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Sheriff implores commission to grant bonus to employees

Proposed \$1,500 bonus would come from excess budget funds

By Mike Steely
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Knox County Sheriff Tom Spangler made an impassioned plea to the Knox

County Commission last week to permit him to use part of a \$3 million surplus in his budget to reward department employees with a bonus.

Speaking during a public hearing on the proposed county budget, Spangler requested using about \$1.6 million of the leftover salary funds to give sheriff department employees about \$1,500 each. The sheriff said the bonus would not go to

administrative personnel. Chris Caldwell, county finance director, said the \$3 million "doesn't mean that money is there to spend." He told the commissioners the left-over money should return to the county fund balance.

"Let's get to the end of the year and see where we are," Caldwell said. Although the new fiscal year begins July 1st, the actual year-end balance may not be known until September when the state reports back.

"Now is not the time to do that," Caldwell said, adding that the county has furloughed 370 employees and is now being asked to give a bonus to sheriff employees. He said he is not opposed to the sheriff's effort but wants to wait "to the end to see where we are."

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City revises police department's use-of-force, code of conduct policies

Friday, Mayor Indya Kincannon announced updates to the Knoxville Police Department's Use of Force Policy to make it consistent with the 8 Can't Wait campaign. The campaign outlines eight specific use-of-force policies to reduce police violence.

Mayor Kincannon said, "This review is just one step in my commitment to take a comprehensive look at public safety in Knoxville. This is not a one-way conversation. Our efforts must be intentional and include meaningful community input."

"KPD is a well-trained, professional and accredited police department that was already practicing the majority of the recommendations of the 8 Can't Wait campaign. There were, however, areas where improvements were needed in the Use of Force policy and in the Code of Conduct."

Police Chief Eve Thomas says the new policies have now been distributed to every officer and agrees this is another step in the right direction. "I am proud of the work and attention that our Use of Force Committee devoted to this review," she said.

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Safe Summer Fun



PHOTO BY BESSIE OF SHARONVILLE CENTER

Ijams has a variety of programs and activities including dip-netting in ponds, hiking the trails and discovering natural treasures.

New Ijams Nature Center programs offer fun for all ages

Join Ijams Nature Center for safe summer fun! The nature center is offering new programs, from rock scrambling and creek walks for families, to bird watching for beginners, introduction to bouldering and art programs for all ages.

"We may not be able to gather in large groups, but we

can still come together in ways that allow us to learn and enjoy the outdoors," Ijams Executive Director Amber Parker said.

"These programs are perfect for families who can explore together as a unit, or adults and older teens who are able to observe distancing guidelines and other practices to limit their

exposure." Space for all programs is limited to ensure physical distancing and Ijams is following safety and sanitization protocols.

In addition to scheduled programs, jama naturalsists will rove the grounds on Saturdays.

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Size of Knox Commission before Charter Review Committee

By Mike Steely
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Should future Knox County Commissions be expanded to eleven districts and the at-large positions be eliminated?

That was one of the questions about the future of Knox County government that the Charter Review Committee discussed Thursday afternoon. The members also asked if the two at-large commissioners should be added to future charter reviews.

Any decision by the review committee will go before voters, possibly on the August ballot.

Knox County Law Director Bud Armstrong said, under the current charter, at-large members are banned from serving but it may be possible for them to be named as citizen members by the other county commissioners or by the mayor.

Several possible combinations of the makeup of the future Knox County Commission were passed to the law director who will report back this week with language and options.

Suggestions ranged from keeping the current makeup of nine district commissioners and two at-large members, cutting back to nine members, increasing to eleven or eleven with two being at-large, or even increasing to nineteen members.

Whatever change is adopted for the ballot, the upcoming census will cause the districts to be redrawn to apportion each equally by population. The review commission also discussed having commission districts and school districts be the same. Law Director Armstrong said the school board is limited by law to no more than 11 members.

The charter review group meets this Tuesday to hear recommendations from the law director and continue to take other suggestions on changes to the county charter.

Work session questions new northwest school



PHOTO BY MIKE STEELY FOR CFN

Laura Squires of Farragut said her town cannot fight against 5G Cell Towers on public right-of-way alone and begged the Knox County Commission to join in an effort to stop them.

By Mike Steely
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The purchase of three rural lots in Hardin Valley was approved for \$2.3 million last week in a Knox County Commission Work Session for the future site of a new northwest elementary school. The purchase agreement, with Lillian J. Redmon, did not happen without questions: the first dealing with Coward Mill Road there and the other dealing with the risk of starting a costly new project in the midst of the pandemic.

The matter is on the school system's requests and will be on today's commission agenda for the required final approval.

Commissioner Larsen Jay said the purchase "magically appeared"

and asked why now, with so many other needed projects in the county. Jim Snowden, Chief Engineer, said the state will pick up half of the cost of widening Coward Mill Road, about \$2 million of the estimated \$4.5 million, and the work should be completed in about two years as the school opens.

Commissioner Evelyn Gill asked why the school system is looking to expand capacity.

Russ Oaks, the school system's chief operating officer, responded that the county has no intent to give up standard classrooms, adding, "Children need that experience."

The road work includes widening Coward Mill from Mississippi Parkway, adding a turning lane, and extending the project to Chuck Jones Drive. A resolution for the

road work was passed onto today's meeting with no recommendation for the contract with Cannon and Cannon, Inc.

In other business the commission heard from several Farragut residents who pleaded with the county to join their city in objecting to the planned 5G cell towers.

"I and my neighbors are being impacted and the town of Farragut cannot fight this alone," Laura Squires told the commissioners. She urged the county to have a joint meeting with local state legislators.

"This is urgent," she said, adding, "It's coming to your neighborhood."

Farragut resident, Maria Stain-Wood said the 5G towers cause health problems and another resident spoke of harm from electromagnetic.

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