-6614 to set up an appointment, or you can also email me at [mayor@willoughbyhills-oh.gov](mailto:mayor@willoughbyhills-oh.gov). Thank you again for the opportunity to serve as your Mayor.

## MAYOR WEGER ACCOMPLISHMENTS INFORMATION

### Established:

“Residents First” Program  
Citywide Trash & Recycle Program  
Recycle Magnets  
Reactivated Civil Service Commission  
Reactivated Records Commission  
Annual Shredding Day  
City Engineer’s Report on website  
WHISPER Program for Seniors

Internet Auction for Surplus Vehicles  
WH Art Gallery  
Prescription Recycle Bin  
Reactivated Charter Review Commission  
Updated Record Retention Policies  
Credit Card Machine for City Hall use  
Finance Director’s Report on website  
Route 91 Signal Synchronization

### Improved:

Clean audits 2008 – 2014  
City Hall phone system  
City Hall website  
Resurfacing many roads  
Painting City Hall and Fire Station  
Pump stations  
Maple Grove slope repair  
Contracted with new City Engineer  
Lamplight Drainage Improvements  
Police Dispatch Center

“State Auditor’s Award of Excellence”  
City Hall email  
City Newsletter  
Area C sewer implementation  
Dodd Road Bridge Improvements  
City Hall HVAC (\$94,000 NOPEC Grant)  
RITA Income Tax Enhancement  
Stopped Airport Expansion  
Eddy Road Sewer Line Construction

### Recreation & Education for Children and Families:

Established WH Day at Classic Park  
Established “Winter Fest”  
Established Color Run  
Maintained “Breakfast with Santa”  
Facilitated Eagle Scout Projects  
Welcomed W-E School of Innovation  
Welcomed “Fall Corn Fest”  
Established Cornerstone School Zone  
Welcomed Lake Metropark

Established “Official Garage Sale Day”  
Maintained Safety Town with increased enrollments  
Maintained “Touch A Truck”  
Established “Garfield Soccer Park”  
Maintained Pool Pass Subsidy at Willoughby Pool  
Maintained Halloween party and Easter party  
Welcomed W-E Library programs at WH Comm. Ctr.  
Planned Goodbye to Garfield Event  
Tribute to 9/11 First Responders

### Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts:

Supported Troop 562 activities

Provided Troop Headquarters at the Grange Building

### Grange Building:

Acquisition of the Grange Building  
Wrote grant to re-side the Grange

Wrote grant to pay for re-roofing the Grange (\$15,000)  
Supported Scout members in building upgrades

### Veterans:

Built Veteran’s Memorial Park & Gazebo

Maintained Veterans Bricks Program & Ceremonies

### Safety Forces:

Constructed a dedicated PD driveway  
Street light at Giant Eagle & WH Towers

Ratified Labor contracts through 2017  
Established Vehicle Inventory & Replacement Policy

### Service Department:

Ratified Labor contracts through 2017  
Maintained Brush Drop-off

Established Vehicle Inventory & Replacement Policy  
Maintained Leaf Pick Up

### Economic Development/New Business:

BMW/Lexus  
National College  
Dunkin Donuts  
Pub 91  
WH Senior Apartments (Clover)

Sun Plum Market  
Heritage Motorcycle  
Avalon Sr. Day Care  
Mary Rose Estates  
Dollar Tree  
O’Reilly’s Auto  
Brindaliers