

Diverse topics aired at ETSU town hall

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Priorities for East Tennessee State University were made known by community members at a town hall meeting to discuss the future of the school Wednesday.

Establishing a law school, providing greener vehicles for campus transportation, creating a competitive cycling team, ensuring First Amendment protections are in place and building a properly integrated electronic health records system among health colleges

were some of the topics brought up by those who attended the meeting at the Millennium Centre.

The Committee for 125 was formed in 2012 to develop a plan to guide ETSU to where the school should be at its 125th anniversary in 2036. This "ETSU 125" process resulted in the work of six task forces that was presented in December. At this meeting it was recommended ETSU should pursue a football team, a school of dentistry, push the arts and establish some new programs on campus, among other initiatives.

ETSU President Brian Noland said Wednesday's meeting was a chance to hear from the community ETSU serves about what the school should focus on before a final report is issued later this spring.

"We're not going to make everyone happy," Noland said at the conclusion of the discussion. "That's not our intention. Our intention is to prioritize the goals for this institution and to assist the institution and the region in establishing a culture of excellence."

After hearing presentations from the heads of the task forces, attendees had the chance to ask questions. Later, one-on-one questions could be asked.

Terry Tollefson attended the meeting. He retired recently after teaching 19 years in the department of educational leadership and policy analysis at ETSU.

He wanted to know if establishing a law school had been considered.

Noland told him that law training in this country is dynamic right now, so this was deemed to not be a major focus. That had indeed been discussed, though.

"But I would not say that is on a short-term time frame," Noland said.

After the meeting, Tollefson was optimistic about ETSU's future.

"I'm curious and thinking I don't know if there's anything I can do to be helpful but it's a great endeavor," he said. "And I'm sure ETSU is going to become even better than it has been in the past."

Chelsea Lyons, an ETSU senior majoring in history, asked if there were plans to make the campus shuttle service, the BucShot, more eco-friendly by using hybrid shuttles.

Joe Sherlin, ETSU vice provost and dean of students, who led a task force for ETSU 125 on student life and services, said that had not been expressly discussed but that a \$5 per semester green fee was established to address things just like that.

The BucShot is operated by Johnson City Transit System. It is a free service to the ETSU campus.

Lyons said afterward she attended the town hall to learn more about what is occurring on campus. She is a volunteer with the Carter County Democratic Association and with the election committee in that county.

"I'm involved in local politics and I'd like to be involved on campus, as well, to try to make not just ETSU a better place but Washington, Carter count(ies) a better place as well because ETSU is a better place," she said.

She enjoyed the presentations and thought ETSU was heading in a good direction.

"I have a lot of faith that in 25 years we will be one of the best colleges in the entire state of Tennessee," Lyons said.

Reneau Dubberley, brought up the fact ETSU has no competitive cycling program despite the fact several nearby schools have such teams. He said this was important for the school to consider, especially since there have been recent discussions about adding cycling to the ETSU Olympic Training Site. ETSU was designated this past year as an Olympic Training Site for weightlifting.

Judge Ken Bailey, who led the task force on ETSU athletics, told Dubberley that cycling was specifically addressed and that this sport needs to be considered.

"I think it's absolutely something we were looking at," he said.

ETSU student Joseph Rasch asked if at any point in the ETSU 125 process anyone had included protecting First Amendment rights on campus. He said there have been instances where free speech had been stifled.

This had not been addressed, but Sherlin said there were avenues on campus to air grievances about free speech issues.

Noland also responded by saying: "Openness to inclusion is who we are as an institution."

Jennifer Hovatter told those gathered at the town hall she was a student in public health whose husband passed away of a disease known as lymphedema. She asked if any consideration would be given to establishing a program or course of study that teaches how to treat patients with this disease. She said not many doctors know how to treat this disease, so such a program would be useful.

Larry Calhoun, pharmacy dean and head of the health sciences task force, said he would meet with her specifically to address this issue and would bring it to the attention of others.

Derriell Springfield works in the office of equity and diversity at ETSU. He is also a graduate student in educational leadership and policy analysis.

He has been at ETSU since 2010. He attended the town hall because he is interested in higher education and the direction ETSU is taking.

He said it seems ETSU is moving toward being more collaborative on all fronts, which he thought was good.

"I think moving forward, if we can actually be more collaborative, which I think a lot of what the committees for 125 are trying to do, we're going to see some big things coming from ETSU," he said.

Everything related to the Committee for 125 process can be accessed at etsu.edu/125/.

The Committee for 125 will meet again to digest reports from consultants who have been looking at every facet of the university, feedback from Wednesday's town hall and other data before producing a final report due in late spring.

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