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9/11 Victims Remembered



Photos by Mike Steely

By Mike Steely
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Knoxville Police Chaplain Pam Neal kicked off Knoxville and Knox County's 9/11 Memorial Ceremonies Friday with a talk and a prayer. A crowd of about 100 assembled in front of the City-County Building for the event which started at 8:45 a.m., remembering when the first airplane hit the World Trade Center Towers.

Ragpicker Chris Riedl took part in the downtown 9/11 ceremonies and his music highlighted the event that featured speakers and a laying of a wreath at the 9/11 Memorial at the City County Building by Knoxville Mayor Indya Kincannon and Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs.

The 9/11 Memorial Ceremonies drew dozens of Knox County Deputies, City Police Officers, Firemen and various city, county and state officials. One officer arrived by his private bicycle to honor those killed in the attack.

Parents urge KCS to keep in-person learning in place

By Ken Lay

The Knox County Schools Board of Education meeting went rather smoothly Wednesday night until the public forum segment.

The board approved all items on the agenda. It did so unanimously with little discussion.

Then, when public forum began, three area parents, Annika Jenkins, Debra Howard and Amber Burns, urged the board to keep the school system's current in-person teaching intact in these unprecedented and uncertain times of the COVID-19 pandemic, while protestors outside the meeting were urging the district to close its schools in favor of a complete virtual learning model.

The demonstrators were from Community and Teachers for Safe Schools, and that group held a motorcade protest outside the Andrew Johnson building during the KCS board meeting.

Jenkins, a parent from Farragut, said she had a child in kindergarten at Farragut Primary School and another in seventh grade at Farragut Middle School.

"I urge you to keep schools open and in-person," Jenkins said. "I know that a lot of these decisions are being driven by the (Knox County) Board of Health, and I hope the board (of education) is pushing back against them, and pushing back to see why they're making the decisions they're making."

"I've watched the numbers and the numbers don't justify (the schools) being closed."

Jenkins also noted that her son in the seventh grade is friends with a high school freshman at Farragut, who chose to utilize the virtual model.

"One of my son's friends is a ninth grader and he chose virtual," Jenkins said. "He is very lonely and he has three virtual classes a week and that's it."

"He's feeling pressure because he feels like the

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Dr. Buchanan can vote on BOH

By Mike Steely
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When the Knox County Board of Health began adopting its own rules of procedure last week there was one additional, and new, vote on the matter.

While Dr. Martha Buchanan, executive director of the health department, attends each board meeting, gives updates on the county benchmarks and takes part in discussions, she has not until now voted as a member. She, Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs and School Superintendent Bob Thomas are members of the board as a result of their public positions. Thomas hasn't been attending the meeting and KCS Health Services Supervisor Lisa Wagner has been sitting in for him. Both Wagner and Jacobs have voted on issues.

Although Buchanan calls the roll in votes, she has not been voting. The bar curfew vote, which failed for the lack of one



Dr. Martha Buchanan, silent on past Board of Health votes, is eligible to vote on board matters according to Deputy Law Director David Sanders. File Photo by Mike Steely.

vote, was a matter on which she did not vote.

Attorney David Sanders told the board that Buchanan, as an ex-officio member, like Jacobs and Thomas, could have been voting all along. Apparently the health department director and the other members thought she could not vote on issues.

How that may affect future actions by the board and how the votes may go if the Knox County Commissions adds a "citizen representative" to the board is unknown.

Board of Health splits on bar curfew vote

By Mike Steely
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Although UT Chancellor Donde Plowman is calling for the closing of bars near the campus for two weeks, the Knox County Board of Health came within one vote of lifting the 10 p.m. curfew.

During a meeting Wednesday that lasted more than three hours, the board debated the curfew restrictions with the idea of making the curfew a "recommendation" rather than a requirement. Although Health Department Director Dr. Martha Buchanan told the meeting that three of the five benchmarks are in the yellow, or cautious, category and one in red for danger, the effectiveness of the curfew and the lack of enforcement was questioned.

As COVID-19 positive cases spike on the UT campus following the return to classes Chancellor Plowman said the college is preparing one of the on-campus dorms and the nearby Holiday Inn to house the increasing number of positive-testing students. She reported 616 students are positive as of last Wednesday, up from 303 the previous week. Massey Hall is being emptied of residents to provide 550 beds as the college administration looks at creating "isolation dorms."

"We've got to make a change of the environment and the behavior," she said.

While the five steps to combat the virus remain in effect, including the mask mandate, the board heard Dr. Patrick O'Brien say that there is no cooperation from law enforcement and most infections are coming from personal gatherings and not bars.

"It's not working—it's not being enforced. We're at a point where the bar curfew is a moot point," O'Brien said.

Dr. Buchanan said violations of the curfew by some bars was like "Whack-A-Mole" because when some have obeyed the curfew other bars ignore the 10 p.m. closure rule.

Attorney David Sanders said that while the health department has the power to enforce the restrictions doing so would probably result in lawsuits.

Board Chairman Dr. Jack Gotcher advised the board to make the curfew "an advisory rather than a mandate," although he thought dropping the curfew will increase positive cases.

Martha Harts said maybe the board should "rethink the alcohol issue" and possibly ban alcohol serving everywhere, including restaurants, after 10 p.m.

Buchanan said that positive cases involve "on campus" activities and gatherings and reported bars have not been involved in cluster cases. She said that closing only the campus area bars would cause "lots of potential concerns."

Gotcher said that UT has more power over its students and could declare nearby bars "off limits."

He added that if the board becomes more restrictive with bar regulations, some bars "would go rogue."

"Adding more regulations won't bring law

enforcement on board," Dr. O'Brien said. Knox County Sheriff Tom Spangler has stated his department will not enforce health department regulations. Neither does the Knoxville Police Department.

Dr. James Shamiye warned that if UT is forced to adopt more restrictions on students, such as going online for classes or restricting student access to local bars, Knoxville businesses "are going to suffer."

Danna Drake motioned to table the bar curfew immediately. Mayor Jacobs agreed, saying, "People are not complying, it's not enforceable. Do it now."

"Take their handoffs off, it might actually help," Jacobs said.

The vote to rescind the curfew appeared to pass, with Drake, Gotcher, Jacobs and O'Brien voting "yes" and Harts, Shamiye and Wagner voting "no." The four to three vote, with Dr. Marcy Souza not attending the meeting, appeared to be a victory.

Then Attorney Sanders informed the board that the rule requires five votes of the entire board in order to pass. So the curfew remains in effect until the board meets again this Wednesday. How Souza and Buchanan may vote on the curfew remains to be seen.

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