

## *Staying updated on issues of impact*

**Greetings, Memphis!** The month of October is an unusual one for the Council this year, schedule-wise. Due to outside conflicts, we held our first meeting of the month on the second Tuesday, rather than on the first Tuesday as usual. This gives us a condensed schedule between the first and second meeting, which still will be held on the third Tuesday – October 18. Nonetheless, following is a run-down of some of the items heard and action taken at our first meeting of the month.

Councilmember Dr. Jeff Warren brought a resolution declaring October as Hindu American Awareness and Appreciation Month. Approximately 3.4 million Hindus live in the United States and have greatly contributed to our vibrant cultural diversity through classical art, dance, music, literature, meditation, philosophy, medicine, and yoga. In addition to the Hindu principles of seva – selfless service – and Ahimsa – nonviolence - Hindu Americans promote the ideals of tolerance, pluralism, and religious freedom which are enshrined into the ethos of the United States.

Alongside this recognition, Councilwoman Teri Dockery brought a Resolution celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Pramukh Swami was the spiritual leader and Guru of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), a worldwide Hindu organization dedicated to promoting harmony between individuals, within families and amongst diverse communities. Pramukh Swami’s influence has grown BAPS globally, to encompass more than 1,100 Mandirs (temples) worldwide and 150 centers in North America.



Councilwoman Dockery, Councilman Warren and representatives of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir

## **Council at Work**

**Intervening to prevent violence** – At the October 11 meeting, the Council’s Public Services, Art, Youth Initiatives, Libraries and Neighborhoods Committee heard an update on the Administration’s Group Violence Intervention Program (GVIP). Although the Council had voted to fund the program in 2020, the onset of the pandemic delayed the rollout. Program Administrator Jimmie Johnson, who assumed leadership of the initiative in April, gave a progress report so far.

GVIP’s goal is to reduce the City’s homicide rate by 10 percent per year, by addressing the immediate goal of reducing gang or group-related homicides and shootings. GVIP identifies and engages individuals most at-risk of shooting or being shot and applies appropriate interventions through law enforcement, community, or hospital violence intervention, and/or connecting them to supportive services.

Working with the Memphis Police Department and contractors such as 901 Bloc Squad, the program contacts individuals identified as being most at-risk of shooting or being shot and offers them alternatives to the cycle of retaliatory violence. Stressing the risk of death or imprisonment that comes with this cycle, the program’s 50 trained interventionists offer mediation, positive community action or needed support services such as job support, expungements, and counseling.

So far, Johnson said, the program has identified 126 at-risk individuals and has contacted 122 of them. He said the GVIP team expects the numbers to grow as the program continues to ramp up.

At the full Council meeting later Tuesday, the Council passed a Resolution co-sponsored by all members requesting Shelby County Government – which funds the Regional One Medical Center – to help facilitate an agreement between Regional One and GVIP to allow program interventionists to work in the center. Currently, citing medical privacy laws, Regional One has refused to allow the teams in. The Resolution expresses the Council’s concern that, as the region’s number one trauma center, Regional One’s unwillingness to cooperate curtails GVIP’s reach and thus puts lives in danger.

**Monitoring MLGW** – In another area of great concern to citizens – and, consequently, to Councilmembers, the Council received an update on the now-complete work of Memphis Light, Gas & Water’s Outage Improvement Advisory Team (OAIT). Formed shortly after numerous MLGW customers experienced extended outages from Ice Storm Landon in February, and composed of community stakeholders, including MLGW employees, government officials, neighborhood association members and representatives of non-profit organizations, the OAIT held its last meeting on June 16<sup>th</sup>.

Many of the team’s recommendations coincided with the Five-Year Improvement Plan implemented by MLGW after the Council approved rate increases in 2019 to help raise revenues for system infrastructure improvements. The report presented to the Council contained updates on the progress of this plan, as well as projections to implement the new ideas formulated by the Outage Improvement Advisory Team (OAIT).

In addition to decreasing the frequency and shortening the duration of outages, another goal of the OAIT was to identify ways to improve communication with customers while outages are ongoing. A major complaint during Landon was customers had difficulty getting reliable information on the status of their outages. While the MLGW officials who presented the report said they plan to focus on improving such automated communication systems as text alerts, Council members noted other methods are needed for older or less tech-savvy customers. To view a copy of the OAIT report, click [here](#).

The Council also heard from Timothy Davis, who took the post of MLGW Vice President of Customer Experience and Energy Services last month. Referring to complaints about customers experiencing long wait times or not being able to get through to MLGW’s customer call center, Davis said he has deemed the situation in need of an “emergency response.” He said the utility is working to increase staffing and available phone circuits, as well as sharpening training for current employees to improve efficiency and speed.

In addition to improving call center operations, MLGW reopened all but one of its Community Offices on Oct. 3. Although the reopening experienced some snags, the centers processed nearly 9,000 transactions in four days. Davis said the offices are using the lessons learned each day to improve operations; he also said reviews are underway comparing pre-COVID to post-COVID operations.

Finally, Davis said he wants to see the utility improve customer advocacy and resolution, so that more customers feel their issues were handled satisfactorily. Overall, he stressed to the Council he is committed to – and accountable for – improving the experience of constituents who contact MLGW with concerns.

### **The Bottom Line**

I am honored by the opportunity to work with my fellow Council Members to enhance this city we call home. 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 and view our [Council Meetings](#) here.



For Memphis,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martavius D. Jones". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Martavius D. Jones,  
Chairman, Memphis City Council