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Neighborhood Conference canceled but nominees listed

By Mike Steely
Senior Writer
steelym@knoxfocus.com

The annual Neighborhood Conference has been cancelled because of concerns over the spread of the COVID-19. The always well-attended

event, scheduled for March 28, may or may not be rescheduled for later this year.

Debbie Sharp, Neighborhood Coordinator, shared information about the various nominees who would have been

honored during the event.

The outstanding neighborhoods include Forest Heights Neighborhood Association, Historic Sutherland Heights Neighborhood, Oakwood-Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association, South

Woodlawn Neighborhood Association and Wesley Heights/West Hills Community Association.

The winner of the Diana Conn Good Neighbor of the Year Award would have been named. Selection of that

person and the nominees is based on service to their community.

Sharp told The Focus the nominees include Anne Crais of Wesley Heights, Kevin Jeske-Polyak of Southside Waterfront Neighborhood

Association, Jeff Johnson of Historic Fourth and Gill and Beateeta Prater of the Lee Williams Tenants' Association.

The Office of Neighborhoods huddled Friday to look at possibly rescheduling the event.



State Representative Jason Zachary takes a question from a concerned citizen at last Thursday's Citizen Forum at the Farragut Town Hall.

Farragut and the 5G cell giants

The latest in the saga

By Bill Howard

The drama swirling around Farragut's decision to allow the infrastructure necessary for 5G cellular service was once again on display, this time Thursday night, Mar. 12 at the Town Hall. Republican State Rep. Jason Zachary, who represents Farragut in the 14th district, reported the latest update to the crowd.

Zachary started by briefly summarizing events from the last two months, when the issue first arose. AT&T and Verizon planned to install hundreds, maybe thousands, of towers around the Farragut community to enable 5G cellular service.

The image of those towers defiling the landscape brought about an uproar of opposition.

Zachary then reminded the crowd that the wireless companies, because of both a 2018 state law and an FCC ruling, could not be prohibited from building wireless capabilities.

"We had no idea what 5G would look like, and the fact that they would have to put these blasted 25-foot cell towers in our neighborhoods to cover nine, ten, fifteen homes," said Zachary. "So we passed the legislation and in August of that year the FCC issues a rule which says

you cannot prohibit the wireless companies at all. It really put us in a tough position in terms of communities for how we were able to respond to this. So all we can do is try to put them in a box and just try to pump the brakes as much as we can."

"Pumping the brakes" meant imposing various limits on the tech giants, limits on things like height of the poles, distance between them, and how many could be installed. To achieve this, Zachary, Farragut town Administrator David Simoak and others drafted HB 2150, to try to alter the original legislation that was favorable to

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Old Sevier Neighbors Win at City Council Meeting

By Mike Steely
Senior Writer
steelym@knoxfocus.com

Loud applause and shouts of joy erupted Tuesday evening from the Old Sevier Neighborhood citizens attending the Knoxville City Council meeting. The impromptu celebration took place after the city council members approved an appeal of the variances granted to a proposed large development there.

Jennifer Arthur filed the appeal of the Board of Zoning Appeals decision to grant four variances for a huge apartment and retail complex proposed for 931 Langford Avenue. The site would face Suttrees Landing Park and the Tennessee River and, in effect, block the view of many houses and businesses along Old Sevier Avenue. Attorney Wayne Kline represented the residents along the route.

Kline mentioned that 640 residents signed a petition against the development and said that the proposal violates the "SW2" zoning there. He said there's no hardship other than the design of the complex the developers want to put there.

Peter Hall of Dominion Development said the proposal meets the code for the area except for the variances, which included setback from the street. He said the variances are needed because of the curvature of Waterfront Drive which fronts the development.

Vice Mayor Gwen McKelzie asked Hall what would happen if the citizen appeal is approved. Hall said if the variances

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West Valley Orchestra, 5G Concerns Heard at BOE Session

By Amy Box Feilhoelter

The March 11 regular session of the BOE was business as usual until the music made by middle school students filled the ears and hearts of those who were seated in the main assembly room.

The West Valley Middle School orchestra, led by Fine Arts Teacher Dan Thompson, showed its talent beautifully by performing three songs for the board members, superintendent, and attendees. "America the Beautiful," "Stand by Me," and the

"Tennessee Waltz" were presented by 45 of the 200 students in the program.

The songs came after Board Chair Susan Horn recognized the University of Tennessee pre-K interns, reminded community members of the FCS budget meeting on March 12, and announced a BOE policy review meeting on April 29 at 2 p.m. She informed the public that BOE members will be attending a National School Board Association (NSBA) annual conference and exposition in Chicago scheduled for April 3-6.

Seven of the nine board members present approved one change to the agenda. As labeled item 6C7, the change approved the lodging agreement for the Hardin Valley Academy Robotics Team to attend the robotics national competition in Houston, Texas. Besides regular agenda items, all other items, contracts, board policies, and grants were approved with minimal discussion.

Public forum brought two intense speakers regarding the use of placing 5G cellular poles

on the public five-foot right-of-way properties adjacent to Farragut primary, middle, and high schools.

Laura Squires, a Knox County resident, stated, "I am here because Verizon Wireless has applied to place cellular antennas around school systems... I am coming to you to make you aware of it, and to ask for your actions on it." She talked to ten homeowners in her neighborhood, and nine of them want "No 5G" signs to place in their front yards. Her concerns come from a lack of

baseline EMF (electric and magnetic fields) data because a 5G study assessment hasn't been performed yet, therefore leaving possible biological effects to Americans unknown. She would like to see this study done before the poles are deployed.

"Once the first pole comes, then different companies will come and use the same pole," she explained. "My main concern is across from Farragut Primary School. It is only 200 paces from where a pole is placed to the

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