Opponents speak out against sanctuary city plan in Mansfield

By COREY SIPE
Chronicle Staff Writer

MANSFIELD — It was cold outside but things were heating up inside Mansfield Town Council chambers as opponents, for the first time, spoke against a proposal to enact a sanctuary city policy.

If the town decided to adopt such a policy, it would be voted on by the council, and residents wanted to ensure their voices were heard during the “opportunity for public address the council” portion of Monday’s town council meeting in the Audrey P. Beek Municipal Building.

Eight people spoke against the policy proposal while only four spoke in favor of it. That is in stark contrast to the Nov. 28 council meeting where 22 people spoke in favor and nobody spoke against such an ordinance during the public comment period.

The term “sanctuary city” refers to a town that shelters undocumented immigrants by not voluntarily assisting federal immigration officials in identifying them.

Several towns in Connecticut, such as Hartford and New Haven, have enacted such a policy. During his campaign, President-elect Donald Trump threatened to deport these individuals.

“We are at a crossroads where we are considering allowing … as not allowing … demanding that our police officers no longer enforce a single law concerning immigration,” said Mansfield resident Ray Haddad, one of the policy’s opponents.

However, Mansfield Democratic Mayor Paul Shapiro explained later during the meeting “we have no direct control over law enforcement in our town,” since Mansfield does not have a municipal police department and is, instead, patrolled by Connecticut State Police through the resident state trooper program.

Mansfield resident Denna Staples, who said she has lived in town for 25 years, posed many unanswered questions to councilors regarding sanctuary city protections and how it might hurt the town.

“I think it’s opening a big can of worms,” Staples said, fearing the town would have to pay for undocumented immigrants to attend the University of Connecticut if federal funds were cut.

Later in the public session, Joseline Tlacomulco, a UConn sophomore political science major and an undocumented immigrant, spoke against the proposal.

“I urge you not to consider allowing … no not allowing … demanding that our police officers no longer enforce a single law concerning immigration,” said Mansfield resident Ray Haddad, one of the policy’s opponents.

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ABOVE: Ethan McCorkle, 4, holds up the creation he made with Plus-Plus blocks at the Margaret S. Wilson Child and Family Development Resource Center in Willimantic on Monday. Eastern's Center for Early Childhood Education named the blocks its TIMPANI toy of the year.

BELOW: Jaiden Perez, 4, Jasper Lloyd, 4, and Angel Ramos, 4, play with the blocks while head teacher Leisha Flynn looks on.
Award-winning toy has a Danish twist

By MICHELLE FIRESTONE
Chronicle Staff Writer

WILLIMANTIC — The Margaret S. Wilson Child and Family Development Resource Center at Eastern Connecticut State University was a busy place Monday.

Preschoolers were hard at work building various objects using Plus-Plus Midi, a construction toy that resembles a puzzle piece.

Plus-Plus Midi, which is made by Plus-Plus, a Danish company, scored highest in Eastern’s 2016 TIMPANI (Toys that Inspire Mindful Play and Nurture Imagination) study.

The winning toy was unveiled during a press conference Monday morning at the Center for Early Childhood Education, which is in the same building as the preschool.

Year after year, the toys that score highest in the TIMPANI toy study are simple ones.

“I think Timpani is a great asset for parents,” said lead preschool teacher Leisha Flynn, noting TIMPANI toys make great Christmas presents.

The TIMPANI toy study is designed to evaluate how children play with a variety of toys.

Research for the annual study began in 2009, but the first announcement wasn’t made until 2010.

Plus-Plus Midi are pieces that connect to each other and can be used to construct objects.

According to the website for Plus-Plus Midi, the toy is designed for ages 1-6.

A 50-piece set retails for $24.99, the website indicates.

Researchers said Plus-Plus Midi (Award-winning, Page 4)
Award-winning toy has a Danish twist

Plus-Plus Midi scored the highest overall, but also scored the highest in the ‘thinking and learning’ and ‘creativity and imagination’ subscales.

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scored high among boys and girls, as well as children from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Eastern early childhood education professor Jeffrey Trawick-Smith said children use their imagination, plan, collaborate with peers, experiment and test hypotheses, problem-solve, modify and destroy designs while playing, among other activities.

Teachers, faculty and student researchers chose 10 toys for the study.

In addition to Plus-Plus Midi, the following toys were evaluated: Aquadoodle Classic Mat; Boomophone XTS Whack Pack by Boomwhackers; Cargo Plane Balancer by P’kolino; Creative Peg Puzzle by Hape; Jumbo Slot Foam Building Shapes by Lakeshore Learning; Kinetic Sand by Waba Fun; Picnic Set by Oompa; Slice and Bake Cookie Set by Melissa and Doug; and Squigz by Fat Brain.

TIMPANI toys were placed into preschool classrooms at the Margaret S. Wilson Child and Family Development Resource Center.

Hidden cameras were used in the classrooms to videotape children playing with the toys.

Student researchers coded the footage according to the evaluation rubric, which includes four categories: thinking and learning, cooperation and social interaction, creativity and imagination, and verbalization.

According to a press release, Plus-Plus Midi scored the highest overall, but also scored the highest in the “thinking and learning” and “creativity and imagination” subscales.

Eastern President Elsa Nunez said the TIMPANI toy study has gotten international attention, noting people in Turkey e-mailed the university about the study last year.

“It is an opportunity for our students to actually do serious undergraduate research with faculty members,” she said during the press conference.

Julia DeLapp, director of the Center for Early Childhood Education at Eastern, said the center has received requests from college faculty across the country to use information about the study in courses.

“We are deeply committed to engaging students, and particularly undergraduate students, in our research,” she said.

Trawick-Smith, principal investigator on the study, and fellow early childhood education professor Phyllis Waite, said children learn “very unique skills” when they participate in high-quality play.

“Good toys really inspire curiosity,” he said.

Trawick-Smith said construction toys, like Plus-Plus Midi, do well on the TIMPANI evaluation rubric.

He said the skills developed in engineering schools, such as Columbia University’s graduate school of engineering, are similar to the skills children learn when they play with construction toys.

“Tools serve as kind of engineer-

ing tools for very young children,” Trawick-Smith said.

After the press conference, members of the media were invited to visit the preschool, where children were playing with Plus-Plus Midi and other toys.

“TIMPANI toys are really special,” said Karla Alamo, a university assistant who was working at the preschool.

She said Plus-Plus Midi allows children to use their imagination.

DeLapp said researchers speak to teachers about preliminary findings from the TIMPANI toy study to get their feedback about the children’s interaction with the toys.

“We really want to hear their perspective on it,” she said.

Previous TIMPANI toy winners are Wooden Vehicles and Signs by Melissa and Doug, 2010; Tinker Toys by Hasbro, 2011; Duplo Blocks by Lego, 2012; Magna-Tiles by Valtech! and My First Railway by Brio, 2013; Paint and Easel by Community Playthings and Hot Wheels cars by Mattel, 2014; and Wooden Cash Register by Hape, 2015.

Those who are interested in Plus-Plus Midi can order the toy online at www.plus-plus.us.