

## Warwick Beacon June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006

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### *Privatizing crossing guards could save \$225,000*

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Private security agency NESCTC has a suggestion for Warwick – boot city crossing guards, use theirs and save roughly \$225,000 annually.

The company sent a letter to School Committee Chairman Robert Cushman last month asking the city to explore using agency guards as opposed to city employees. In response, Cushman was expected to urge the City Council at last night's budget hearing to support conducting a cost analysis.

"I think it makes sense to do that," Cushman said. "If there are significant, significant long-term savings, I think it's something we need to explore."

The letter, signed by Capt. Lori-Ann Madonna, points out the company has been providing guards for Cranston since the 2005 school year at a savings of \$500,000 annually and offers to conduct a free cost analysis for Warwick. Cushman said he understood that some might perceive an analysis done by a company seeking the job as bias but said it was worth it to prove to the taxpayers the School Committee is taking some actions to explore saving money.

Warwick has proposed spending \$190,000 in salaries for 23 crossing guards next year. In addition, the guards are slated to receive \$249,300 in fringe benefits such as health insurance, clothing allowances and pensions. All told, the city expects to spend \$439,300 on crossing guards during the 2007 fiscal year.

Maj. Wayne McNeil, head of direct services for NESCTC, said a very rough estimate shows the company could save Warwick a minimum of \$225,000 a year under a contract that would include all training, benefits, etc.

But Mayor Scott Avedisian urged restraint, saying Cushman made implications that may not be true in a press release issued to the media Monday. "I think in all honesty he should not have even used a figure in his press release because he certainly implies that he can save \$500,000 a year," Avedisian said, adding later, "This is typical because [Cushman] is very loose with the facts." Avedisian recommended the School Department take over the crossing guards program entirely, rather than reimburse the city as it does now. "Rather than administrating something for them, since Mr. Cushman thinks he can save money, we'd be more than happy to give him the whole thing," Avedisian said.

Superintendent Robert Shapiro said he had no problem conducting a cost analysis but didn't think it wise for the department to take over the program now, citing ongoing contract negotiations with teachers and approaching negotiations with Warwick Independent School Employees. "It's putting all of our resources to the test and right now," he said. Shapiro said he wasn't necessarily opposed to the idea but wanted it explored further.

"Hearing just a generalization of it I feel a little uncomfortable," he said. "Perhaps I can be encouraged to think another way when I see the cost issues." Shapiro could look to Cranston where Deputy Director of Administration Robin Muksian-Schutt said crossing guard costs fell from \$129 an hour to roughly \$16 an hour under a \$347,000 contract with NESCTC. She called the relationship with NESCTC "tremendous," saying the city meets quarterly with the company and other officials to review the program, which was started as a pilot both for the city and NESCTC. The Cranston program has 50 guards, 37 on duty and the remainder as reserves.