

# Westfield City Council adjourns due to non-compliance with mask mandate

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The majority of people who attended the Westfield City Council meeting on Jan. 6 did not comply with the city's mask mandate. (AMY PORTER / THE WESTFIELD NEWS)

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WESTFIELD — On Thursday, newly elected City Council President William Onyski convened the regular meeting at 7 p.m. Councilors stood up for the Pledge of Allegiance, approved the minutes, and then voted for a 10-minute recess on a motion from Ward 4 Councilor Michael Burns.

They never got to the rest of the agenda.

During the vote for the recess, in response to Councilor Dan Allie's point of order, Councilor Brent B. Bean II said he had some procedure questions he wanted to ask, indicating Onyski with his hand. The vote for a recess then passed 12 to 1, with Councilor Nicholas J. Morganelli Jr. voting no.

Onyski then made several phone calls. Before the meeting reconvened, Police Lt. Eric Hall addressed the dozens of people in the gallery, presumably there for public participation and most not wearing a mask. Hall told them that the Westfield Board of Health had implemented an indoor mask mandate. Signs on the entrances to City Hall indicated the requirement to wear a mask in the building.

“I don’t agree with it, but if you would like to be heard, you must follow the mandate put forth by the Board of Health,” Hall said.

After a few minutes, during which some but not all of the people in the gallery put on masks, Burns made a motion to adjourn. Onyski called for a roll call, and the vote passed 10-3, with councilors Allie and Dave Flaherty voting no, and Morganelli voting “absolutely not.” Neither Allie nor Morganelli were wearing a mask at the meeting, nor had they put one on following Hall’s request.

Afterward, Bean said the meeting was adjourned because attendees were not following the city’s mask mandate.

“It’s nothing about agreeing or disagreeing. It’s about the mandate. Until it is lifted, the council is abiding by the mandate,” Bean said.

While declining to make a formal statement, Mayor Michael McCabe told councilors, police officers and others outside the chamber doors that he could not supersede the Board of Health, and neither could the council.

“We can’t pick and choose the rules we follow,” McCabe said.

Among the items on the Jan. 6 agenda which were not addressed was the second reading and final passage of the \$61.2 million bond for the construction of a new elementary school building to replace the Franklin Avenue and Abner Gibbs elementary schools. The vote for the funding must be taken within a certain time frame, following the Massachusetts School Building Authority vote on Oct. 27 to approve up to \$30.5 million for the Westfield school building project.

In November, school liaison Ralph J. Figy said the MSBA vote started the clock ticking on Oct. 27 on a 120-day deadline for the city to approve the school bond, though in reality he said Westfield only had 100 days to pass the funding, to accommodate a required 20-day appeal period. The first vote passed the council unanimously on Dec. 16, 2021.

On Thursday, Superintendent Stefan Czapowski said he had spoken to School Committee Vice Chair Tim O’Connor after the council failed to take the final vote on the bond. He said he knew that Figy had spoken to Purchasing Director Tammy Tefft and was aware of the timeline to hold the vote, although Czapowski said he himself was not sure when the final vote had to be made.

When asked, Onyski said the council would figure it out and hold a special meeting if necessary, and that other items on the agenda were also time-sensitive.

[Story source: MassLive.com](https://www.masslive.com)