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County Commission questions Care Center location

By Mike Steely
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Former Knox County Commissioner Mike Brown sat up front during the commission's work session last week and listened to the many, many questions coming from the elected officials about the proposed Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center.

For eight years Brown spearheaded the commission's efforts to create such a center, then called "The Safety Center." Some

of the sitting commissioners' questions seemed to reflect the thinking of the neighbors who oppose the location of the center just off Western Avenue. Working with Sheriff J.J. Jones, mental and physical health officials, and volunteer citizens the effort passed a unanimous approval by the Metropolitan Planning Commission recently.

Today's commission meeting may decide the contract with Helen Ross McNabb Center to operate

the facility and lease a former church at 3343 Dewine Road, next to the center's northern location, for creation of a 32 bed facility.

After questioning McNabb Center Director Jerry Vagnier and Knox County Sheriff J. J. Jones the commission voted to pass the issue onto today's regular meeting without a recommendation but Brown didn't like the way the questions seemed to be going.

"Don't throw the baby out with bathwater," Brown said, taking the podium just as the commission was adjourning. He held their attention briefly.

"The basic elements of this are in place," he said, adding, "We know that Helen Ross McNabb is capable." Brown recalled the eight-year effort and added "Now is the time to do something or get off the pot."

The work session concentrated on the Urgent

Care Center proposal with Vice Chairman Randy Smith moving the "no recommendation" suggestion and Commissioner Brad Anders seconding the motion. Smith then said, "I fully support something to help people" and then added he is concerned about the location of the facility.

He asked Vagnier about the proposed number of beds and how the patients would be transported to and from there. Smith

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PHOTO BY MIKE STEELY.

Former Knox County Commissioner Mike Brown told the current commissioners to "get off the pot" and approve an agreement to create an Urgent Care Center for mentally ill people arrested on minor offenses.

KAT Upgrades Trolley Stops



PHOTO BY MIKE STEELY.

New transit shelters suddenly appeared on Main Street at the City-County Building last week, having been installed over the weekend. Dawn Distler, Transit Director, told The Focus that smaller shelters are available for other locations including on Summit Hill below Summit Towers. She said those would be installed when road work is completed there and other sites are being considered for additional shelters.

Celebrate SPRING

The first day of spring has passed, which means Dogwood Arts, a 60+ year-old East Tennessee tradition, is gearing up for its annual celebration with a number of exciting events and activities throughout the Spring season. New this year - Dogwood Arts events will expand beyond just the month of April!

Dogwood Arts will feature events for residents and visitors to experience from the large-scale sculpture exhibit Art in Public Places to the blooming beautiful open gardens and dogwood trails to live music and performances of the Rhythm N' Blooms Music Festival and so much more.

Starting this week, The Focus will be running its annual Knoxville in Bloom four-issue series, providing Dogwood Arts trail maps and event listings for the season.

State Supreme Court kicks off HELP4TNDAY



PHOTO BY MIKE STEELY.

Supreme Court Justice Sharon Lee spoke Tuesday about the state court's effort to partner with local legal organization to provide free legal services to people who can't afford an attorney.

By Mike Steely
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Tennessee Supreme Court justices fanned out across the state Tuesday to bring attention to free legal advice and education in the state. In Knoxville, Justice Sharon Lee, a Monroe County native, spoke at the University of Tennessee's College of Law about how the effort is partnering with local legal services.

Knoxville City Attorney Charles Swanson appeared for Mayor Madeline Rogero and presented a document declaring April 1st as "HELP4TNDAY." Swanson told the audience "the greatest security we have is the rule of law."

Justice Lee said the effort began in 2008 to encourage attorneys to provide free service to needy citizens dealing with civil legal needs such as foreclosure, evictions, etc. She said lawyers are encouraged to give at least 50 hours per week of free

advice and service.

"It is part of our profession to help those who cannot afford to hire an attorney," Lee said.

Several other East Tennessee attorneys spoke including Melanie Wilson, dean of the UT College of Law; Deborah Taylor Tate, administrative director of the Office of the Courts; Deb House, director of Development and Compliance of the Legal Aid of East Tennessee; Tony Seaton of the Tennessee Trial Lawyers Association; and Josh Hedrick, a pro bono attorney.

House said she has worked with Legal Aid of Tennessee her entire career.

"Not everyone can afford an attorney," she said, adding that advice and services from most attorneys can cost from \$150 to \$200 per hour. She said that in 2016 Legal Aid assisted 2,300 people in the 23-county region. She added that her

office cannot serve every person who needs legal aid and can only help about 20% of the needs.

Seaton said he helped form a Free Legal Clinic in Johnson City and, today, almost all of the 31 Judicial Districts have such an office.

Anyone wanting more information can find information on the internet at www.help4tn.org. Legal help provided includes healthcare, family law issues, landlord and tenant relations, and debt.

The HELP4TNDAY campaign is an effort by the Tennessee Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission, the Administrative Office of the Courts, Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services, the Tennessee Bar Association, and Legal Aid of East Tennessee.

Other Supreme Court justices made similar presentations Tuesday in Memphis, Jackson, Nashville and Chattanooga.



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