Last year, city council voted to eliminate the safety director position, or at least they thought they did. The people of East Cleveland gathered enough signatures to stop the city council action for now. So, if the action is stopped, the salary cut doesn't take effect.

By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff Reporter

East Cleveland Mayor Gary Norton was busy Monday and Tuesday working as a crossing guard at the corner of Euclid and Superior Avenues. The reason for this new job was the concern for the children said Mayor Norton.

On March 31, East Cleveland City Council voted to eliminate school crossing guards. The city, which recently located $3.2 million, has enough money to pay for guards. Guards cost $31,000; however, council declined to appropriate the necessary funds.

Although the city has money available, payment cannot be made without council's approval. Both before and after the vote, Norton warned that it would force the immediate lay-off of all crossing guards, leaving school children to cross high-traffic streets like Euclid, Superior, Forest Hills, Hayden and Shaw without an escort. Following the explanation, council declined the request.

As a result, Mayor Norton decided to hit the streets to become a school crossing guard. "Politics is one thing, but putting children's lives in danger is inexcusable," Norton said. "I'm outraged. Thousands of kids cross these busy streets every day. If council refuses to protect our children, then I'll do it myself."

The result… Mayor Norton stood in a fluorescent vest with a handheld stop sign and helped school children cross the intersection of Euclid and Superior Avenues Monday and Tuesday afternoon.

Norton personally chose to cross children at this busy intersection due to the fact that this is where his daughters attend school. "My children attend this school. I'm just doing what any concerned parent would do, but I hope council restores crossing guards soon," said Norton.

East Cleveland has been plagued with problems recently. Earlier this year Auditor of State Dave Yost declared a state of fiscal caution for the City of East Cleveland. This designation provides the city with an early warning so it may address fiscal issues before they become more serious.

"Both the mayor and city council are seeking creative solutions to the city's fiscal challenges," Yost said. "New development, outsourcing and regional partnerships are all being utilized to help bring stability to this community. I encourage them to continue to pursue these types of opportunities."

Then it became apparent that Mayor Norton and council did not see eye to eye on the cameras in the city. On the crossing guard issue, council's vice president, Chantelle Lewis, explained to the Call & Post that Norton was not being honest.

Lewis emailed the Call & Post a copy of the budget, which shows $31,000 for crossing guards. Mayor Norton calls it a high-profile typo, saying council members deleted the money verbally during a meeting.

East Cleveland residents shared their concern with the tension between Mayor Norton and the city council. "I am here supporting the Mayor, something has to be done for the kids," said councilmember Mildred Brewer.

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City council said they also voted to cut 10 percent of the budget from most city departments. It is now up to the mayor to decide if those cuts will be made to personnel. "Nothing about East Cleveland is improved as a result of the decision that they made," said Mayor Norton. In 2012, $40,000 a year is not fair compensation for the chief executive officer of the city, who is the mayor. The only people who can rectify that problem are the voters.