



The Knoxville Focus

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March 2, 2020

Pension Board attorneys prepare for Sessions Court date

By Mike Steely
Senior Writer
steelym@knoxfocus.com

The Knox County Retirement and Pension Board met Monday in Room 640 in the City-County Building for its regular session and approved several retirement plans including one sheriff's department employee on the Uniformed Officers Pension Plan.

That controversial plan, which allows department

employees to include vacation days in their total earned income and have it included in the calculation of their monthly retirement income, spurred a 2017 lawsuit filed by the Knox County Law Director.

A group of citizens is now suing the Knox County Mayor and Commission, charging their action to dismiss the 2017 suit violates the Knox County Charter.

Pension Board Attorney John Owings, following a closed session of the board, obtained permission by the committee members to apply to enter the case on their behalf. Judge John Weaver permitted Owings to enter the suit. Mayor Glenn Jacobs hired attorney John Valliant to represent the county and Owings and Valliant have filed motions to dismiss the

case. The upcoming March 17 hearing on both motions to "dismiss" the class action suit, could end the law suit or continue it on to a final ruling.

The citizens' suit asks that the actions of the mayor and commission be declared null and void.

In their last meeting prior to the March 17th Session Court hearing the Pension

Board heard Owings' partner, Stephanie Coleman, make a very brief statement on the matter.

"Right now we can't wait to get the chance to argue our case in front of the chancellor," she said.

In other pension board news from last week, Executive Director Jennifer Schroeder reported that a program to allow UOPP retirees to return to work

as court bailiffs or school security guards expires in June. She said she met with Sheriff Tom Spangler and he wants that program to continue. Retirees could take the second jobs without losing retirement benefits, be paid and receive benefits, but nothing would be added to their UOPP retirement benefits.

Schroeder said that

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Members of the Knoxville Songwriters Association helped launch Tennessee Songwriters Week with a performance at the state's Welcome Center on 1-75 in Jellico. Seated are Laurie and David Easterling. Standing, from left, are Gene Blair, Mitch Townley, Edna Riddick, David Lauver and Tim Doyle.

TVA Tower move, Andrew Johnson sale pass without comment

By Mike Steely
Senior Writer
steelym@knoxfocus.com

The fight is apparently over between opponents of selling the Andrew Johnson Building and moving the school administration offices to the TVA Towers.

Both items were on the Knox County Commission's "consent" list, a long list of items that the commission votes on with one collective vote. Both items ended up there after the work session the week before, also without as much as a comment from commissioners in Monday's Regular Commission meeting.

The school board's split vote on the move prompted the commission to approve their resolution "regarding the relocation of the administrative offices from the Andrew Johnson Building to the TVA East Tower."

The \$6 million sale to BHA Associates LLC was also passed without comment "subject to contingencies and further subject to provisions."

The county still waits for an opinion from the Tennessee Attorney General or resolutions from the state House and Senate before being finalized. The question before the attorney general is "Can a county office be located in a federal building?"

Knoxville Songwriters Help Launch Tennessee Songwriters Week

Members of the Knoxville Songwriters Association helped launch Tennessee Songwriters Week by giving a musical welcome to state visitors at the Welcome Center on 1-75 in Jellico.

Tennessee Songwriters Week was presented Feb. 23-29 by Tennessee's Department of Tourist Development. The 1-75 Welcome Center concert was organized

by the Knoxville Songwriters Association, East Tennessee's largest regional songwriting organization.

Performers at the Welcome Center included KSA President Edna Riddick, Gene Blair, Tim Doyle, David and Laurie Easterling, David Lauver and Mitch Townley. Doyle, a security officer at the center, helped arrange the concert. Manager Ryne

Cummins invited the group back to perform during Tourism Week in May.

During Tennessee Songwriters week, selected writers from nearly 40 qualifying rounds performed at the south waterfront and Suttiree Landing Park and would have 230 multi-family units, 10 buildings, and block the view of the river for home owners behind the development.

Bluebird Cafe in March.

KSA usually meets each Tuesday at the Fountain City Library, 5300 Stanton Road in Knoxville. Visitors are welcome to join in the group's 5 p.m. jam session and 6 p.m. program and song critiques. The group will not meet March 3 because the meeting room will be used in the election.

Two appeals of zoning: South Knox Waterfront, Planned Parenthood

By Mike Steely
Senior Writer
steelym@knoxfocus.com

New City Councilman Tommy Smith said "Here" for the first time Tuesday as he took his seat to represent District 1 on the Knoxville City Council. Smith was chosen by the council recently to replace Stephanie Welch who resigned to take a position with Mayor Indya Kincannon's administration.

Welch was present for

the meeting as chief of economic and community development and deputy to the mayor. Both Smith and Welch took an active part in the matters before the council Tuesday.

The South Waterfront Development

Smith moved right into the fray during his first council meeting when an issue came up within his

own district.

When Jennifer Arthur's appeal of a Board of Zoning Appeals decision came up Smith said the 931 Langford Avenue property has "years of history" and needs more community input before being considered. Councilwoman Gwen McKenzie moved to postpone a decision for two weeks. Smith requested that both sides speak prior to postponing the consideration.

The developer is seeking a variance on the setback requirements. The proposed development, South Haven, is only a block from the south waterfront and Suttiree Landing Park and would have 230 multi-family units, 10 buildings, and block the view of the river for home owners behind the development.

Sean Chalmers, director of development for the Dominion Group, told the council the meetings were

held with the Old Sevier Neighborhood and the curve of Waterfront Drive plays into the design of the facility. He said the developer wants to give the community more green space and noted that the variances were approved by the Board of Zoning Appeals.

He did say that objections include the increased traffic and the height of the buildings.

Attorney Wayne Kline represented Arthur and

the Old Sevier Neighborhood and told the council the opponents have a petition against the granting of the variances signed by more than 600 people. He said that Dominion Group has shown no hardship and mentioned the size of the 10 buildings and two commercial spaces.

Residents opposed to the variances appeared en masse wearing green scarves. Kline said the only

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