Kenny Howell

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The Mt. Juliet Board of Commissioners voted 3-2 to allow any Wilson County school teacher a discount on handgun safety courses instructed by the Mt. Juliet Police Department.

Teachers are not allowed to carry handguns on school grounds. The State Legislature of Tennessee would have to change that, and when they did, might give the decision over to each individual school boards.

Commissioner Art Giles sees it as a possible perk for teachers who want to come teach in Wilson County. He believes teachers need the right to carry firearms in schools.

“These teachers risk their lives,” Giles stated.

Giles said he doesn’t believe that every teacher wants to be armed, but they should have the right if they want to be. And he said that if his kids were still young enough, he would like to have his kids in the classroom where the teacher is armed.

Commissioner Ray Justice, who has a long career in law enforcement, disagreed that arming teachers is a good idea.

“We pay teachers to educate our children, we do not pay them, in addition to that, to become police officers in our schools,” Justice said.

He said it is “a logistical nightmare” for law officers to go into a school and there be more than one person with a weapon. Justice said law enforcement officials do not know who is the shooter or possible shooters when entering a building. He said a gym teacher could be carrying a weapon and react a certain way that may indicate he is the shooter, and a law officer would shoot him. He said that he didn’t want to sound like he was anti-second amendment, because he is not. He believes that if more people in the community had weapons, law enforcement’s job would be easier, and he would support any teacher to actually get their handgun permit. He just doesn’t want them carrying in the school. He also said they are worrying about the wrong “G” in schools, and need to be talking about how to get God back in schools.

“You’re sending a mixed message, a very mixed message,” said Commissioner Jim Bradshaw.

Bradshaw believes that it is sending the message that the commissioners were voting on sending teachers to the class so they could carry the weapons in the school. He also believed that if you are going to do it, you might as well let all business owners take the classes to protect themselves at their businesses. He also urged the State Legislature not to pass a law to allow teachers to carry in schools.

Commissioner James Maness believed that the Declaration of Independence allows for citizens to protect themselves because of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”, and that it was a shame that as a legislative body impedes on their right to the first part, life. However, he said they were just voting on the training classes.

“I don’t know why anyone would be opposed to this,” said Maness.

Mayor Ed Hagerty talked about the story of the Sandy Hook Elementary school nurse who hid under her desk. When the killer entered, she could see his legs from his knees down. He thinks that if she would have been properly trained, she could have taken him down. He said if that happened in Wilson County, or anywhere in Tennessee, it would be a terrible thing.

“I would be devastated,” said Hagerty.

He thought it would allow teachers to start off their gun training, which they could continue into more weapons training in the future.

Justice said that it wasn’t about allowing people to exercise their second amendment.

“It is about allowing untrained people with weapons to put themselves in a position to get themselves killed, potentially, to make themselves targets, potentially,” said Justice.

Justice said the training courses are no more extensive than the driver safety courses you take. He said that you don’t have to qualify for the classes, and there is no way to know the psychological state of a person that comes into the class. Justice called Public Safety Director Andy Garrett up to get his opinion. Justice asked if it was a good idea to have other people with weapons beside the police in an active shooter situation. Garrett said that they wouldn’t know who the bad guy was when they were entering the building.

“I would hate for someone who was trying to help be killed or wounded by police,” said Garrett.

City Manager Kenny Martin said he didn’t know if arming teachers was the answer, but he thought even if it does not become legal for teachers to carry in schools, it is good for people to learn, who are interested in having a weapon, to know the proper techniques, and would hopefully encourage them to take more. He also talked about it would be good to possibly talk about other techniques like disarming a suspect and learning how to protect themselves and others in a situation like that.

The resolution ended up passing on a 3-2 vote, with Justice and Bradshaw voting against it, and Giles, Maness and Hagerty voting for it.

An ordinance to fund two school resource officers in the amount of $47,000 for the rest of the school year did not receive a second and didn't make it to the floor.

In other business, the board of commissioners voted 4-1 to put a moratorium on LED signs until there can be rules defined for them. Some signs that have recently gone up have caused some controversy, one of which someone started a Facebook page because of their dislike for it that has nearly 250 fans.