

## Office of the President

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November 8, 2023

Mr. Craig Tindall  
City Manager  
City of Murfreesboro  
111 West Vine Street  
Murfreesboro, TN 37130

Dear Mr. Tindall:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your Nov. 3, 2023, letter outlining concerns regarding the University's ownership of properties around our campus periphery and related issues with increased criminal activity in the communities surrounding our campus. I must admit to being surprised by your letter as it insinuates that there has been a lack of communication and collaboration with the City on these issues. In fact, there have been on-going discussions between your office, the Mayor, the Chief of Police and the City Planning Department regarding many of the issues outlined in your letter.

You were well aware that yesterday, Nov. 7, a previously scheduled meeting was held at the Murfreesboro Police Department that included not only the two of us, but the Murfreesboro Chief of Police, our campus Chief of Police and Alan Thomas, our Vice President for Business and Finance. This meeting was scheduled a few weeks ago to help address some of the very issues raised in your letter. Furthermore, next Monday on our campus, there has been a long-planned joint meeting between the MTSU's Executive Leadership Team, Chair of our Board of Trustees, the Mayor and members of the City Council to discuss issues of mutual concern and potential further collaboration. The inference from your letter that we are not engaged or actively talking about issues of shared concern is disingenuous and reflects a lack of transparency.

One of the issues you raise regarding crime in the surrounding areas of the university is one that we take very seriously. As President, there is nothing more important to me than the safety and well-being of our students and members of our MTSU community. While we would all agree that the ultimate goal would be no crime in our community, on or off campus, that is not a realistic expectation when one considers that our campus is, in effect, a unique community of 30,000+ within the confines of the City of Murfreesboro. Coupled with the fact that the University hosts a number of public events and activities each month, bringing in thousands of additional visitors and guests, we are subject to the same challenges that the larger community faces.

Therefore, our university, both the administration and our Board of Trustees, take campus crime very seriously. The overwhelming majority of campus connected illegal activities are mostly misdemeanors involving theft and fraud, simple assault and substance abuse. Our campus police efforts in reducing

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these activities are ongoing and appear to be demonstrating positive results. Over the years, the university has invested in the acquisition of more than 1,000 security cameras around the campus. As the latest report from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation shows, criminal activity on our campus is relatively low and consistent with experiences at our sister institutions - [Crime on Campus 2022 Final SECURED.pdf \(tn.gov\)](#). We always welcome any input our local public safety officials can offer that will enable us to further reduce these incidents.

While we work closely with a number of apartment owners on efforts to combat illegal activities on their own properties, we are limited in what we can do. Not only are many of these properties owned by out-of-state investors, but several have a revolving door in management, making consistency in dealing with them difficult. Further, in looking at the map that WGNS publicly posted alongside your letter to me, I noticed that the “hot zone” for crime was actually not in the immediate area of our campus nor in the area where we hold the majority of our properties, but rather in an area that has long been a mixed-use residential area, including a large number of these apartment and rental communities, that serve not only our campus but the larger city population. On multiple occasions we have reached out to the properties in an effort to address some of the concerns but unfortunately, the majority of these properties fall outside our domain, which limits our ability to influence their policies or actions.

The second concern raised in your letter relates to our property ownership in the area immediately surrounding our campus. These properties were purchased by the University to provide the room for campus growth and expansion, consistent with the State of Tennessee’s goals of providing post-secondary education to every Tennessean who desires one. The majority of these properties fall within our State-approved acquisition zone and are consistent with our intent to contain the campus proper to the area defined in this zone.

While the current market value for these properties may exceed \$12 million, based on the 2022 tax assessments, these properties would have generated less than \$35,000 in revenue for the City. More importantly, these University properties not subject to taxation. Under T.C.A. § 67-5-203, “all property of any educational institution owned, operated or otherwise controlled by the state of Tennessee as trustee, or otherwise, shall be exempt from taxation.” Even if your tax lost inference was legitimate, when compared to the over \$1 billion annually in economic impact for the City of Murfreesboro generated by the University, this figure would appear to be only a modest concern.

As you may know, the capital approval process for new facilities is often a years-long process and we only secure properties that are consistent with our need for future growth and campus expansion. The specific property you referenced, 904 Crestland Avenue, is contiguous to existing campus properties

and is a critical piece in our long-term plans to develop our campus infrastructure in that area. While funding is not immediately available for that development, it is imperative that we acquire needed properties as they become available. Doing so helps avoid the need for the State to use eminent domain in obtaining the property when that land is required for growth.

During a meeting with you and the City Planning Department on Aug. 23, our Campus Planning staff acknowledged that some of our properties have been managed by the management company in a less-than-ideal manner and have discussed additional options to help address these issues and concerns. Steps have already been taken to assure that our property manager works more closely with the University and acts responsively to address unsatisfactory tenants and issues related to the upkeep of property. And as we have demonstrated previously, when properties are not in condition to be effectively utilized for housing, we have demolished the structure and left the area as green space until needed for university purposes. Last week, we received approval from the State to demolish four properties owned by the university. We are actively evaluating two or three other properties for demolition as well. These and other updates from the campus will continue as our planning departments meet on a regular basis, with the first of these meetings occurring on October 3.

Having served in leadership positions at three other urban campuses, I am well aware of the additional challenges that a vibrant, growing institution has on our community. I also take great pride in the many positives we have brought in enhancing the educational, economic, cultural and social fabric of this community. If we share a mutual desire to see our community prosper, it is essential that we maintain a high level of trust, with open lines of communication and engage in meaningful conversations. One of our greatest successes has been MTSU's recognition by the Princeton Review, for the 5<sup>th</sup> year in a row, on its list of America's top higher education institutions. It is my belief that, working together, we can assure that both MTSU and Murfreesboro can be considered among the best in the nation.

Sincerely,



Sidney A. McPhee  
President

C: MTSU Board of Trustees  
Murfreesboro City Council  
William T. Waits  
Anne Maples-Vaught