

April is Autism Awareness Month

April is nationally recognized as Autism Awareness Month. According to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 44 children in the United States is diagnosed as falling on the Autism Spectrum. Autism is characterized by challenges with social communication and restricted, repetitive behaviors; and symptoms can range from nearly unnoticeable to severe enough to interfere with daily functioning.

At its Tuesday, April 5th meeting, your Memphis City Council acknowledged Autism Awareness Month; and in so doing honored the contributions of Memphians Nakia and Queen Coleman. Nakia “Kia Shine” is a hip-hop artist known for his own hits as well as collaboration with such artists as Drake. He and his wife Queen have a son who is autistic and nonverbal, and Nakia and Queen have partnered with the City of Memphis Office of Youth Services Memphis Ambassadors Program – I Am Included Program. I Am Included serves differently abled youth, including those on the autism spectrum, by teaching life skills and providing social-emotional learning, community service opportunities and stipends. For more information on the program, visit: www.cityofmemphisyouth.org/i-am-included.



The Council also recognized April 11-17 as “Black Maternal Health Week” in the City of Memphis. The week, which also is observed nationally, is intended to put a spotlight on the healthcare disparities that Black mothers often face. Per the CDC, Black mothers are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than other mothers in the U.S., a statistic also noted in the Tennessee Maternal Mortality Annual Report. The Council’s Resolution asserts the need to invest in maternity care for Black women, as well as in policies that support and promote affordable, comprehensive, and holistic maternal healthcare.

Keeping you informed

One aspect of a holistic view of healthcare is the need for exercise and recreation. At the April 5 meeting, in the quarterly update from Memphis Parks, the City Council was presented opportunities for Memphians to engage in just such activities.

Our Parks Director, Nick Walker, informed the Council that among the features of Memphis Parks' award-winning website redesign is the new "Rec Desk" self-service portal. Users who create an account on Rec Desk will be able to register for Parks programs, sign up for sports leagues and book facilities rentals. Using Spring Break Camp as the pilot program, Parks successfully registered more than 250 participants via Rec Desk.

Director Walker also gave an update on Memphis Parks' construction projects, including Gaisman Park and Community Center and the Ed Rice Community Center; and on improvements to existing facilities including tennis and basketball court resurfacing at Bickford, Gooch and CW Davis Parks and playground resurfacing at Lucille Price Park. He also gave a rundown of planned programs, sports leagues, and special events. For more information on what is happening in Memphis Parks, visit www.memphisparcs.com.

To help provide even more recreational and educational opportunities for Memphis citizens, the Council approved a 20-year Payment-in-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILOT) on the former Northside High School on Vollintine Ave. The Memphis-Shelby County Economic Development Growth Engine (EDGE) already had approved the Community Builder Lease for The Works, Inc., a non-profit corporation engaged in rebuilding, restoring, and renewing inner-city communities. The revitalized former high school is planned to serve as a community hub, housing organizations that provide workforce training, healthcare, athletic and fitness opportunities, literacy advocacy, and arts programming.



The Council also passed a Resolution urging the Shelby County Election Commission to expand Early Voting locations for the May 2022 Primary. Currently, the Commission plans to open one location for the first two days of Early Voting (which runs April 13-28), and five more locations thereafter. The City Council's Resolution urges that such a limited number of locations – particularly in areas not serving the county's traditionally disadvantaged precincts – will harm African American citizens by significantly impairing their voting rights and opportunities as compared to other voters in the county.

The Fiscal Year 2023 Council Community Grant Program is now live. This yearly program is planned to provide more than \$2 million, divided equally among the 13 Councilmembers, for disbursement to their selected non-profit agencies that submit applications and pass the screening process. The money is intended to assist non-profits working in the following City priorities: Crime and Drug Prevention, Youth Empowerment, Economic Development and Poverty. The application period will run until noon on Wednesday, May 4. For more information or to apply, visit www.memphistn.gov/government/city-council/grants/.

A moment of gratitude:

I am fortunate to serve you each day along with my colleagues working to advance our great city. Stay tuned for future Council updates as we keep you informed regarding the activities taking place here at City Hall. As always, for an archive of meeting recordings, you may visit <https://www.memphistn.gov/government/watch-public-meetings-online/>.



Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jamita E. Swearengen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Jamita Swearengen
Chairwoman, Memphis City Council
District 4