

**Good Afternoon and Happy Friday Memphis.**



As I write my first recap for the month of July, I must take a moment to remind you all to make healthy decisions for yourself, as well as others, especially on behalf of the most vulnerable among us. Over the past fourteen days, Memphis/Shelby County has averaged close to **300** new COVID-19 cases *per day*, increasing our local positivity rate to nearly **14%**. As a result, the Shelby County Health Department [now anticipates](#) “two weeks from now . . . a significant number of cases that will be difficult to manage from a hospital perspective, as well as from a public health perspective.” Furthermore, per our local health department, virus transmission rates are heightened by citizens who “refuse to wear” facial coverings.

With this in mind, I implore you, wear a mask. In addition to mask-use being [the law](#), your compliance saves lives!

This week, the Memphis City Council met to discuss measures focused on moving Memphis forward. If you were not able to participate in the meeting via live-stream on the Council website, via YouTube, or via 88.5 FM (WQOX), a full review is provided, [here](#).

## **Protecting Memphis Renters via the Eviction Settlement Fund:**

The Council understands the COVID-19 crisis adversely affects Memphians in a variety of ways. Whereas health risks abound, so do every day economic challenges. Among the latter are citizens facing eviction because they are out-of-work, or under-employed, through no fault of their own. Although the Tennessee Supreme Court established a statewide eviction moratorium in April and May, the judicial body lifted the legal protection in June 2020. As a result, eviction proceedings loom for many Tennesseans, with **approximately 9,000** of these renters residing in Memphis/Shelby County, alone.

With this in mind, on Tuesday, the Council addressed the housing concern by allocating \$1,000,000 in CARES Act funding to support the **Eviction Settlement Fund**. The monetary amount will be matched by Shelby County Government, and in-kind services from partner agencies like the Shelby County Division of Community Services, Shelby County General Sessions Court, Neighborhood Preservation, Inc., Innovate Memphis, BLDG Memphis, United Housing, the University of Memphis Law School, and Memphis Area Legal Services, just to name a few.

As a result, the fund will support local residential tenants who are (1) presently facing eviction, (2) at risk of eviction, or (3) likely to encounter housing instability if evicted. Specifically, the available dollars will be used to (i.) pay negotiated settlements and have the eviction case dropped, (ii.) raise available defenses in court, and possibly on appeal, as well as (iii.) cover administrative fees necessary to operate the program. Furthermore, tenants will receive a counseling session with a HUD-certified housing counselor to discuss long-term financial planning and future housing goals.

In all, the Council believes this action is a valuable step toward protecting Memphis renters.

## **Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis:**

Over the last thirty days, the Council has repeatedly dedicated itself to addressing systems of criminal and sociopolitical injustice that exist within our community. We recognize there is much more work to accomplish if we truly wish the City of Memphis to be a place of peace and prosperity for all. To that end, on Tuesday, the Council passed a resolution declaring racism a public

health crisis. The action served as a re-commitment to enacting policies that eradicate the effects of institutionalized racism and prejudices.

### **Improving our Local Library System:**

Traditional routines may be modified for the time being, but the Council's dedication to the enrichment of Memphians' lives remains our focus. As such, a resolution was approved on Tuesday to provide \$3,870,000 to replace the current Frayser Library with a new facility for use by local men, women, children, and families, alike. Once complete, the building will represent the tangible growth occurring within our library system, while serving as a beacon for education and self-improvement within Frayser and beyond.

On separate note, the Council also accepted and appropriated funds in the amount of \$51,900 from the Tennessee State Library and Archives Department for use in improving the Memphis Public Library (MPL) and Information Center's supplies, books, and related materials.

Taken together, the Council is excited by these developments because they allow our city to build upon the recent success of the MPL system. In 2019, over 2.5M people visited City of Memphis libraries, borrowing over 1.3M items for their personal enjoyment. Additionally, for the third year in a row, youth programming at Memphis public libraries increased, improving attendance from just over 50,000 adolescents and young adults in 2017 to reaching nearly 100,000 in attendance at various Memphis library events in 2019. With goals to enhance equitable access to books, champion literacy for all ages, promote workforce training, and to advance the role of the library as a community anchor, the efforts to provide improved facilities and supplies will benefit citizens, present and future.

### **Maintaining Memphis Community and Senior Centers:**

The Council believes community and senior centers serve an invaluable role within our neighborhoods. However, they must be maintained for long-term use by our youth and elderly populations. Therefore, on Tuesday, the Council approved the appropriation of \$120,000 to replace the gym floors at the Orange Mound and Whitehaven Community Centers. Furthermore, the funds will be used to weatherize, or replace, the windows, as well as to repair the foundation, at Ruth Tate Senior Center.

### **Maintaining Memphis Sidewalks:**

The Council is also aware of the need to ensure walkability within our neighborhoods. On Tuesday, a resolution was approved to provide \$500,000 to replace various sidewalks within the City of Memphis. When coupled with existing projects to resurface City streets, Tuesday's action moves us all forward as the Council works to improve the state of vehicle, bike, and foot traffic, both on and adjacent to, our various thoroughfares.

### **Honoring Memphians Who Served:**

When worthy circumstances arise, the Council has seen fit to name certain public roads in honor of citizens who have served this community. On Tuesday, two Memphians were recognized with honorary street name changes as a result of their legacy of leadership and benevolence.

**Willeen W. Hastings** will retire from her role as Chief Executive Officer of Memphis Health Center, Inc. on July 31, 2020. Having benefited the lives of countless individuals during her thirty (30) plus year career as a healthcare professional, Ms. Hastings is well-known for her persistence in advocating for quality, affordable health services for the underserved and underprivileged within our City. In total, her efforts raised over \$20M for use in providing improved health outcomes to the men, women, and children of the City of Memphis. On Tuesday, the Council unanimously approved a resolution commending Ms. Hastings for her professional contributions, and designated a section of Fourth Street as "**Willeen W. Hastings Place.**"

The **Late-Elder R.E. Berry** served his congregation at Trinity All Nations M.B. Church with unwavering vision from 1974 until his passing in 1996. A dedicated man of faith, Pastor Berry saw a way when others did not. Therefore, when his church was founded, the first services were held in his living room! Nonetheless, Pastor Berry vowed that his congregants would soon "get a building" of their own, which would be "for the community" in every sense of the word. The statement rang true, and within one year's time, Pastor Berry's steadfast nature resulted in the church obtaining a building, one that was "for the community," and is still used today. As the years progressed, Pastor Berry's faith-driven works extended outside his physical church community, as he routinely fed neighboring residents in need of food, while also walking door-to-door extending invitations to attend services, oftentimes stopping to pray for those who allowed him to do so. Although Pastor Berry passed on, his acts of compassion live within those he inspired. As a result, on Tuesday, the Council also unanimously approved a resolution designating

Norman Avenue as "**Elder R.E. Berry Avenue**," in appreciation for his acts of kindness.

### **Protecting Yourself and Others during the COVID-19 Pandemic:**

As we move forward, the Council reiterates its call for your cooperation as we work together for the purpose of keeping all Memphians safe. *Remember:* wash your hands, maintain six-foot social distance, and **wear a mask.**

### **Mark Your Calendar: Tax Day 2020 is Coming!**

Finally, do not forget, the deadline for filing federal income taxes is **Wednesday, July 15, 2020**. If you need assistance, the United Way of the Mid-South is offering its [Free Tax Prep Program](#) to taxpayers in the Greater Memphis area. However, due to COVID-19, there is only one active United Way of the Mid-South Free Tax Prep site available, located at **1005 Tillman Street, Memphis TN 38112 (The United Way Plaza)**.

Hours of operation are **Monday through Friday, 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m., and Saturday, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.** Income eligibility for the United Way's Free Tax Prep Program is capped at \$56,000 in 2019. For more information, call (901) 433-4300.

### **Looking Forward:**

As we move ahead, I am and will always be honored to serve you each day as part of a thirteen-councilmember team working to transform our great city into a place of opportunity for all. Stay tuned for future Council updates as we keep you informed regarding the activities taking place here at City Hall.

With earnest appreciation,



Patrice Jordan Robinson  
Chairwoman, Memphis City Council  
District 3