

Ed. Climate (priorities in Memphis!)

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Enter The Megastadium

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MAYOR WYETH CHANDLER says if the state is "going to give us \$20 million, I think there is much more interest in expanding the stadium" than in developing a large tourist-oriented zoo at Shelby Farms.

What, we wonder, is the source of this divination? Has the mayor had a poll taken? Has he concluded that the enthusiasm of the Liberty Bowl committee represents the sentiment of the entire community? Is it the opinion of his regular foursome at the country club?

Whatever, the comments of Chandler, state Sen. Jim White (D-Memphis) and Holiday Inns' Tedd Schorman these last few days have doubtless encouraged those at the state capitol who doubt they'll ever have to make any capital investments in Memphis because Memphis will never be able to decide what it wants or needs.

Over the weekend, Schorman blamed the "inactivity" of local officials when he withdrew his offer to donate 1,000 animals and birds to the proposed zoo, then backed up to say he would honor the commitment if something happened "quick." Somewhere between then and now he seems to have realized that this all began as a state initiative and has waited for definitive action there, but the waffling on his generous and valuable contribution can only serve to defeat any chance the project might have left at Nashville.

White probably confused things at this end when he said, "It doesn't appear that the state-owned megazoo that was envisioned at first is going to materialize . . . if the city of Memphis or the county of Shelby decided to embark on such a project, we could possibly get some state aid." No one in the state administration or in the leadership of the legislature, to our knowledge, has said the original concept is dead or, if so, that local government might revive the corpse. In any event, it sure wasn't the sort of assessment likely to generate the vigor Schorman is demanding.

PART OF THE PROBLEM the zoo proposal has encountered has been the absence of any firm agreement on what this community's priorities ought to be for any capital grant the state might offer Memphis to match those awarded to Nashville, Knox-

ville, and Chattanooga. During the recent legislative session the zoo plan found itself in competition with the call for an expanded and "encapsulated" stadium. Much of the city's business leadership came down on the side of the zoo, recognizing that its long-range potential for sparking the full development of the Shelby Farms plan offered the most good to the community as a whole. But the stadium proponents have been waiting in the wings to pick up the pieces that a divided effort was certain to leave.

Bud Dudley, executive director of the Liberty Bowl, made that plain in the days following this year's game when he said, "Some people are saying that there are other things in this town that need the money more than the stadium — you know, like the zoo and the theaters.

"All I've got to say to those people is how many times does the Memphis Zoo get on national television?"

Well, what special magic is there in that? Memphis has also been on national television with golf tournaments, riots and fire and police strikes.

The question now is whether Mayor Chandler has fallen in with Dudley's narrow view to the exclusion of other community priorities which might qualify for a major state capital grant if the zoo, in fact, is unworkable or unfeasible. It may be far-fetched, but why couldn't state funds be included with those said to be available from the city, county and federal governments to build a convention center hotel? Isn't that, by most estimates, the No. 1 priority project in the city? Shouldn't that prospect be explored, at least, before any preferences are indicated to the state?

Or what about rapid rail transportation for Memphis?

WE HAVE NEVER supported the zoo plan as a panacea. We do not oppose the stadium plan as a waste. We do say that the leadership of the community, including the mayor, should make every effort to establish a consensus of priorities and fit all resources to them.

Chandler says, "We already have a reasonably good zoo." Yes, and we also already have a reasonably good stadium. So what do we have that isn't good?

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