



Observer Corps Report

Observer: Margaux Cowan-Banker

Meeting Observed: Knoxville City Council

Meeting Date: 3/17/2026

Agenda <https://knoxvilletn.primegov.com/Portal/Meeting?meetingTemplateId=4053>

Video Recording <https://knoxvilletn.granicus.com/player/clip/67?redirect=true>

Three Main Observations:

1. Council denied item 11-D, *A Resolution of the Council of the City of Knoxville approving an appeal filed by David Hamilton for the Norwood Homeowners Group, Humberto Rodriguez for H&M Clinton Hwy LLC, Morris Shaso for Clinton TN LLC, and Jason Sorrell for Knoxville Combatives LLC, thereby overturning the decision of the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission to grant a special use application filed by CareCuts for a social service provider in the C-H-1 (Highway Commercial) district for property located at 5200 Clinton Highway. (Planning staff recommended approval; Planning Commission Approved 13-0) (File No. 1-A-26-SU) (Council District 5). (Requested by Knoxville-Knox County Planning)* in an 8-1 vote. Much discussion was had regarding the appellate's case that the proposed CareCuts property was a safety risk to the unhoused persons it plans to serve, due to them being mostly pedestrian and the area in question being mostly automobile centric. Council deemed that the social services provided by CareCuts to the unhoused individuals outweighed the risk, with emphasis being on the fact that most of the *at risk* unhoused individuals are already trafficking that area daily despite the lack of pedestrian friendly access. Councilman Thomas, the lone vote to approve the appeal, and the council person for district 5 (the district this will most directly affect), requested that all other members be ready to help as needed with what may prove an influx of unhoused persons in district 5.

2. Item 12-F *Resolution authorizing the Mayor to execute any and all documents necessary to award a total amount not to exceed \$213,499.71 in Opportunity Youth Program grants to 13 community-based organizations to support programming for youth and young adults in the City. (Requested by Office of Community Safety and Empowerment),*

Item 12-G *A Resolution authorizing the Mayor to execute an agreement with C.O.N.N.E.C.T. Ministries to provide individual case management, wraparound social services and emergency relocation support to individuals at high-risk for being involved in community-based violence for an annual amount not to exceed \$186,100.00. (Requested by Office of Community Safety and Empowerment)*

And Item 12-F *A Resolution authorizing the Mayor to execute an agreement with the Helen Ross McNabb Center, Inc. to provide individual and group therapy to individuals identified as being at high risk for involvement in community-based violence and enrolled in outreach and/or life coaching, for an annual amount not to exceed \$121,000.00. (Requested by Office of Community Safety and Empowerment)*

Were all approved with a mixed vote count but all were also met with questions regarding transparency and the selection process for the grantees and the chosen local entities receiving funding. Much discussion was had (similar to the 2/17/2026 council meeting) where council sought better clarity on the grantee selection process, how the

applications are advertised, potential gatekeeping, etc. There was a sense that some council members saw these selections as picking favorites over fairly considering all qualified candidates in the community. The mayor made note that a corrective process is underway for grants going forward and highlighted the upcoming City Grant Workshop on 4/23.

3. Council approved item 12-M, *A Resolution authorizing the Mayor to approve and adopt the City of Knoxville Parks & Recreation Master Plan, as prepared by Perez Planning + Design. (Requested by Parks and Recreation Department)* in an 8-1 vote. Much positive feedback was given by both council members and the public for the new master plan but many concerns were expressed over 1) the hasty nature of voting on a document of great length, that several council members perceived to have just been handed to them and 2) the lack of acknowledgement for the future of Chilhowee Park within the master plan and the recent selection of a Chilhowee Park Advisory Council, which some council members found potentially ill-suited for Chilhowee Park to best meet its community's future needs.

Feature Evaluated	Yes	No	Comments
Meeting started on time?		X	The Beer Board did not end until 6:05 p.m. therefore council started at 6:11 p.m.
All members present?	X		
Members attentive?	X		
Did members come prepared to discuss agenda items?	X		This meeting saw a higher volume of discussion that most meetings do
Agenda posted 72 hours prior to meeting?	X		
Agenda items clearly described what was to be discussed?	X		
Adequate opportunity given for public input?	X		This meeting saw a higher volume of public input than most meetings do. 4 speakers at public forum and 14 speakers regarding specific agenda items
Was there an appearance that some action items were discussed in a closed rather than open session?		X	There was much discussion surrounding the importance of transparency but this did not imply that items were discussed in a closed session

Was background information available to the public?	X		Mostly. Councilwoman Debbie Helsley mentioned that the Parks & Rec Master Plan was difficult for people to access as it wasn't attached to the agenda. This was determined by Charles Swanson to be an error due to document length. He made note that he thought his department had attached a link instead.
Facilities adequate (room size, lighting, ventilation, speakers, audible, ADA accessible)?	X		

Were there any issues on the agenda relevant to LWV positions or programs? View the League's [National](#), [State](#), and [LWVKKC](#) policy positions.

***LWVKKC Policy Positions:** Childcare, Land Use, Health, Homeless/Mentally Ill Persons, Urban Forestry, Use of School Facilities by Communities, Teacher Recruitment & Retention*

League Position	Issue
Land Use	Item 11-D (resolution for council to approve an appeal to overturn Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission grant of special use application to Care Cuts) and item 12-M (resolution for council to approve and adopt the Parks & Rec Master Plan)
Homeless/Mentally Ill Persons	Item 11-D (resolution for council to approve an appeal to overturn Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission grant of special use application to Care Cuts), item 12-G & 12-H (resolutions authorizing the mayor to execute agreements with C.O.N.N.E.C.T. Ministries [12-G] and Helen Ross McNabb Center [12-H], Inc for various case management and therapeutic intervention services)

Do you recommend League action on any of these issues? Not at this time

Other notes/concerns? This meeting was very long in length, running roughly 4hrs and 25 min long.