

LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

March 17, 2009

3:15 P.M.

Councilman Benson, Chairman, called the meeting of the Legal and Legislative Committee to order with Councilpersons Bennett, Rico, Gilbert, Gaines, Robinson, Pierce, and Page present. City Attorney Michael McMahan and Shirley Crownover, Assistant Clerk to the Council, were also present.

Others present included Larry Zehnder, Steve Leach, Dennis Malone, Jerry Stewart, Mark Keil, Dan Johnson, Paul Page, Greg Haynes, Barry Bennett, Lee Norris, Daisy Madison and Chief Dodd.

VOCATIONAL/TECHNICAL SCHOOL

Chairman Benson called the meeting to order, stating that the Council had asked that this be brought forward in the interest of educating our youth. He noted that we had several guests with us tonight and also that Judge Bailey would be here in two weeks to talk about youth problems. He noted that we had Judge Bean present tonight to discuss the issue of the Vocational/Technical School.

First, though, Chairman Benson introduced the guests present, including Roger Lane, CEO of East Tech; Darrell McDonald, former City Employee and a graduate of Kirkman; Kenny Smith, Board of Education and graduate of City High School; Bill Green, former teacher at Chattanooga State and graduate of Kirkman; and Roger Tudor, who also went to Kirkman. He noted that these people had been involved in several meetings. He turned the meeting over to Judge Bean.

Judge Bean stated that with Volkswagen coming and the stimulus money, we see an economic void of industry and workforce; that he felt it was the time for a centrally located Technical/Vocational High School in Chattanooga; that we need something in the inner city. He expressed his interest, adding that he had taught at Kirkman; that some kids were not interested in Shakespeare and foreign languages but were interested in building things with their hands, and he felt like we were letting these kids down; that Chattanooga needed to be on the forefront of a State of the Art Technical School; that we needed to discuss the stimulus money, grants and location.

Kenny Smith spoke next, stating that he had been involved recently with closing three schools but that this was a different type of school; that he had worked as an electrician out of town and had eaten cheese and crackers; that people coming from out of town would spend as little as they could and send their money back home. He stated that he had been pushing a Vocational/Technical School since 2000; that Volkswagen was just the tip of the iceberg; that we had a shortage of skilled workers and some of our workforce is retiring, which makes for a great opportunity for kids in the trades; that he wished all kids could go to college but this would give them another opportunity to have a good paying job. He stated that he did not think counselors were telling all the options; that a school such as this could happen; however money is the issue; that putting such a school in place needs to be studied. He stated that he felt strongly about this and had been hearing that this is not the right time to bring this subject up; that we need to study this and get stimulus money; that he thought both the City Council and the County Commission were in favor of this.

Judge Bean noted that in his court he saw young people who had dropped out of school; that they were lost with no structure in their lives for class reunions and such; that we needed to get these people back into a routine.

Roger Lane of East Tech spoke next. He stated that he started out at Kirkman; that he had an older brother who had gone there, and it was a great career opportunity for him; that it would take 4-5 years to develop world class talent; that after four years of a Trade School, people would be ready to start work in jobs such as engineering, cosmetology and all that Kirkman had to offer; that by the time these young people reached 12th grade, there was a waiting list for these students, and they were taught interviewing skills. He stated that technology was increasing faster than education can keep up with, and he asked "When will be the right time?" He reiterated that this effort was started in 2000 and recognized that we would have a mass pool of students; that it would take a year to build the facility and four years to graduate the first class, which would be 2013, and Volkswagen would be here in 2011 and Alston Powers also needs world class workers. He went on to say that he was 17 when he got out of Kirkman, and he worked at a Carpet Mill; that he was taught great work ethics and that he had also worked at a Shoe Store; that he did what it took to get ahead. He focused on an individual who went to Chattanooga State for mechanical engineering and went thorough an apprentice program at Combustion. He stated that we had to realize that the talent was not coming to us, and we needed to work with Chattanooga State; that this was a chance to make an effect on the next generation.. He continued by stating that there were 25 employees at East Tech and that he ran his own company and had lots of clients; that he was here two years ago to get a tax abatement from the Council, and they saved him money; that he was located on Annicola Highway and had a world-class business—that he wanted to be the best or not do it at all and had worked to make it world-class and that the company affected lives and families; that he got a few employees from Sequoyah; however Sequoyah was too far away and a school needs to be accessible by bus. He added that CMA was behind this school and would support it, and we needed to do something as soon as possible; that we needed this school five years ago.

Councilwoman Bennett mentioned pilot dollars, stating that we need to focus on workforce development; that her experience is that it goes into a big pot and is not targeted; that the kids at Sequoyah are not considered to be the cream of the crop, and we need to change this image and career counseling is essential. She had a question about “middle college” and if kids with a technical “bent” were directed to this path?

Kenny Smith responded that Kim McCormick is looking at this; that it is not in this area right now; that they were open for suggestions.

Judge Bean noted that vocational schools have a bad name, and this is holding Sequoyah back; that it should be called a technical school where people could get work ethics.

Roger Tudor of AGC spoke next. He mentioned that in 2000 they started an academy at East Ridge High School; however what the academy was producing was not the product that they wanted to hire; that they sat down and devised a curriculum to take applied process in their field and “marry” it with traditional skills; that they had seen students’ averages go up and tardiness go down; that they had given teachers an opportunity to teach new ideas that students could take and apply; that there was no way for higher education to “marry” with Chattanooga State; that AGC had given \$150,000 to UTC for a program. He went on to say that the point of this is that some of the students in the career academy are 17-18 years old, and they gave them the opportunity to think about this; that \$24,000 went for scholarships last month. He noted that some folks work better with their hands, and we need to give these kids a chance.

Chairman Benson stated that the school needed to be centrally located and where the population is.

Mr. Tudor responded that East Ridge is centrally located; that we can’t transfer kids from every school, but they had put big money in this.

Councilman Rico asked if there was not a vocational school at Howard? Mr. Kenny Smith responded that it was more like an academy. He agreed that an image problem had always existed and suggested that the Council could help this image; that it was a “false” image; that a lot of different places could help with the image, and we could get these kids to the top; that it would take an image change and money.

Councilman Gilbert stated that we were really ready for a Technical School and that Dr. Scales had also said “yes”; that these gentlemen here today went to Kirkman and were very successful; that we tend to put down people who work with their hands and not in offices; that people were getting BS Degrees, and it was still hard to find a job. He mentioned Andy Anderson who was a principal and also built houses; that we find money for different things, and we need to find money for a Technical School; that he had talked to ex-gang members, and this was an alternative for them; that because they had nothing like this, they turned to crime to make money; that we had smart kids out there on the street, and we needed to take negatives and make them positives; that he had been for this idea for years; that Chattanooga could be on the map with a top of the line school, and the nation would say that we did this to change our youth.

Councilman Page stated that he thought this was really great and also that we had quality people leading the charge for this; that the question he had was what is there for the Council to do? He stated that he knew there was a Resolution prepared but still wanted to know what the Council could do.

At this point, Chairman Benson presented the Resolution.

Councilman Page stated that he was really asking if there was something more we need to do; that the people here today were being considerate enough to study this; that he thought everyone agreed that we needed this, and he wanted to know where we started.

Chairman Benson stated that the National Association was telling us that an academy is wonderful if it is large; however right now we only have 2% to 4% taking things like x-ray technology, and he wondered if the cost justified the expense; that we were talking about the public school system. He suggested that Mr. Eichenthal could do some work on whether an academy would work; that such academies could bankrupt a system.

Mr. Tudor explained that what he was talking about was a Public/Private partnership; that if we allowed a Vocational School to develop, he thought it would help keep people here as opposed to them going elsewhere; that we needed to employ “carpe diem” and “seize” the day.

Judge Bean suggested that the Council endorse this Resolution; that the first issue would be that people would say that the City is not in the school business; that we need this Resolution to say that we are interested. He added that the Council could lobby Bob Corker and Zach Wamp and also Mayor Ramsey; that some would say that it is a bad time financially, but he thought it was a good time; that we have a working foundation and with the stimulus money, it should not take that much; that nothing is more important than getting our youth to have a work ethic.

Councilwoman Bennett noted that the Chamber has an Educational initiative and asked if this could be another piece of this; that they are looking regularly at needs and AGC had provided training for minority contractors. She questioned who needed to be at the table; that she thought we had a good strong group of leaders.

Councilwoman Robinson asked what kind of reception would this get on the School Board? Mr. Smith responded that one or two agree that this is needed; that they agree with the academy idea also; that it is always a bad time to talk about it; that with the shortfall, it is hard for some to speak in favor of this; that he did not think with the money problem that they would come out publicly with this.

Councilwoman Robinson questioned where the facility would be in partnering with UTC or Chattanooga State; that Olan Mills property might be an option and Chattanooga State would be the best partner you could have; that it could fit nicely and be an accelerated program.

Kenny Smith responded that Chattanooga State had helped their apprentice school.

Councilwoman Robinson mentioned \$40 million dollars on a facility for Volkswagen and questioned if this could be positioned as a “feeder” school?

Mr. Smith mentioned that Chattanooga State had sent three to Atlanta to study Siemens—that it was all about partnership.

Mr. Lane added that the purpose of a good education is to prepare a student for a career and not a degree; that he had worked with parents and teachers and everyone was fascinated with a new modern facility where the floors are cleaner than carpet. He stated that he was excited about going to work and that this was a life long dream.

Mr. Bill Green spoke next. He stated that he had taught at Chattanooga State for 23 years; that we had better get on the ball, or we would be embarrassed when Volkswagen comes in and we do not have the manpower to supply them and other companies, too. He stated that he was a scholastic scholar at the University of Cincinnati and that in Chattanooga right now we need this school and now is the right time; that the money would come along; that the program is going well at Chattanooga State; that they sent fellows out, and they had a job when they were through with school. He stated that the only thing they did not have at Kirkman was chemistry, but we got what we needed; that Chattanooga State was 5-10 years behind technology, and we need a school here that will have an entrance exam; that he would love for all the Council to take an exam and asked how many of the Council had worked in industry; that he would like to give a basic exam to all of the Council to see what it takes to learn a trade.

Councilman Page complimented everyone on getting support.

Judge Bean stated that the City could help on the location; that it could be south of Chattanooga State and part of the Park; that this is important, and we do have a Resolution which reads “*WHEREAS, the recent industrial growth in the Hamilton County area will provide opportunities for vocational technical graduates to obtain well-paying jobs in Hamilton County; and WHEREAS, the existing vocational technical school in Sequoah is removed from the population center of Hamilton County for the convenience of too far students; and WHEREAS, a new facility could provide expanded training opportunities in a variety of areas. NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHATTANOOGA, That the Hamilton County Board of Education be implored to study and consider establishing a stand alone technical vocational school near the center of population of Hamilton County.*”

Councilwoman Robinson stated that the only thing Judge Bean left out is “AMEN”!

Chairman Benson noted that the County would be doing this same thing, too.

Judge Bean stated that Daisy Madison had the money for this!!

Chairman Benson asked if everyone was in agreement to putting this Resolution on next week’s agenda and the consensus was “yes”. He stated that this concluded this meeting and thanked everyone for coming.

Floyd Kilpatrick was present and stated that he had an issue that affected economic development in the downtown area; that he had not had a chance to talk with Chairman Benson about getting this on his agenda, and he would like the opportunity to talk with him about this; that he would talk to him first, as it might be inappropriate to discuss this in this committee. Chairman Benson agreed to meet with him right after this meeting.

Mr. Green apologized for his voice, stating that he was nervous.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 P.M.