

Crossing guards may issue parking tickets

Revenue-raising duties part of agreement between city and municipal workers' union

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

Through an agreement with the municipal employees' union, school crossing guards will be asked to start writing parking tickets to help combat scofflaws.

Mayor Eldrige Hawkins announced at an Oct. 6 press conference that crossing guards would write parking summonses while the children are in school. The plan would become effective if the City Council passes a resolution designating them as parking agents and they are sworn into such positions by a municipal judge.

Hawkins said the guards' new duties are part of the city's effort to increase revenues and employee productivity. He added it would make more police officers available for patrol.

"In a terrible economy, a city must be creative and develop innovative ways to sur-

vive and fund its necessary programs," Hawkins said. "Our initiative is among the first of its kind in the nation. Other innovations we have made to save money and prevent layoffs are cross-training other employees to perform more than one job, negotiating money-saving changes in work rules, and redirecting federal grant money."

Hawkins said when they are not performing their typical duties, guards would issue tickets for parking in front of a fire hydrant, in spaces with expired meters, and for other non-moving violations.

The guards would stay in the vicinity of their crossing duties, Hawkins said. The added duties are part of givebacks negotiated with OMEBA, the municipal workers' union.

"Through the givebacks, Orange was able to save jobs and rehire several employees who had been laid off," Hawkins said.

"The safety, health and welfare of our children are of paramount importance. We are not trying to change the crossing guards into police officers. We will carefully monitor the arrangement to ensure that it is working as intended, and we will address any unanticipated problems."

Although there has been some surprise about the move, the local law enforcement leadership appears to have given the plan their blessing.

"The safety of children is our number one concern," said Police Director John Rappaport. "The parking enforcement duties will take place outside of the hours when crossing guards are protecting children."

Marvin Braker, the city attorney, said it was legally permissible for the crossing guards to take on the additional powers. He added that when the union and city reached an agreement, members knew the expansion

of the guards' duties was a part of it.

"There is no question that the duties of the particular employees is something that is permissible by law and certainly would pass legal muster," Braker said.

Raymond Wingfield, OMEBA's president, agreed. Wingfield said his members will do what they have to do, but it does not mean there are not future concerns.

"The biggest concern right now would be their safety. That's something that needs to be explored," Wingfield said. "Our first approach during the negotiations was to the economy and the second was personal safety."

"At the time we were involved in negotiations with the city, there was talk and plans about privatizing the crossing guards," Wingfield continued. "We looked at it from the standpoint of saving jobs and saving money. The administration said we could save \$100,000 by doing this."