

**Kenny Howell**

*Managing Editor*

An ordinance that could have potentially let employees with a valid handgun carry permit carry in city buildings was amended Monday night.

The ordinance was amended to allow employees with a valid carry permit to leave their guns in their car while on City property. Commissioner Art Giles, who sponsored the ordinance, said that was partially the intent of the original ordinance.

“We are not asking everyone to come down here and carry a gun,” said Giles.

However, on first reading it was amended to allow all employees with a valid permit to carry in City offices.

Commissioner Ray Justice spoke first on the subject. He said he had spoke with city employees that were worried of working in an environment where guns are allowed to be carried, and some who had a permit who didn't want to carry.

“They have no desire to bring their handgun to work,” said Justice. “Some don't feel comfortable with others bringing it to work.”

Mayor Ed Hagerty said the community had already weighed in on the issue when they decided to allow guns in the parks. He said that a few weeks ago at a Planning Commission meeting, the room was packed and there were no police officers in sight.

“It got heated, and they felt threatened,” said Hagerty.

Justice said the item created a culture of fear that was not really necessary. He didn’t understand the fear of someone coming in and shooting up the City Hall when it is rare. He said things happen, they can’t let fear dictate their laws. He said they are potentially arming 120 employees.

“We’ve now got an army,” said Justice.

Jim Bradshaw agreed.

“If you are scared to sit up here, I suggest you find another role,” said Bradshaw.

Bradshaw said insurance rates could go up if this law was passed. He asked City Attorney Gino Marchetti if it would increase liability, and he agreed. He asked him if he thought they should pass the ordinance.

“I do not,” said Marchetti.

Bradshaw asked City Manager if he thought they should pass it.

“I don’t have much heartburn with the commissioners carrying them, I’d rather employees not

carry them,” said Martin. “Too many questions and not enough answers.”

Giles explained that he was surprised that the issue had received so much attention. He felt that it was just protecting people’s second amendment rights. He said people who worked late in the offices had the rights to protect themselves. Hagerty and Vice Mayor James Maness agreed.

“I think we should be proactive, and try to prevent,” said Giles.

Hagerty said that 11 percent of population of Wilson County have handgun carry permits, so if that ratio held, only roughly 14 employees would be carrying.

Maness shared his frustration with gun control laws like having gun free zones, which he referred to as “defense free zones” similar to City Hall.

“All this does is disarm law abiding citizens,” said Maness

The ordinance was eventually amended to make it so that the employees would be able to keep their guns in their car when parking on city property without fear of discipline from the City offices.

Hagerty urged Giles to move forward with potentially allowing city employees and the commissioners to carry on city property and work through the insurance and liability issues for a possible future ordinance.