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Whitehead greets supporters at reception at Calhoun's on the River



Knox County Property Assessor John R. Whitehead kicked off his re-election campaign at a reception at Calhoun's on the River Wednesday night. Inset, pictured with Whitehead are Knox County Law Director Bud Armstrong (right) and David Buuck (left), who is looking to succeed term-limited Armstrong.

By Ken Lay

A number of supporters showed up at a fundraising reception for John R. Whitehead late Wednesday afternoon at Calhoun's on the River.

Whitehead, who is seeking a fourth term as Knox County Property Assessor, said that he was pleased with the turnout, which included Knox County Law Director Bud Armstrong, David Buuck, who is looking to replace the term-limited Armstrong, and Knox County Commissioner Richie Beeler, who is also seeking re-election.

"I'm really thrilled with the crowd," said Whitehead, who didn't make a speech, but worked the room greeting those who showed up to show their support as late-afternoon shifted to evening. "It's been a great night."

Whitehead has been with the Knox County Property Assessor's office for nearly five decades, serving as property assessor from 2000-2008 before being term-limited.

After eight years away from the office, he ran and won the post again in 2016 and he's seeking a possible final term as property assessor in 2020.

"Because of my age and everything, this is probably my last hoorah," said Whitehead, a military veteran who served in Vietnam.

"When I got out of the military, I went to work with the property assessor's office. I got out of the military in 1971 and I went to work for the property assessor's office in 1972.

"I first ran in 2000 and I ran in 2004. I couldn't run again in 2008 because I was term-limited. Then, I ran again 2016 and I'm running again in 2020."

Even when Whitehead wasn't serving in Knox County, he was no stranger to the office.

"When I wasn't in office, I worked for the citizens," he said. "I helped citizens appeal their property taxes, so I've been on both sides of this."

During his previous terms as property assessor, Whitehead has taken pride in the fact that he works directly with the citizens whenever he can. He also said that he has been transparent while serving the citizens of Knox County.

"When people have a question, I tell



them to call me," he said. "I don't think that there's a question about this office that I can't answer."

"And when people ask to speak to me, they get transferred directly to me and if I'm not there or don't answer, I make sure that I always call them back. Everything in our office is public record except personal property assessment listings."

Whitehead also noted that he's happy to have the support of county officials such as Armstrong.

"Bud and I are from the same part of the country," Whitehead said. "We're both from East Knox County and I hope to see some other county officials come here tonight."

Welch officially resigning from City Council

By Mike Steely
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First District Councilwoman Stephanie Welch will officially leave the council on February 16. She told other members during the City Council meeting last Tuesday.

Welch said she has submitted her resignation and plans to join Mayor Indya Kincannon's administration after completing Army Reserve duties in February. The mayor has called a special session on February 20 to consider a replacement. Applications will be accepted beginning Thursday, January 23.

Welch will be the city's new director of economic and community development.

Several First District residents have voiced a desire to replace Welch, including Rebecca Parr, Janice Tocher and David Hayes. Other applications are expected for the position.

The council will eventually hear from those who submit applications. The field will be narrowed by voting until one person gets a clear majority of the votes, or six of the eight council members. Council Attorney Rob Frost told The Focus that council members cannot recommend applicants and a

replacement must be chosen from those who submit a desire to hold the seat. Welch cannot vote on a replacement.

The person selected would fill out Welch's term of office and be eligible to run for re-election when that term ends in December, 2021, but may only serve one more term.

In other city staffing news, Mayor Kincannon announced that WATE's Kristin Farley will join the administration this week as the public information director and Eric Vreeland will remain as assistant director. Kincannon also said that Boyce Evans will fill in as interim finance director,

holding the seat of Jim York who retired, until a replacement is found.

She said that Bill Lyons, senior advisor and deputy mayor, will remain in the administration "for a few more months."

Kincannon thanked Alvin Reid, director of community relations, for her service and the council gave the lady a standing ovation. She's being replaced by Charles Lomax and the department is being renamed "Community Empowerment."

The city is taking applications for two additional top positions: chief financial officer and chief technical officer.

Mayor Jacobs pushes TVA Tower proposal on commissioners

By Mike Steely
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Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs brought out the big guns last week in his pitch to get the approval of the Knox County Commission for an easement agreement for the TVA East Tower. Jacobs called a special session and lined up people from various agencies and organizations to promote the idea.

"This is an opportunity to save thousands of dollars," Jacobs said. He called the agreement a "complicated proposal" and said he is providing as much information as possible.

Those speaking for the proposal included appraisers, realtors, title insurers, and spokespeople from the Knoxville Chamber, the Public Building Authority, the County Finance and Purchasing Departments, and the University of Tennessee. Each presentation was accompanied by a graphic presentation. The county mayor spoke twice after Commission Chairman Hugh Hysom reminded the other commissioners that there would be no vote during the meeting. Hysom told The Focus that he hoped most of the discussion and questions would be resolved during the called meeting and not during Tuesday's Work Session.

The takeaway from the meeting is that Jacobs intends to go ahead with the agreement pending commission approval, even if the board of education turns down relocating to the TVA East Tower. The sale of the Andrew Johnson Building, currently housing the school administration, has been postponed until February, following a decision this month by the school board and the commission.

That had been on the work-session agreement today.

Only six of the commission members commented or asked questions. Most of the questions came from Evelyn Gill, Randy Smith, John Schoonmaker, Larsen Jay, Justin Biggs and Charles Busler. Several of the questions were obviously in support of the deal and several were in opposition.

Questions from Gill and Busler centered around security at the TVA Towers, which would be supplied by TVA or a TVA-contracted company. Busler focused on the requirement to have a badge or the new special driver's license, the REAL ID, to enter the TVA Tower. He said it inhibited parents or others wanting to visit with the school administration from entering.

The response was that those visitors would be taken to special

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