



MARTAVIUS D. JONES
CHAIRMAN
MEMPHIS CITY COUNCIL

Getting through, going forward

Greetings, Memphis. It has been a somber two weeks since our last Council meeting on January 10. Sadly, that was the day that 29-year-old Tyre Nichols died, three days after an altercation with Memphis Police Department officers during a traffic stop.

Words cannot adequately express the sadness, frustration, and pain our City Council is feeling along with you, the citizens of Memphis.

I would like to say that I am proud of our citizens for the fact that in their demonstrations and protests in support of Tyre Nichols and his family, they have refrained from violence. Outrage, frustration, indignation and like emotions are appropriate and warranted, but adding to the tragedy of Mr. Nichols' death by endangering further lives or property is not. The City and Memphis Police Department are taking appropriate action against the officers involved, and the Shelby County District Attorney General has indicted and arrested five of them on multiple charges, including second-degree murder.

I certainly wish to offer the Council's deepest condolences, thoughts, and prayers to Tyre Nichols' family. But they – and the rest of Memphis' citizens – need more than our thoughts and prayers; they expect action. And so, we are acting. Already, members are working on initiatives to increase training and transparency within the Memphis Police Department. While we believe the majority of our officers seek to serve the public with honor, fairness, integrity and respect, we know measures must be taken to try and identify and weed out those who may be prone to unacceptable conduct.

Memphis has seen some dark times in the last few years, from a pandemic, to catastrophic freezes, to a crime problem some citizens call a crisis. But truth be told, our city has endured dark times throughout its more than 200-year history. And through it all, we have emerged as a city whose soul and culture has impacted not just the nation, but the world. I fully believe that we will get through this experience, then rise with the grit and grind that has characterized Memphis from the beginning.



Council at Work

Looking Toward a Brighter Future – Speaking of rising, the Greater Memphis Chamber of Commerce presented its 2023 State of the Greater Memphis Economy Report at the January 24 meeting of the Council’s Economic Development, Tourism and Technology Committee. Among the presentation’s highlights: Jobs in the Memphis Metropolitan Statistical Area exceed the record number before the pandemic by 2%; in comparison, jobs nationwide exceed the pre-pandemic high by 0.6%. After a spike to nearly 8.7% in 2020, unemployment in the Memphis MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) is at 4.14% – slightly lower than it was (4.34%) in 2017.

The future could be even brighter, if all the Economic Development initiatives the Chamber has in the pipeline come to fruition. The Chamber currently is working on 38 projects, with the potential for creating nearly 11,000 new jobs with an estimated average wage of almost \$54,000. The projects also would bring \$13.9 billion in estimated capital investment. As it stands, the Chamber reported Memphis was named the Number 4 Best City for Jobs in 2023 by employment website Glassdoor.

Seeking Action on EtO – As it relates to Memphis’ economy, the Council certainly recognizes the value of the numerous industrial facilities located within the city. However, we also recognize that some industries use chemicals or other materials that may be hazardous and pose a threat to the public. Such, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is the case at Sterilization Services of Tennessee, a facility in South Memphis that uses ethylene oxide to sterilize medical and dental equipment.

At our last meeting, on January 10, EPA-Region 4 Director Caroline Freeman presented information showing people living in the area around the sterilization facility may face an elevated cancer risk from ethylene oxide (EtO). She noted the plant is not violating any regulations, and most of the EtO comes from “fugitive emissions.” The Agency, she said, is working on new regulations for the chemical; but these could take months to formulate, and then businesses are given 2-3 years to comply.

And at the Jan. 24 meeting, Councilman Edmund Ford, Sr., with the co-sponsorship of numerous other Councilmembers, brought a Resolution in Support of Efforts to Reduce Ethylene Oxide Emissions in the City. Noting that some of Sterilization Services’ sister agencies in other areas have undertaken efforts to control fugitive emissions. The non-binding resolution encourages the company to immediately begin working with the EPA, State of Tennessee, and Shelby County Health Department to halt fugitive emissions, rather than waiting for the passage of federal regulation. It also asks the EPA, State of Tennessee, and Shelby County Health Department to keep citizens and the Council well informed with updated information.

The Results are In – The City’s Engineering Division provided at our January 24 meeting some updated information on a major Traffic Study in the Cordova area. From April through August of 2022, the Division sought public opinion through an interactive website on transportation issues in the area. More than 1,400 citizens visited the website to report on traffic issues, from desire for better connectivity between corridors to concerns about speeding.

Although the Public Input portion of the study is closed for now, the map showing the location of suggested improvements may still be found at <https://www.cordovatraffic.com/>.

The Engineering Division plans to use the input gathered to prioritize future studies and help identify needed transportation-related projects. Super District 9-1 Councilman Chase Carlisle, who had requested the study, asked the Division to provide an estimated timeline of when improvements might begin. Stay tuned for that information from future meetings.

Knock, knock – Memphis calling – The 113th Tennessee General Assembly is currently in session in Nashville; and as we do each year at this time, your Council is working to ensure the State doesn’t overlook its second-largest city. At the January 24 meeting, the Council voted to send four Resolutions (three of which were Joint Resolutions with the Shelby County Board of Commissioners) to the State, with requests including adjustments to grant programs for short rail lines and recycling, and expansion of the Airplane Mechanic Program at the Tennessee College of Applied Technology. The last of these four Resolutions (jointly with the County Commission) asks the General Assembly (and the Governor, who would sign off) to enact

legislation that would regulate the rental of single-family residential properties in the same manner as industrial and commercial property when an investor purchases 50 or more such properties in one county for use as rental home properties. Industrial and commercial properties (including apartment complexes) are taxed at a higher rate than single-family homes, and the Council believes the extra revenue generated by this proposed change would provide local legislative bodies with additional revenue to address vacant, blighted properties. The Resolution says historically, it has been difficult to identify and locate the owners of such properties due to the State-imposed prohibition against rental registries requiring corporate owners to identify a person responsible for responding to residential property citations.

The Bottom Line

Even in dark times, I am honored by the opportunity to work with my fellow Council Members to enhance this city we call home – and to do our best to lead our city toward brighter days. Please keep the family of Tyre Nichols lifted in prayer. 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