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Commission may hire attorney in pension board case

By Mike Steely
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Knox County Commission Chairman Hugh Nystrom told The Focus Friday that he is introducing a discussion in Monday's Work Session Agenda to consider hiring an outside attorney to represent the

county in the pension board suit.

Judge John Weaver will hold a hearing November 28 to consider whether or not the county will pay attorney fees for the retirees mentioned in the lawsuit. The "settlement" approved by the pension

board and Mayor Glenn Jacobs indicates that the county will reimburse the retired deputies up to \$5,000 each for their cost of an attorney, not to exceed \$50,000 total.

The problem is that, currently, the law director has been cut from the case

and no one is in place to represent the county.

If Judge Weaver approves the "settlement" will the pension board continue adding unused vacation days to a retiring deputy's pension in violation of the 2007 referendum and the charter? Commissioner

Charles Busler has placed an item on the agenda to discuss these retirement calculations within the sheriff's department retirement plan.

There's a possibility that Judge Weaver could hand down an opinion that the proposed settlement is

in violation of the Knox County Charter, as the law director has contended. If so the pension board might need to file an appeal or come back with another "settlement" that would need to go through the mayor and commission again.

School board examines a variety of items

By Anne Primm

The November 7, 2018 school board meeting began on time with all nine representatives present. After the moment of silence and the pledge of allegiance, Chairwoman Terry Hill called the meeting to order and announced that several of the board members had attended the Tennessee School Board Association Conference in Nashville and that a summary of their observations will be presented at the December 5, 2018 school board meeting. Next, Chairwoman Hill asked for a motion to approve the evening's agenda. Third District representative Tony Norman made that motion and it was seconded by Vice Chair Susan Horn.

Superintendent Bob Thomas reported to the board and related that Janice Cook, principal of the Paul L Kelley Volunteer Academy, will receive an award from the Simon Youth Foundation. Thomas also proclaimed November 15, 2018 as Principal for a Day day where Knoxville leaders can act as principals for a day in local schools. This event will also be followed by lunch at the Sarah Simpson Center. The superintendent's last remarks were about Thanksgiving Holidays being November 21-23.

Seventh District representative Patti Bounds presented the next item on the agenda about active transportation and street connectivity. Dr. Jeremy Auerbach and Ellen Zavitsas aided in the presentation was to point out how improving street connectivity can increase student ability to walk to school. The benefits are many: cost savings for Knox County Schools, better health for

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HALLS MIDDLE HOLDS PURPLE-OUT



PHOTO BY KEN LAY

Halls Middle School principal Jessica Strickland and athletic director J.D. Overton present Richard Lee's family with a banner honoring the longtime coach and educator. The banner honoring Lee, who passed away in July due to complications from pancreatic cancer, will now hang in the school's gym.

Halls Middle School celebrates life of fallen coach and educator

By Ken Lay

Halls Middle School honored one of its own last week. The school paid tribute to longtime teacher and coach Richard Lee between games of a basketball double header against Whittle Springs.

Lee, who coached the Lady Demons basketball team the last few seasons, passed away in July after a valiant battle

with pancreatic cancer. He coached last season while undergoing chemotherapy. He maintained his enthusiasm for the game and his team despite his illness.

During a long career as a teacher and coach at Halls, Lee also coached volleyball, golf and track and field.

November is pancreatic cancer awareness month and the school had a purple out during the games against the

Warriors and Lady Warriors.

During a ceremony honoring Lee, Halls athletic director J.D. Overton announced that Halls Middle would donate all proceeds from the basketball games on Monday, November 5 to pancreatic cancer research.

Overton also noted that proceeds from every first November home game,

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Council remembers synagogue shooting victims

By Mike Steely
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The regular meeting of the Knoxville City Council paused for a moment Tuesday and heard from Chip Rayman, president of the Knoxville Jewish Alliance. Rayman spoke briefly prior to the council passing a resolution to express its condolences to

the members of Tree of Life Synagogue and to the City of Pittsburgh.

Rayman asked for 11 seconds of silence to honor the victims recently murdered by a bigot who invaded their house of worship and began firing.

"Knoxville is a welcoming and tolerant city," he said. He then asked the police

department to be more present at the Jewish Community Center and at the synagogues. He said the organization will feed police who stop by and asked for more police drive-bys and mentioned the five times Nazi symbols and hate speech have been left at the synagogues this year. He also asked for "active

shooter training" and suggested the city create a "compact against hate."

He also asked the media and billboard operators to display promotions against hate and mentioned the similar threats against black churches, mosques and the Unitarian Church.

In other news, city council voted to approve hiring

Volpert, Inc. to manage planning, design, bidding and construction of a new Public Safety complex. The \$1.44 million contract saw some questioning prior to unanimous approval with David Brace, Knoxville's chief operating officer and deputy to the mayor replying.

Brace said the firm will

handle all of the project, "from soup to nuts," which may or may not include the former St. Mary's Hospital just off North Broadway. The city is looking into purchasing and renovating that large complex to house the police and fire departments and likely even more

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