

Good Evening and Happy New Year's Eve Memphis!



In her 1937 Harlem Renaissance classic *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston keenly stated **"There are years that ask questions, and years that answer."**

In this sense, Hurston noted that life is often defined by seasons of change, intervals of challenge, and periods of growth. Taken together, these moments blend in ways that lend wisdom and resilience to us all.

Although Hurston was unaware of what would occur after her passing, her observations echo across decades, resonating in the present-day.

2020 is a year that has asked questions.

2020 is *also* a year that has provided answers.

As I pen my twenty-eighth and final Chair's Recap, I reflect proudly knowing that in the face of uncertainty, we did not hesitate as a City. Rather, we forged ahead, seeking solutions for all Memphians. As a result of our

collective and continued effort, we will emerge stronger in the New Year, equipped by way of our experiences, ready and able to reach greater heights in the months ahead.

It has been an honor to serve as your 2020 Council Chairwoman. At last, as we look toward progress soon-to-come, let us do so with knowledge of the work accomplished to this point over the last twelve months in the areas of economic assistance, public health, public works, parks, libraries, fire and police, community development, historic preservation, non-profit grant funding, public safety reform, and voter participation initiatives.

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Economic Assistance:

The City of Memphis' work to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic may be summed up in two words: ***assistance*** and ***prevention***.

Many Memphians, like citizens across our nation and world, are in need of economic assistance due to the hardships created by the coronavirus. With this in mind, in April, the Council passed a resolution establishing the Council Emergency Relief Program to address the financial challenges facing Memphis residents. As a result of the Council action, \$10,000,000 was used to establish a fund to provide economic relief to men, women, and families struggling with monetary uncertainty, or the related effects of unemployment/business instability.

Furthermore, in June, the Council passed a resolution allocating \$1,000,000 in CARES Act funding to support the Eviction Settlement Fund. The dollar amount was matched by Shelby County Government and in-kind services from partners like the Shelby County Division of Community Services, Shelby County General Sessions Court, Neighborhood Preservation, Inc., Innovate Memphis, BLDG Memphis, United Housing, the University of Memphis Law School, and Memphis Area Legal Services, Inc., just to name a few.

Then, in September, the Council approved a resolution encouraging Tennessee Governor Bill Lee to suspend eviction proceedings for those (1) hospitalized and/or recovering under doctor's care from COVID-19, or (2) caring for children, or parents, hospitalized and/or recovering under doctor's care from COVID-19 for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Public Health and COVID-19 Prevention:

With prevention in mind, the Council took action in April by passing a resolution strongly encouraging all businesses within the City of Memphis to require their employees to wear facial coverings. The decision was made to lessen the likelihood of the coronavirus being transmitted unknowingly within the workplace.

However, you cannot manage what you cannot measure. So, one month later, the Council approved a resolution allocating \$2,770,000 of the City of Memphis' \$113,647,218 in CARES Act funding to the Shelby County Health Department to increase their capacity to hire, train, and deploy additional staff to conduct contact tracing within our community.

Subsequently, with paid sick leave in mind, the Council passed a resolution encouraging private employers of all sizes operating within the City of Memphis to provide paid sick leave to their employees, while also urging Governor Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly to repeal Tennessee Code Annotated Section 7-51-1802, which prevents local bodies, like the Memphis City Council, from *requiring* private employers to provide paid sick leave to their employees, and instead *allow* local bodies, such as the Council, to enforce life-saving paid sick leave policies.

Within weeks, the Council took yet another step to protect the health and well-being of Memphians by establishing a face covering/mask ordinance – the first of its kind within our region – to (1) reduce the spread of COVID-19, and (2) mitigate the impact of the virus on members of the public, ultimately with an eye toward preserving the ability of local healthcare systems to provide critical care to those in need. The ordinance remains in effect requiring citizens to wear facial coverings outside of their home when visiting local businesses.

Since that time, two resolutions were approved appropriating funds to bolster our local coronavirus prevention efforts. Specifically, in September, \$7,000,000 was appropriated through CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund proceeds to enhance community and school-based COVID-19 testing. Finally, this month, \$5,000,000 was approved as a bridge for the City of Memphis to continue its response to the public health emergency in an uninterrupted manner. Moreover, the measure enables the City of Memphis to provide continued testing coupled with vaccine education, distribution, and administration as we work to find solutions to the pandemic in the weeks ahead.

Commitment to Key Government Functions:

Through it all, the Council maintained its commitment to key government functions, firmly believing that every great city requires great public works, parks, libraries, fire, and police services. With that in mind, since January 1, the Council has passed resolutions allocating and appropriating over \$98,000,000 to these key City of Memphis divisions, ultimately for the benefit of all Memphians. Highlights include funding for the new Memphis Fire Department Headquarters, improvements to Memphis Fire Department Station Number 5, as well as funding for the new Raleigh, Frayser, and Cossitt branch libraries, along with the new Ed Rice Community Center, and improvements to the Whitehaven Community Center.

Envisioning an Improved Future for Every Citizen:

However, as we work to maintain the core functions of our municipality, it is incumbent upon us all to envision an improved future for the City of Memphis. In doing so, the Council considered methods to resolve issues affecting our neighborhoods: namely the ***overabundance of auto-related enterprises***, the ***need for historic preservation***, the ***need for renewed investment in community anchors***, and the ***need to support Pre-K education***.

Envisioning a New Lamar Avenue:

To further this goal, in February, the Council extended a moratorium on the issuance of auto-related project authorizations on Lamar Avenue between Bellevue Boulevard and Winchester Road due to the high volume of tire repair shops, service stations, auto repair shops, used auto sales businesses, and car washes taking root within proximity to each other.

Subsequently, in March, the Council followed-up on its earlier measure by approving a resolution authorizing the Memphis and Shelby County Division of Planning and Development to proceed with the submission of an application to rezone certain properties along Lamar Avenue.

Taken together, the actions lay the groundwork for the Comprehensive Rezoning of the Lamar Avenue corridor, which will result in the influx of needed health clinics, grocery stores, and diverse enterprises for a more positive impact upon future generations of Memphians.

Protecting our Churches:

A similar process was pursued along Summer Avenue, albeit for the purpose

of protecting historic churches along the thoroughfare. In August, the Council passed a resolution establishing a 180-day moratorium on the issuance of demolition permits of churches over fifty years old on Summer Avenue. In doing so, the Council aims to preserve the character of our diverse neighborhoods, and structures that have served our citizens within these communities for generations.

Investing in Community Anchors:

As we revive our historic thoroughfares via comprehensive rezoning and historic preservation strategies, the Council is also aware of the need for committed investment. Therefore, in June, we took action by renewing investment in community anchors like the Southbrook Town Center in Whitehaven. Specifically, a resolution was approved allocating \$250,000 to Southbrook Properties for the development of the center.

Ultimately, the project has the potential to contribute \$6.50 in industry input for every dollar of public investment, create 79.4 jobs for every \$1M in public investment, create \$228 in labor income for every \$100 of public investment, while contributing \$2,006,491 annually in local and state tax revenue.

Additionally, yesterday, the closing on the Davis YMCA took place, representing a highlight for the year as the project received approximately \$2,000,000 in New Market tax credits, along with \$11,000,000 in contributions from Valero, the City of Memphis, Shelby County government, and numerous other philanthropic organizations, companies, and community members.

Supporting Pre-K Education:

The Council believes the youth are our greatest hope for an improved future. With that said, if we aim to provide our children with opportunities to thrive, we must support Pre-K education.

In 2019, First 8 Memphis was named the fiscal agent of City and County Pre-K funds over the next three years. To start, approximately \$3,000,000 was committed in year one. This year, i.e., year two, approximately \$4,500,000 was committed. Overall, the Council values First 8 Memphis, as it is imperative that every child in Memphis be provided with a strong educational foundation.

Combined, the Council is proud of the progress made this year to (1) envision an improved future for the City of Memphis, while (2) taking steps

needed to bring that desired future to fruition.

Empowering Memphis Non-Profits via the Memphis City Council Community Grant Program:

Despite the efforts of the Council to address the needs of Memphians present and future, the old saying remains true: *It takes a village*. As such, this year we continued our work in recognizing the invaluable contributions of Memphis non-profits via the Memphis City Council Community Grant Program, designed to financially assist these organizations each year. To be eligible, a non-profit must provide proof of current programming and a successful record in providing the services for which they are requesting support.

Funding through the Council Community Grant Program must go toward addressing either Crime and Drug Prevention, Youth Empowerment, Economic Development, or Poverty Alleviation.

In October, the Council approved a resolution allocating and appropriating \$1,950,000 in City Council grant funds to agencies and initiatives working to promote the welfare of Memphis residents. We value the missions of the selected non-profits, viewing them as partners in our continued effort to improve the lives of Memphians of every stripe.

Championing Public Safety Reform:

I would be remiss if I did not also mention the Council's efforts to directly address social justice issues this year. The death of George Floyd, and the international calls for positive change that followed, are both reminders that there is still progress to be made to ensure that our nation reaches its full potential for *all* citizens seeking life, liberty, and justice under the law.

However, to reach that end, reform is required at every level.

From a Council-perspective, in June, we began by passing a resolution formally condemning the act of violence that resulted in the murder of George Floyd; the resolution was delivered to the late-George Floyd's family.

Days later, the Council passed three separate resolutions that (1) expanded the City of Memphis' public safety data portal to include all complaints of excessive force and misuse of body-worn cameras, (2) adopted the 8-Can't Wait principles designed to reduce and prevent violent encounters between

law enforcement and members of the public, and (3) requested Mayor Strickland to form a diverse, community task force to assist in the selection of a new MPD Director.

Additionally, in March, the Council approved a resolution establishing the Public Safety Task Force to provide recommendations to the Divisions of Police and Fire for implementation of best practices for recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining public safety officers. On December 1, the ad hoc committee's recommendations were presented to the Council, and accepted that same day.

In doing so, we look forward to continuing our work to ensure a more transparent, safe, and inclusive City of Memphis.

Securing Community-Driven Outcomes:

On a related note, in July, the Council passed a resolution establishing the City Council Renaming Commission. The committee consists of fifteen members approved by the Council and tasked with providing recommendations to the legislative body regarding the renaming of specific public streets, parks, and places whose titles represent actions that should be condemned and removed from prominence within our revered public spaces and venues.

In all, the Council is excited to receive the Renaming Commission's recommendations in 2021, as we believe this measure will work toward securing inclusive, community-driven outcomes that are reflective of our *entire* community.

Spotlighting Memphis Citizens who Served:

Since 1993, the Council has selected a person to receive its highest honor: the Memphis City Council Humanitarian Award. The award commemorates the enduring legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by recognizing a Memphian who has dedicated his or her life to the betterment of their fellow man and to the promotion of harmony among all men. This year, the Council selected the late-Rudi and Honey Scheidt as the 2020 Humanitarian Award Recipients.

On December 15, Rudi and Honey Scheidt were posthumously honored with the Council's 2020 Humanitarian Award and their loving family accepted the award on their behalf. Joined in matrimony in 1954, the charitable couple enjoyed a passion for the arts, which through their philanthropic generosity over decades of stewardship, transformed the Memphis community into a

place where access to the wonders of the creative arts could be accessed by all.

Spotlighting Memphis Organizations that Serve:

To encourage service within Memphis, the Council has also made a point to spotlight a different organization working to benefit the Memphis community at the start of each Council meeting. This year, Mid-South Mission of Mercy and the City of Memphis' MPLOY program were recognized, just to name a few.

Empowering Citizens to Exercise their Constitutional Right to Vote:

This year has been historic in more ways than one. Amidst a public health crisis, and deep-reaching calls for social reform, we also experienced a national election. Considering the need to empower citizens to exercise their constitutional right to vote in a safe and equitable manner, a series of Council actions were taken.

In May, a resolution was approved requesting Governor Lee to issue an executive order suspending certain provisions of Tennessee Code Annotated 2-6-201 to the extent necessary to authorize absentee voting by demand to respond to, and prevent the spread of, COVID-19 during the 2020 Election Cycle.

Later, in October, two additional resolutions were passed: one encouraging *all* registered voters in the City of Memphis and Shelby County to vote in the 2020 General Election, and a second urging Memphis Area Transit Authority to temporarily waive all transit fares on November 3, 2020, i.e., Election Day.

Taken together, the three efforts were based in the Council's desire for all Memphians to be heard in as safe a manner as possible; in doing so, we were successful.

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In Closing:

As we end this year, I once again must say, serving as your 2020 Council Chairwoman has been the personal and professional honor of a lifetime. I thank you all for being steadfast and resilient in the face of challenges as they arose. Together, we will reach new heights for the benefit of all Memphians.

With earnest appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrice J. Robinson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "P" and "R".

Patrice Jordan Robinson
Chairwoman, Memphis City Council
District 3