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### Westfield Mayor Brindle's Opening Remarks from the September 3, 2019 Town Council Meeting

It's great to see everyone tonight, and I hope you all enjoyed these final days of summer.

#### CROSSING GUARDS/ PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

As we welcome all students back to school this week, now is a good time to re-emphasize safety on our roads. I want to thank Chief Battiloro for writing a very helpful Letter to the Editor last week that detailed what his department is doing to help promote pedestrian safety with the beginning of a new school year. One of those measures is an enhanced speed limit enforcement initiative throughout Town, which this Council fully supports, and is being announced with full transparency so that there are no surprises when the tickets start getting issued with more frequency.

In his letter – which you can find on our website – the Chief also addressed the new crossing guard program at length. Given some of the concerns raised at our last meeting, I want to just spend a few minutes on this.

As a reminder, Westfield has more than 50 crossing guard posts, which is a very robust program for a municipality of our size. Recruiting for and keeping these posts filled every day meant that, increasingly, police officers were serving as crossing guards

– significantly impacting our officers' ability to respond to actual emergencies, and also precluding them from conducting traffic and parking enforcement during those times of day when our streets are their busiest, which created significant public safety concerns.

As a result, the Town contracted on a one-year, trial basis with All City Management Services (ACMS) to oversee the management of the crossing guard program. ACMS successfully manages some 6,000 crossing guards in 25 states, and brings more than 30 years of experience to our program. This allows the Westfield Police Department to refocus its efforts on its key law enforcement priorities while also providing our crossing guards with the dedicated support and expertise to help them succeed.

We are grateful for the ongoing dedication of our crossing guards to keeping our children safe, and think of many of them as family. Please know that all those who wished to continue in the crossing guard program under ACMS remain assigned to their previous posts. All will receive pay raises, new equipment, more robust training, and additional benefits such as paid snow days.

What we should not expect is

for them to direct traffic, which is not part of their responsibilities, and it never has been, but many felt an obligation to do so in highly trafficked crossings. To ensure a smooth transition and assess potential need, Chief Battiloro has committed to having officers present in some of our busier intersections as the school year gets underway, and we ask the public for their patience and flexibility during this time.

#### CAR THEFTS

I'll cover one more item related to the police, and that's the issue of car burglaries and thefts we continue to see. In the vast majority of these instances in the past year, the cars have been unlocked, some with the keys inside. Please secure your cars! This problem is hitting nearby communities as well – it's not exclusive to Westfield. But as long as we continue to make our town an easy target, we cannot be surprised that this criminal activity continues. Our police are doing their part, but they cannot be on every street at all times; we all need to do our part as well to secure our property.

#### DOWNTOWN

Shifting gears, I want to talk about several significant announcements affecting our downtown. As you know, we were all

surprised by the sudden closing of our beloved Rialto Theater. No one was more surprised than the property owner when the tenant vacated the building without any advance notice. To reiterate, the property has not been sold, and was closed as the result of a legal dispute between New Vision and Rialto Properties. I have spent many hours speaking with both parties about the current state of their litigation and also about the near and long-term possibilities for the theater. I am encouraged by the property owner's concern and commitment to reimagining what is possible, similar to what he enabled with his other property, the Bellevue Theater in Montclair, which is going through a significant transformation before reopening as a movie/performance arts space.

I also want to thank the numerous residents who have reached out with constructive, innovative suggestions about what we can do to save this icon of our downtown and offering their support and assistance. I am keeping all of these contacts in a file, so that once we get more clarity regarding the litigation and potential next steps, we can immediately form a coordinated group effort to assess all of our options. I can promise you that all options are on the table, and

I will do whatever is in my authority to ensure that the Rialto will remain a staple of our downtown for generations to come.

We also learned that the Lord and Taylor brand was purchased by LeTote, a move that came as no surprise to me based upon my numerous conversations with executives from Lord and Taylor's parent company, Hudson's Bay Company, who continue to own the property. I believe that this is a very positive development, and an encouraging combination of old retail and the new economy. While the initial agreement is for two years, I am confident that Hudson's Bay will be a transformative investor in our town and remain committed to being long term partners and collaborators.

There has also been a leadership change at the DWC which Councilwoman Mackey will be addressing as the Council liaison to the DWC.

#### MASTER PLAN/PARKS PLAN

Thank you to everyone who provided input on our Master Plan Reexamination and our Strategic Parks Plans. I have said from the beginning that these plans will only be as good as the feedback we receive, and I'm thrilled by the significant thoughtful, candid input that so many residents provided.