

Child Impact Statement Reporting System answers question: 'Is it good for the kids?'

Web tool to be used in community decisions

By Linda Moore

Friday, April 17, 2009

In a small auditorium filled with government officials and community stakeholders in the well-being of children and families, a new Web-based tool was presented that will be used to answer only one question:

Is it good for the children?

The experts say children in Shelby County are in crisis, and the Child Impact Statement Reporting System, the first of its kind in the country, was designed to provide Shelby County officials with data on the consequences their decisions will have on the youngest among us.

"It is another step along a long road that we started way back in 2002 when someone said, 'What's going to be one of your priorities?' and I said, 'Children, children, children,'" said Shelby County Mayor A C Wharton.

Last year, the Shelby County Commission approved the use of child impact statements and a way to develop them to accompany resolutions and other issues brought before the body.

The reporting system uses information from a number of data bases to detail how governmental actions impact children.

"We know the children are disproportionately affected by the decisions that we make, and yet we rarely stop to ask if what we are about to do is good for children," said county Commissioner Mike Carpenter, who has championed the cause.

While school-related issues have obvious impacts, other projects, such as where a factory might be located, also need child impact statements, he said.

The system was developed by a team led by Michael Schmidt, director of the University of Memphis Center for Multimedia Arts in collaboration with the Shelby County Office of Early Childhood and Youth, the Center for Urban Child Policy and The Urban Child Institute.

The data comes from sources that include the U.S. Census Bureau, the Tennessee

Department of Education Report Card and the state health department.

Child impact statements are done across the country and around the world, Schmidt said. Most come at the "tail end" of the process and are used as a screening tool.

Here, instead of adding the report at the end, it's included at the beginning of the process and progresses through the system, Schmidt said.

-- Linda A. Moore: 529-2702



© 2009 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online