

DEMOCRAT

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Wilson County addresses charter schools

School system seeks to implement policy for charter school applicants

BY CHANDLER INIONS
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Earlier this year, Tennessee sought to redesign the application process for charter schools looking to set up shop in the state. Charter schools are not new

to Tennessee, but the change does represent a shift away from local school district autonomy to a state-controlled commission in Nashville. New language regarding the application of charter schools alters the ultimate deciding

party, because if an applicant is denied at the local level by a county school district, they now have a fallback, an appeal to Tennessee Charter School Commission (TCSC), which is the body that reviews appeals if the initial application is denied.



Jeff Luttrell



Lauren Bush

Wilson County does not currently have any charter schools. However, during a meeting on Thursday, the Wilson County Schools Policy Advisory Committee laid out a path for handling the requests of potential charter-school applicants.

“There are many charter schools that have been coming to the state,” said Lauren Bush, WCS deputy director of policy and student services. “We have not had a charter-school request in our district, but we do need to establish a policy for approving charter schools.”

Any move will still require the final approval from the Wilson County School Board’s approval,

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Chandler Inions/Lebanon Democrat

An inmate at the Wilson County Jail attempted to take their own life last weekend. According to the Bureau of Justice, each year, more than 1,000 inmates nationwide commit suicide in custody.

Old Friends still on hold

BY MIGUEL DETILLIER
FOR THE DEMOCRAT

The Mt. Juliet Planning Commission once again deferred any decision on the Old Friends Senior Dog Sanctuary’s future property during Thursday evening’s meeting.

They deferred on rezoning Old Friends’ new administrative offices on Nonaville Road until their next monthly meeting.

Old Friends’ new offices would be rezoned into an office/professional service district (OPS).

The non-profit’s future property will be located in a log house on the east side of Nonaville Road, further north from Pawvillions, Old Friends’ 18,700-square-foot facility.

Old Friends’ log house measures more than 3,600 square feet on almost five acres.

The planning commission previously deferred on the rezoning two months ago.

During that same meeting, Old Friends Executive Director Zina Goodwin said that they want to move their marketing and fundraising staff to their new offices.

Goodwin estimated that five to seven people would work in Old Friends’ log house.

However, city officials were concerned that the non-profit’s future property would not work well in residential areas like Nonaville Road.

During Thursday’s meeting, both Mt. Juliet Planning Director Jennifer Hamblen and Mt. Juliet Planning Commission Chairman Luke Winchester disapproved of the rezoning due to concerns of having commercial property there.

Hamblen said that she cannot support the amendment due to safety concerns surrounding the streets near Old Friends’ log house, such as Nonaville Road and Spring Hill Road.

“I think it’s a bad direction when you’re putting in commercial zoning in between two houses,” said Winchester.

Five residents also voiced their disapproval of Old Friends’ future property during the meeting.

Area resident Janice Von Allmen said that the rezoning is not in agreement with the general plan to not have commercial properties in residential areas. She believes that it will affect the 11 residential properties that are near Old Friends’ log house on Nonaville Road.

“I am not a realtor, but I do not think having a commercial office space surrounded by residential homes would be a benefit to those homeowners or those homes in the immediate area,” said Von Allmen.

Von Allmen said that it doesn’t make sense to have commercial property that would only be used for a few people.

She added that there are five properties for sale in less than a five-mile radius of Old Friends’ Pawvillions. Von Allmen said that those properties are already zoned or close to zone to commercial.

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Grappling with despair

Wilson County inmate attempts suicide

BY CHANDLER INIONS
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An inmate at the Wilson County Jail attempted to take their own life last Sunday. While incidents like that are difficult to predict, jail officials have several steps in place aimed to prevent and to react to suicide attempts.

The Wilson County Sheriff’s Office oversees the county jail. Correctional officers monitor up to 450 inmates housed anywhere from weekenders to felons. Even with those numbers, Major David Bennett, the lead jail administrator, indicated that the frequency for suicide attempts is anything but consistent.

“You may go six months and never have a suicide or suicide attempt,” Bennett said. “Then, in one week, we may have multiple suicide attempts. You

do the best you can and work to keep everyone safe.”

Throughout the inmate’s unsuccessful attempt last weekend, Bennett mentioned that the inmate never lost consciousness but was still transferred for medical examination.

“His cellmate yelled at a correctional officer and told them he had tied himself up,” Bennett said. “When they got to him, he was breathing on his own, so no life-saving treatment was required.”

That time, the result was positive, but the jail administrator acknowledged that it’s not if, but when, it will happen again, even with parameters in place designed to prevent it.

“Every (inmate) who comes in gets a screening,” Bennett said. “When we book them in, we ask if they have ever been locked up before. We ask for their general health history.”

Once that line of questioning is complete, Bennett indicated that they get into inquiries about the inmate’s mental health.



David Bennett

“Some of those questions can be, ‘Do you have a drug addiction,’” Bennett said. “We ask them point blank, ‘Are you thinking about hurting yourself?’ We also ask if they have ever attempted to do something like that.”

The direct questioning doesn’t always yield accurate responses, but Bennett said that trying to determine that is not a luxury they have.

“Pretty much every week, when someone comes in and is asked that question, we have a lot of them say they might hurt themselves,” Bennett said. “If someone comes in and they are impaired, they might not mean it, but you still have to take it seriously.”

SEE **DESPAIR/PAGE A4**

A thief in the night

Burglar steals ATM from Lebanon market

BY CHANDLER INIONS
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Authorities are searching for an unidentified male following a break-in at Geri’s Market in Lebanon. The store sits on the southeast corner of the intersection between Castle Heights Avenue and Leeville Pike.

According to a report from the Lebanon Police

Department, the individual suspected for the break-in arrived at the store on Thursday around 3 a.m.

The report indicated that the suspected individual “broke through the glass door,” which is at the front of the store. Once inside, the individual can be seen removing the ATM from the business.

Based on video surveillance obtained by the Lebanon Police Department, the individual is believed to be a white male.

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Chandler Inions/Lebanon Democrat

An unidentified white male broke into Geri’s Market in Lebanon around 3 a.m. on Thursday and took the ATM from inside. The Lebanon Police Department is seeking information to track down the individual.

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