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Kids' Coupon Book Money to be Spent on Lavish Banquet?

By Focus Staff

Mike McMillan, East Knox County's member of the board of education, found an odd item on the last meeting agenda. Making a few inquiries, McMillan discovered the school system proposed to spend \$15,000 on a banquet to be held at the Knoxville Convention Center. The funding source appalled McMillan; it was to be drawn from the school system's share of coupon book sales.

Just about everybody in Knox County has seen small children trudging along

streets to sell the books or have been accosted by friends and neighbors selling coupon books for their kids. Two dollars of every coupon book comes back to the school system to do with as they please. Superintendent Bob Thomas evidently determined \$15,000 of that money will go to sponsor a banquet honoring teachers of the year at every school in the county. During the last workshop session of the board of education, McMillan sharply questioned Clifford Davis, the chief of staff for

Superintendent Thomas. The school system seems to be the only entity in town that has both a chief of staff and a chief operating officer, an innovation created by the former superintendent, Jim McIntyre.

Under questioning from McMillan, Davis admitted in the past the banquet was sponsored by a corporation. McMillan wondered why that was not the case any longer. Davis replied that the school system had been notified the corporate sponsor decided not to participate this

year. McMillan then asked how long Davis had known a new sponsor had been needed, to which Davis responded he couldn't remember. McMillan asked if it had been longer than 30 days? Davis responded it had likely been longer than thirty days, but still, his memory failed him. Unable to hide his dismay, McMillan denounced the notion of spending coupon money for a banquet, even if the dinner was to honor teachers. McMillan, who spent his entire adult life as an educator, said while he

certainly had no objection to honoring teachers, he thought it sent the wrong message to the public to expend money raised through the sale of coupon books for a banquet.

"Nobody appreciates the job done by good teachers more than I do," McMillan said, "but while this seems like a small amount of money, and considering the amount spent by the school system annually, it is. Yet I think it sends the wrong message to parents and the public."

McMillan wondered why



Mike McMillan

school officials did not more aggressively seek out a new corporate sponsor immediately upon being

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PHOTO BY MIKE STEELY

About 23 members of the Capt. Bill Robinson Chapter 1078 Vietnam Veterans Of America walked down Gay Street Friday to celebrate the service of U.S. military veterans in the city's annual Veterans Day Parade.

Knoxville Election Historic Women's Victory

By Mike Steely
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Who would have predicted a year ago that the new Knoxville City Council would see four women, two being minorities, elected? Tuesday's General Election set a record in the total number of people casting ballots during an off-year election.

Currently the only woman on the council is Brenda Palmer and the only African-American is Daniel Brown, who served as mayor briefly between Bill Haslam's election as governor and Madeline Rogar's election as mayor.

Counting those who voted Tuesday and in absentee and early votes, 11,735 people voted in a race the Election Commission was hoping to get at least 10,000 ballots cast. Tuesday's election permitted registered Knoxville voters in all districts to choose council members from five districts.

While some thought that Amelia Parker's write-in campaign might upset the momentum being built by Lauren Rider it did not. Parker got 2,015 write-in votes but Rider's District 4 campaign pulled in 5,289 votes to Harry Tindell's 3,405.

Gwen McKenzie pulled 57% of the vote to Jennifer Montgomery's 43%. The 6th District battle between McKenzie, an African-American activist and professional, and Montgomery, a realtor and president of the Parkridge Neighborhood Association, came to an end with Mayor Madeline Rogar endorsing McKenzie just days before the election.

Stephanie Welch, in South Knoxville's 1st District, received the highest percentage of any candidate, pulling in 73% of the vote, or 7,387 votes. Rebecca Parr got 2,686 votes in her challenge. Welch had been endorsed early on by outgoing Councilman Nick Pavlis.

Seema Singh Perez surprised many by defeating James Edward Corcoran in the 3rd District. She received 6,105 votes to Corcoran's 4,470.

In the 2nd District Andrew Roberto, who resigned from the Election Commission to seek the office, defeated Wayne Christensen with almost 60% of the vote. Roberto pulled 6,141 voters to Christensen's 4,250.

Short-term rental regulations passes first vote

By Mike Steely
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Two major changes for Knoxville passed on first reading Tuesday as the Knoxville City Council debated regulating short-term rentals and expanding the Historic Overlay in the Parkridge Neighborhood. The subjects saw some heated remarks from both sides as some council members and citizens spoke out.

The short-term rental (STR) debate centered on whether to accept the proposal offered by the planning commission or to make the rules more restrictive with amendments from Vice Mayor Duane Grieve. He suggested five amendments to the proposal: exclude R-1 and R-1E restricted neighborhoods from having short-term rentals, lowering the minimum "transients" in a home to 8 instead of 12, require the homeowner to remain on site during occupancy, limiting off street parking, requiring a STR owner to notify neighbors and post a sign.

All five amendments, one after one, were voted down in 7-2 votes with Grieve

and Councilman Nick Della Volpe voting for the changes.

As it now stands STRs would be allowed in all residential neighborhoods.

Mayor Madeline Rogar read a statement before the discussion saying that the proposal "may not make everyone happy." She went on to say she "fully supports" the issue and noted only a few complaints have been lodged against that type of temporary rental, noting that those complaints were about zoning violations.

She also said the proposal will make it easy to change or alter the rules.

Proponents told the council that STRs fill an income gap and the proposed rules were very generous to both sides. Opponents said the rules were a violation of zoning, pose an unnecessary risk and set a dangerous precedent.

Another STR owner asked them to include non-owner occupied rentals as an amendment. Grieve said that passing the ordinance is a "slippery slope."

Councilman George Wallace asked the

Law Department if the STR rules were part of the city's zoning and Attorney Christa Cuccaro said the city's power does not involve zoning and were part of its "police powers." She and Planning Commission Director Gerald Green told the council that short-term rentals were a right of a homeowner, just as long-term rentals are.

Grieve said the policy was "not enforceable" and Della Volpe asked, "What are we doing here?"

"You make it more difficult to be a cohesive neighborhood," Della Volpe said.

When Councilman Nick Pavlis suggested giving current non-owner occupied STRs a few months or a year to resolve their properties Della Volpe said, "That's crazy!"

Dealing with current non-owner occupied STRs may be back as an amendment in the final vote in two weeks.

The current proposal passed with only Grieve and Della Volpe opposing it.

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