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Tommy Smith selected for District 1 council seat

By Mike Steely
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It took almost six hours but Knoxville City Council selected a new council member for South Knoxville in a special meeting last Thursday.

Tommy Smith, the vice president of marketing strategy at Ackermann PR, was chosen from seven applicants to replace District 1's representative Stephanie Welch, who left council for a position with the city. The choice, after several votes, came down

to Smith and community activist David Hayes.

Both men appeared with a following and all the applicants spoke and answered a series of questions from the council. Also applying were Janice Tocher, Rebecca Parr, Anne Wallace, Ben Reams and Kenny Lee Bradley. All candidates were well informed and answered questions with reasonable remarks.

Smith is the former chief marketing officer of ORNL Credit Union. He and his wife, Jamie, have three children. She joined him on the

floor as he took the oath of office to become the new member of the council.

Smith said during the interview that he refers to the homeless as the "houseless" and proclaimed his support of the Urban Wilderness, Chapman Highway improvements, and the South Waterfront. He also said he has served on the city's Business Advisory Board and said he's interested in supporting more affordable housing.

The selection came down to Smith getting five votes

and Hayes getting three. The final vote gave Smith seven votes with Amelia Parker abstaining. Earlier the Hayes support came from Councilwomen Gwen McKenzie, Seema Singh and Parker.

Each applicant had three minutes to speak and two supporters of each spoke on their behalf. The council then questioned each applicant before going through a half-dozen votes to narrow the field to Smith and Hayes.



Tommy Smith speaks to the Knoxville City Council as he applies to replace District 1 Councilwoman Stephanie Welch. He and David Hayes were chosen as finalists and Smith edged out Hayes in a 5-3 vote then, in a final vote, got 7 of 8 votes. Photo by Mike Steely.



Emerald Youth Foundation CEO Steve Diggs, Director of East and South Knox Ministry Kaylin Chesney and Overcoming Believers Church Pastor Daryl Arnold celebrate the opening of the foundation's Calling and Career Center in East Knoxville.

Emerald Youth Foundation celebrates opening of East Knox Career Center

By Ken Lay

The weather may have been cold, damp and snowy late Thursday afternoon but that didn't stop the Emerald Youth Foundation from celebrating the opening of another facility.

The foundation invited high school students, parents and other community members from throughout Knoxville to celebrate the opening of a second career and calling center, which is located in East Knoxville.

It is the second such facility to be operated by Emerald Youth and it's located at Overcoming Believers Church at 211 Harriet Tubman St. This facility will serve students in East and South Knoxville. The foundation also operates a similar facility in Mechanicsville.

The center will be open from 3:30-7 p.m. on Mondays and Thursdays and from 3:30-6:30 on Tuesdays.

The East Knoxville facility is run in collaboration with Overcoming Believers Church and will provide a multitude of services to high school and college students according to Kaylin Chesney, the foundation's area director.

"We're excited to be there to serve the young people in the areas of East and

South Knoxville," Chesney said. "This center will serve students and scholars in high school on up to the second year in college.

"Students can drop in to get help with their homework."

The center is also partnered with Johnson University in East Knox County and will provide tutoring in math, science, Spanish and other subjects. Chesney said that the center is seeking volunteer teachers and tutors to assist the community.

"We have a student from Johnson University who comes in and helps with the tutoring," Chesney said. "We're looking for some teachers and other volunteers to come in and help us."

In addition to tutoring and homework support and assistance, the new center will provide financial aid workshops as well as ACT preparation.

"We have structured hours and we certainly invite students to come by and stay," Chesney said. "A student can come by if they need Wi-Fi, or if they just need to type a paper."

"We'll have financial aid workshops and ACT prep. We'll also have workshops on time management and we'll assist with college applications."

Chesney also noted the facility, which is modeled like a community college setting, will also have guest presentations from professionals, including engineers and those in the medical field.

Daryl Arnold, pastor of Overcoming Believers Church, is excited to be partnering with the Emerald Youth Foundation on this endeavor.

The foundation will have its own area in the church, which is adjacent to the Change Center, a recreation center.

"It's all about collaboration and we're happy to collaborate with Emerald Youth," Arnold said. "We went to the Lord and we told Him if He would give us the building that we would give it back to the community."

"It's next to our Change Center, a safe place for our kids to go to roller skate and play games," Arnold said. "We had originally intended to use the building as a workout facility and a dance studio. But we decided that it was better to serve our young people for education. We're happy to collaborate with Emerald because Emerald is creating a legacy."

As part as the grand opening, guests were treated to food and drinks as well as entertainment and games.

Will Knox County form its own planning commission?

By Mike Steely
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It is an idea that has floated around for several years. Some Knox County officials and developers are upset by Knoxville-Knoxville Planning and want out.

The recent action of Farragut to reject Mayor Glenn Jacobs' Growth Plan means that the mayor may have to reconvene the joint members—Knox County, Knoxville and Farragut—to rework the area-wide plan. Jacobs' proposed plan increases density and opens all of the county's open land to subdivisions.

Farragut is upset with losing the adjoining green spaces to development and believe it will add to the traffic in the town. The rejection, which requires approval of all the parties, stopped the plan for the moment.

The rejection by Farragut was mentioned by Commissioner Brad Anders Tuesday night as he suggested the commission take steps to withdraw from the planning commission and form its own organization.

He said the county needs to "keep other government influence" out of county plans.

"We're being forced by an old statute. We're compressed and it's bad planning," Anders said.

"We could have good cluster development. Sometimes we have to think of ourselves," he added.

Commissioner Evelyn Gill said she represents a district that is mostly in the city and it shouldn't be excluded in county-wide plans.

Randy Smith agreed with fellow Commissioner Anders.

"There is a time when we take control of our own destiny," he said, adding that if nothing is done now, "We're headed for another 30 years of sprawl."

Commissioner John Schoonmaker chimed in saying that the Knox County funding of the planning commission runs

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