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Jail overcrowding can lead to loss of all state inmate revenue

Sheriff offers idea to convert empty building into jail annex for additional housing



Johnson County Sheriff Mike Reece and a number of county commissioners discuss jail overcrowding and revenue shortfalls.

By Marlana Ward
FREELANCE WRITER

Representatives from the Johnson County Sheriff's Department and a number of the Johnson County Commissioners came together February 7, 2017 to discuss the department's overcrowding situation and future revenue possibilities.

Presently, the county jail houses approximately 57 state inmates at any given time. The Tennessee Department of Corrections pays the county \$37 per day to house these inmates. Housing costs run close to \$5 per day, giving the

county a revenue profit every day a state inmate is kept in county custody.

While the money earned by keeping state inmates helps the county budget, increases in the number of county inmates being booked into the jail has led to overcrowding and the inability of the department to house as many state inmates. Sheriff Mike Reece spoke to the commissioners present about recent visits by inspectors to the jail and the resulting departure of 14 state inmates due to crowding issues found.

"The inspectors look at yearly averages," Sheriff Reece explained. "If they find that

there are too many we could lose certification to house state inmates."

Sheriff Reece explained that the housing of the state inmates within the county jail had led to a surplus in the jail's budget and that money was put into the county budget, helping to keep taxes from being raised. He stated that if the county did not take advantage of the opportunity to house the state inmates, budget shortfalls would lead to increased taxes and budget cuts by the county. With over 28,000 state inmates being presently held in county jails across the state, the po-

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Sheriff details jail overcrowding, budget issues and his proposal for solution

By Paula Walter
ASSISTANT EDITOR

As appears in the article above, Sheriff Mike Reece plans to come before the commissioners this Thursday to address the issue of overcrowding at the Johnson County jail and the renovation of an existing facility to house state inmates.

Following are details from the sheriff regarding the overcrowding issue.

•Monies received from the state for the housing of state inmates brings approximately

\$1 million per year for Johnson County.

•According to Reece, Tennessee Corrections Institute (TCI) is the agency that inspects jails in the state. Last April, they reported that the Johnson County jail was overcrowded. "We had to shift the inmates out," he added, meaning less revenue for the jail.

•Since 2006, the Johnson County Sheriff's Department brings over \$1 million a year from housing state inmates. Over a ten-year period, it has amounted to \$10,560,910. "We've kept the county afloat," Reece said. Monies received

go to Johnson County, not the sheriff's department.

•"I don't want a new jail," Reece stated. However, housing state inmates brings in revenue for the county. If the county jail fails state inspection, they have 30 days to make corrections. If they fail to make the necessary changes and again fail inspection, the department will not be certified and no state inmates can be housed at the facility.

•Should the jail population in the Johnson County jail go over 114 inmates, their

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JCHS graduation set for May 13

By Rebecca Herman
FREELANCE WRITER

On Thursday, February 9, the Johnson County School Board met for its regularly scheduled meeting; all board members were present.

Director of Schools Dr. Michelle Simcox began the meeting by recognizing the employee of the month, Julian Crews, teacher at Johnson County Middle School. Crews teaches seventh grade social studies and according to JCMS Principal Edna Miller creates "an atmosphere where students desire to explore and inquire...he presents and teaches in such a way that all students want to be actively engaged in the lesson." Miller also explained that Crews is able to have this impact of students due to his "tireless efforts" and "countless hours preparing lessons that include effective differentiated learning strategies based on the abilities and learning difficulties of students, ensuring that all students are successful in thinking through the task and mastering the objective."

Miller also recognized students who received the top ten scores on the ACT Aspire test. These students worked hard and earned high scores in at least three of the four subject areas. The students recognized

were Samantha Manuel, Lauren Johnson, Veda Morefield, Lauren Patterson, Christopher Laing, Issac Brown, Nathan Trivette, Christian Woerner, Robert Coffey, and Madison Wright.

Rick Thomason and Danielle Pleasant spoke to the board about the 4-H program and additional programs that are offered to students in the school system. After giving a brief history of the 100-year-old organization, Pleasant and Thomason explained what the program offers the children. Pleasant said that in Johnson County they focus on workforce development. In order to teach students to be responsible citizens, Pleasant works with fourth, fifth, and sixth graders to complete five projects per school year. These projects help students to learn the Parliamentary Procedure, public speaking, financial education, supply and demand, decision-making, demonstration and poster making, and essay writing. By completing these projects students are able to learn life lessons and are rewarded for their efforts with placement ribbons and an award ceremony at the end of the school year.

Rick Walters from Horace Mann addressed the board next. Walters is also a representative for donorschoole.com. This is a website that

allows teachers to post projects, activities, supplies, etc. that need funding. Individual donors, as well as businesses, can then choose which projects they would like to fund. Walters told the board that Johnson County Schools has had over \$200,000 donated to complete these projects, with Roan Creek Elementary (RCE) receiving the most donations with over \$50,000; RCE has also had more projects funded than any other school in the state of Tennessee.

Marly Eggers, student school board member, reported to the board that the seniors would have local Scholarship Day on February 10. She also reported that there are now four televisions in the commons area that show an ACT practice question, the lunch menu, weather, and announcements. According to Eggers, the Health Occupation Student Association team went to the regional competition and several students will be moving on to state. Abby Smith, junior at JCHS, was chosen to attend the 2017 Tennessee Governor's School for Scientific Models and Data Analysis.

Eggers also updated the board about the upcoming schedule for boys and girls basketball tournaments and announced that the boys junior varsity team "won their conference

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Red Cross offers services to help with disaster preparedness plans

By Bonnie Davis Guy
FREELANCE WRITER

The February Mountain City Council meeting came to order promptly with Mayor Kevin Parsons, Vice Mayor Jerry Jordan, and Aldermen Kenny Icenhour and Bob Morrison in attendance. Alderman Bud Crosswhite was absent due to illness. With the council having a quorum, they moved forward with the night's agenda beginning with public presentations.

First to address the council members was Ellen Watkins from the Johnson County branch of the American Red Cross. Watkins wanted to update the council members on the county's response to the recent catastrophic wildfires in Sevier County/Gatlinburg as well as other events affecting our area. Watkins was called to Gatlinburg the first night of the fire and helped find shelter and assistance for some 14,000 people. On Christmas Eve 2016, the shelters were finally closed with everyone placed in housing. Watkins, a long-term veteran of the Red Cross, visibly teared up when she reported, "It is unreal how the people of Tennessee stepped up to the plate with donations of needed items, clothing and financial aid. I am so proud," said Watkins. The audience responded with congratulations and comments acknowledging Tennessee is the volunteer state. Watkins went on to explain to the

board that she would like to see residences and businesses of Johnson County have disaster preparedness plans in place. The Red Cross, and specifically Watkins, is available to help create these plans if needed. Johnson County recently suffered a microburst weather event, which is a type of tornado/straight line wind scenario. Our area is susceptible to severe weather and natural events that can end in disaster situations. Being prepared can make all the difference. Mayor Parsons thanked Watkins and said, "I am proud to have you as a citizen of our town."

The next item involved a landowner acquiring an unused right of way to 365 Hillside Drive across from Apple Street. The landowner is interested in developing this property but the entrance would encroach on the city's right of way. Attorney Steve McEwen will investigate the issue, as the council had no objections at this point. A motion was made and passed to give Mayor Parsons and Attorney McEwen the authority to move forward with this request.

Chris Dunbar, Johnson Counties Middle School teacher and coach for the JV baseball team, asked permission to use the city's ball field as a practice field starting on February 13 through March 31. With an all yes vote, permission was given.

The consent calendar with January minutes and the second and final reading of budget amendments were unanimously approved.

Items of concern for the council members and department heads began with Vice Mayor Jordan who thanked the city workers for the hard work at trying to cover up the graffiti

at Ralph Stout Park. He also asked Andy Garland for a time frame on rehabbing the reservoir at water tank hill. Garland responded that the project will begin as soon as the weather permits and equipment can get to the site. Jordan also had concerns about buildings and property in the city that are not up to city ordinance due to

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"...joy cometh in the morning."

-Psalm 30:5



Living in the mountains of East Tennessee, it is easy to grow so accustomed to the beauty all around that we fail to appreciate the magnificence of our home.

Photo by Edna Miller



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