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Has Burlington been forgotten?

By Mike Steely
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The residents of Burlington are wondering if the City of Knoxville has abandoned them.

Funds were granted back two years ago for business facade renovations and the city offered a tax credit for rehabilitation of structures. But since then, the 2.19-square mile community with more than 6,000 residents, has been waiting for help.

Sixty-five percent of the people in Burlington are African American, 25% are White and 4.5% are

Hispanic. The area was annexed into the city in 1917.

The lapse in attention was brought up at a recent city council meeting. When Councilwoman Amelia Parker said the nearby Magnolia Streetscape Project resulted in discord and anger in the Burlington community, Vice Mayor Gwen McKenzie replied the efforts there "have been spaced out too far."

"It's been two years since we had community input and we need to get that again," she said. Councilwoman Parker

bemoaned the lack of funds in the new budget for Burlington.

Vice Mayor Gwen McKenzie said there are \$587,000 community funds left over from the current budget for Burlington and the city is adding more bring it to about \$612,000.

In 2018 the Burlington Residents Association and the East Tennessee Design Center held public meetings and came up with ideas for the area. Among those was the rehabilitation of

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Burlington's footprint in east Knoxville as shown two years ago by the East Tennessee Design Center's proposal to the neighborhood. The "oval" in the picture is Speedway Circle, designed by Cal Johnson as a horseshoe track many years ago and now lined with houses.

Elters vs. Knox County hearing set for July 16

By Mike Steely
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The COVID-19 pandemic saw the closure of courts in Tennessee. Some courts have returned with limited seating recently and the Elters vs. Knox County lawsuit, which has been in limbo for several months, finally appears on the Chancery Court Docket.

During the Knox County Pension Board meeting Tuesday the board's attorney, John Owings, said that July 16 at 9:30 a.m. is the new date and time. The hearing is to rule on a motion to dismiss filed by Knox County and the Pension Board regarding a class action lawsuit against the county filed by thirteen citizens.

The lawsuit charges that actions taken by Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs and the Knox County Board of Commissioners were illegal when they pulled the Knox County Law Department out of its suit against the pension board.

Since the law director's office was pulled out of the case the mayor hired an outside attorney, John P. Vallant, to represent the county. Owings, following a closed-door meeting with the pension board, asked for and received permission to intervene on behalf of the board. Chancery Court Judge John Weaver permitted Owings to take part.

While a hearing date on dismissal and a reply from the citizen group attorney, Tom McFarland, had been set, delays and the COVID-19 Phase One statewide mandate had further delayed the hearing.

Family Fights Frustration: caring for a loved one from afar during pandemic

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He's finally back home and recovering but the difficulties and worries that his family faced while he was in the hospital during the pandemic is a heart-wrenching story that must be told.

The 85-year-old West Knoxville man lay in Parkwest Medical Center several weeks ago, awaiting surgery for his broken hip. Mostly deaf and confused, Franklin Davis Wills was alone and could have no visitors because of hospital policy due to the coronavirus pandemic.

One of his daughters, Missy Shorter, was panicked and concerned about her 77-year-old mother wanting to be with Wills during the ordeal. Missy and her husband, Mike, began a frustrating effort to see her father.

"We've been trying to get in to see him," she told The Focus. With the help and advice of Knox County Commissioner Charles Busler she was reaching out to anyone who could

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Missy Shorter visits with her father, Franklin Davis Wills, following weeks when no family member could see him in the hospital during the COVID-19 shut down. Finally home, the 85-year-old man is back with family and doing better. Photo courtesy of Mike Shorter.

KCS 2021 budget reluctantly passed

By Amy Box Fellhoelter

The overall mood of last Wednesday's Knox County Board of Education special called budget meeting can be summed up with two sentences spoken by Superintendent Bob Thomas: "The outlook is grim. We are facing a \$20 million projected revenue shortfall and we are balancing a budget with less revenue than the current year."

He added the last time the school budget reflected these two

factors was in FY1992. Due to the economic downdraft of the COVID-19 pandemic, a reduction of \$2,806,000 from the current 2020 budget was reflected in the FY21 proposal.

Eight of the nine members were present for the two and one half hour meeting which was held on the first floor of the Andrew Johnson Building. Tony Norman was unable to attend or join the discussion due to technical difficulties.

The superintendent admitted to frustrating times but encouraged members stating, "We will be prepared upon school opening, provided we have a normal opening. Even if we don't have a normal opening, we will be prepared for that as well. We will be ready."

Thomas emphasized his disappointment with the budget's inability to fund an across-the-board salary increase, ELA textbook adoption, the enhancement

of RTI services, and additional mental health services. Thomas stated that every effort was made to not make cuts to the classroom. Although \$700,000 was cut from the salaries of some KCS employees, step increases were left in the budget for certified and classified personnel. The construction projects of Adrian Burnett, Lonsdale and Northwest elementary schools

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