

Setting priorities, creating programs

Greetings, Memphis! October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. As it has each year with encouragement from District 2 Councilman Frank Colvett, Jr., the Council recognized the observance at its meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 18. Councilmembers wore pink, along with Pink Ribbon pins (the symbol of Breast Cancer Awareness) provided by the American Cancer Society. Councilman Colvett brought a Resolution declaring October as Breast Cancer Awareness month in the City of Memphis. He also brought a resolution honoring Shannan McWaters, who learned through genetic testing that she had a more-than-80-percent chance of developing breast and ovarian cancer. Determined to beat these odds, Ms. Waters underwent a double mastectomy and hysterectomy, and is now using her platform as a local REALTOR to promote awareness of genetic testing options. As affirmed in our resolution, the Memphis City Council stands in solidarity with survivors and those currently battling breast cancer, and encourages citizens to recognize the importance of screening for early detection.



Councilman Colvett, Shannan McWaters and her daughter Maisen Conley, Elizabeth Ennis of the American Cancer Society and Councilman Jeff Warren.

Council at Work

Taking it to the State – At its October 18 meeting, the Council worked on honing its Legislative Agenda for the upcoming session of the Tennessee General Assembly. Along with Mayor Jim Strickland, the Council soon will present this Agenda to Shelby County’s Legislative Delegation. But before polishing ours, we heard the items that Mayor Jim Strickland intends to bring.

Many of the items of concern to the Council are also priorities for the Mayor. On his Legislative Agenda, he is addressing reckless driving and the Move Over Law. He intends to ask the General Assembly to alter state law so that people who are arrested for reckless driving will have their cars impounded upon arrest – and destroyed upon conviction. Likewise, the Council plans to ask that the State give local law enforcement the ability to seize cars used in drag racing and/or reckless driving.

Mayor Strickland also wants the State to stiffen the penalties for people who violate the State’s Move Over Law, which requires drivers to pull over for first responders, including garbage trucks. He also wants to add aggravated assault to the list of crimes that mandate prison time. The Council, for its part, will ask that the General Assembly allow municipalities to institute penalties greater than a \$50 fine for violation of City ordinances – the current maximum penalty.

On a related note, the Council plans to ask that the State allow municipalities to implement rental registries for landlords. Although State law currently prevents cities from activating them, we feel that rental registries are vital Code Enforcement tools to ensure that landlords maintain their properties and keep out blight.

Both we and the Mayor intend to ask for speedier testing of sexual assault kits by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation. While the State has committed to adding funding and increasing staffing at the Crime Labs, we feel that there should be guidelines on how long testing should take and when it should be farmed out to private labs to prevent a backlog. We also plan to request that TBI locate a Crime Lab here in Memphis. Although Memphis has the heaviest caseload in West Tennessee, the closest full Crime Lab (capable of testing sexual assault kits) is in Jackson. Having such a lab here could further help to expedite the testing process.

Finally, along with the Mayor we intend to ask for more funding to help boost sports tourism in Memphis. At the October 18 meeting, Mayor Strickland unveiled an ambitious \$684 million proposal to renovate the FedEx Forum, Simmons Bank Liberty Stadium and AutoZone Park; plus build a new stadium for the 901 FC soccer team, on the site of and possibly incorporating part of the Mid-South Coliseum. The Mayor plans to request \$350 million of the funding for these projects from the State. We agree with him that having and keeping major professional and college sports teams is vital to a city’s perception as a major city.

Ensuring equal representation – Every 10 years, the U.S. Census issues revised figures on the population of the country – including numbers for cities. With the 2020 Census, these figures showed that Memphis’ population has shifted so that the nine Council Districts (seven Single-Member and two Super Districts) no longer comprise equal numbers of constituents. Therefore, it is necessary to redraw the District lines. Councilwoman Michalyn Easter-Thomas brought a Resolution proposing that the that the fairest, most transparent way to do that is to involve the

entire Council, along with community members. The Resolution, passed at the October 18 meeting, creates the City Council 2022 Redistricting Committee.

The Committee will include all 13 Councilmembers, along with one community representative chosen by each member. These community members will have a demonstrable record of experience within education, civil rights, law, business, non-profit, or faith-based organizations. The group will meet publicly at least once a month until April 15, when it will submit its final suggested redistricting plans to the Council for approval. Councilmembers are in the process of assembling the Committee now, with the first meeting forthcoming.

Providing help for homeowners – The Council unanimously approved a Resolution brought by District 9-1 Councilman Chase Carlisle and District 8-2 Councilwoman Cheyenne Johnson to provide a fund of \$500,000 for homeowners who need help paying for sidewalk repairs along their property. Under City ordinances, maintenance of the sidewalks along a property are the owner’s responsibility. This Resolution provides up to \$3,000 for qualifying homeowners who may not be able to afford to fix a sidewalk. Details of the program are still in the works, but as Councilman Carlisle noted, this “get(s) the ball rolling.”

Restoring a sacred site – The Council also passed a Resolution brought by District 6 Councilman Edmund Ford, Sr. and cosponsored by all members, allocating and appropriating \$500,000 for the restoration of Clayborn Temple. Built in 1892 as the white Second Presbyterian Church, in 1949 this Romanesque Revival structure was sold to an African Methodist Episcopal congregation and renamed in honor of a local AME Bishop. In 1968, Memphis Sanitation workers used the church as a staging area for their historic strike, and the world-recognized “I AM A MAN” posters were printed there on the pastor’s own press.

After the church closed in 1999, the building fell into disrepair; but in 2017 the Downtown Church bought the structure and began working to restore it. The site is now under the auspices of Clayborn Reborn, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the hallowed history of the building and bringing it back to its former grandeur. The Council is confident that its \$500,000 contribution will be put to good use restoring this Memphis landmark.

One more chance at Grants – At the October 18 meeting, the Council reopened its Community Grant Program for Fiscal Year 2023. Qualifying non-profit community organizations have one more chance to apply for the program, which aims to empower non-profit organizations whose work targets the City’s priorities: Crime and Drug Prevention, Youth Empowerment, Economic Development, and Poverty. Eligible organizations may apply for the Grant through 5 PM on October 31, 2022. For more information or to apply, please visit the Council’s website: <https://www.memphistn.gov/government/city-council/grants/>.

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'.

Martavius D. Jones,
Chairman, Memphis City Council