



July 20-23 in Knoxville

Sports Columnist Sally Jenkins to headline TML 84th Annual Conference

Award-winning sports writer Sally Jenkins has spent her entire adult life observing and writing about great coaches and athletes. Her latest book: *The Right Call: What Sports Teaches us About Work and Life*, explores the astonishing inner qualities in these same people that pushed them to overcome pressure, elevate their performances, and discover champion identities.

As the keynote speaker for the 84th TML Annual Conference, slated for July 20-23 in Knoxville, she will explore these qualities and share how you can apply these same principles to your life.

Based on years of observing, interviewing, and analyzing elite coaches and playmakers, such as Bill Belichick, Pat Summitt, Peyton Manning, Michael Phelps, and more, Jenkins has discovered the seven principles behind their success: conditioning, practice, discipline, candor, culture, resilience, and intention.

Jenkins is an American sports columnist and feature writer for *The Washington Post*. Prior employment included being a senior writer for *Sports Illustrated*.

She is the author of 12 books, four of which were *New York Times* bestsellers, most notably No. 1 *Sum It Up: 1098 Victories, A Couple of Irrelevant Losses and A Life In Perspective* with legendary basketball coach Pat Summitt and *It's Not About the Bike* with Lance Armstrong.

Her work has been featured



Sally Jenkins

in *Smithsonian Magazine*, *GO* and *Sports Illustrated*, and she has acted as a correspondent on CNBC as well as on NPR's *All Things Considered*.

Jenkins will help kick off the conference on Sunday, July 21, during the opening ceremonies.

Other conference highlights will include a dynamic panel presentation on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and practical uses in municipal government, educational workshops that qualify for CEU credits, our annual awards ceremony, a dynamic exhibitors hall and vendors program, ample opportunities to network with your peers, a Sunday morning golf tournament, plus much more!

So mark your calendars for July 20-23 in Knoxville and keep an eye on your mail box for more conference information!

Conference registration to open May 1.

Supreme Court largely sides with public officials in social media case

By KATE COIL
TT&C Assistant Editor

The U.S. Supreme Court has issued rulings clarifying how and when public officials can block users and delete posts from their social media accounts, largely siding with government officials.

The unanimous decision, authored by Justice Amy Coney Barrett, the court found that public officials can delete and block unless the account they are using has the power to speak on behalf of the government or were using their personal accounts as a government mouthpiece. This authority to speak on behalf of the government must either be written in law or established by "longstanding custom." The ruling was a very narrow decision, and future rulings could determine further parameters.

"State officials have a choice about the capacity in which they choose to speak," Justice Barrett wrote in her opinion for the court. "If the public employee does not use his speech in furtherance of his official responsibilities, he is speaking in his own voice."

The ruling was praised by National League of Cities CEO and Executive Director Clarence Anthony.

"The Supreme Court ruling helps bring much-needed clarity to local officials with social media accounts," Anthony said in a statement. "Unfortunately, some on social media have used the platforms to harass and intimidate public officials. Under the new test laid out by the Supreme Court, public officials have important First Amendment protections of their own when the content they post is not of an official nature."

Barrett noted that pages run by government officials and employees can sometimes blur the lines between the public in private when they both discuss public matters as well as post private pictures, videos, and



A recent ruling from the Supreme Court has clarified that public officials can block users and delete posts from personal accounts, though not accounts that are official government pages.



Left to right, Spencer-Fane attorneys Sam Jackson and Bethany Vanhooser present at the TML Legislative Conference about how new Supreme Court rulings are impacting social media use by both local governments as well as elected officials and public employees.

information.

"When a government official posts about job-related topics on social media, it can be difficult to tell whether the speech is official or private," she wrote. "We hold that such speech is attributable to the state only if the official (1) possessed actual authority to speak on the State's behalf, and (2) purported to exercise that authority when he spoke on social media."

However, the court did not interpret how the ruling would impact the two cases before them, one out of California and another out of Michigan, where public officials had

been accused of violating the First Amendment by deleting comments and blocking users.

The Michigan case, *Lindke v. Freed*, was the focus of the Supreme Court decision. Heard by the Sixth Circuit Court, of which Tennessee is part, the case involved Port Huron, Mich., city manager James Freed, who blocked another user, Kevin Lindke, after Lindke made several negative comments about the city's handling of Covid-19.

However, as the page was not an official government page and contained numerous posts of Freed's *See COURT on Page 6*

Chattanooga Builder's Blueprint program aims to create general contractor pipeline

By KATE COIL

A new program in Chattanooga hopes to aid groups that have traditionally faced barriers to careers in general contracting with the ultimate goal of expanding the local base of contractors and spurring reinvestment in the city.

The Builder's Blueprint Program recently welcomed its first cohort and will help participants meet the qualifications needed for a general contractor license over eight weeks. Tennessee requires general contractor license applicants to prove a net worth of 10% of the project cost for which they are applying. For example, if someone is applying for a contracting license with a total monetary limit of \$100,000, they must prove they have access to \$10,000 in capital. This is difficult for many applicants, especially those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds.

"We can't change the rules, but we can make them easier to navigate," said Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly. "The Builder's Blueprint Program is directly supportive of our mission to increase the diversity of contractors and vendors that are able to do business in and with the city and to make it easier for them to do so, creating critically needed economic opportunities for our minority community."

By signing up for the Builder's Blueprint Program, participants get financial counseling, access to necessary capital via a grant through the National League of Cities and the Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, and a laptop computer, business management tools, mentorship, networking opportunities, and more. Other important sponsors of the program include the Southern Cities for Economic Inclusion (SCEI) initiative, Pathway Lending, and Tech Goes Home.



Members of the first cohort of Chattanooga's Builder's Blueprint program meet. The Builder's Blueprint program has brought together future contractors with city officials and partners including the National League of Cities, Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, Southern Cities for Economic Inclusion, Pathway Lending, and Tech Goes Home.

The need for the program came to the attention of city officials and Mayor Kelly from working with Theodore Sanders, a current member of the program and owner of Sanders Remodeling.

"The Builders Blueprint program is opening doors and giving me the tools to take my business to the next level, creating generational wealth that will put my family in a position I have worked so hard for but always felt just out of reach," said Sanders. "Through this program, I can get the assistance I need to succeed and contribute to building a stronger city - this is the hand-up that will change the lives of all of us who go through the program."

Dylan Rivera, director of Policy Planning and Implementation for Chattanooga, said Sanders helped city officials better understand what barriers he and others were facing.

"Theo and I had become very close over the past few years, and I would talk with him about his business," Rivera said. "I asked

him what was the root cause of the problems he was running into with his business, and it was because he was operating as a subcontractor, not a fully-licensed general contractor. As I started to research and learn more, I started to understand more of what the problems were. We also had a cohort of city staff who were working with NLC in the Southern Cities Economic Inclusion Initiative, which is to diversify procurement practices for the city. We were able to see that in order to diversify our procurement contractors, there needed to be someone there to support that level of access. It was very clear that we were putting the cart before the horse."

Because Builder's Blueprint was started through the city, Rivera said Chattanooga was able to call on various partners and initiatives the city was already involved in. The first cohort of the pilot program has five participants based on grant funding for the program. There are still open applications online for the program, but *See BLUEPRINT on Page 6*

Local governments must be proactive about AI revolution

By KATE COIL

With talk of artificial intelligence dominating much of the conversation around tech, local governments of all shapes and sizes are weighing the risks and benefits of employing AI to improve services, streamline data, and engage with the public.

TML Preferred Technology Partner VC3 recently hosted the webinar "Embracing the Future: AI's Influence on Local Government" to discuss how artificial intelligence works, how local governments are already using AI, and what policies local governments may want to adopt concerning data privacy.

Kevin Benson, director of applications development for VC3, said many municipalities or their employees are already using AI in ways they may not anticipate, such as having a chatbot pop up on a municipal website or Facebook page to answer frequently asked questions, autocorrect and autosuggest features, and spam filters in email.

"Until now, we have all considered ourselves unique in our ability to create something new, to create something that didn't exist before," Benson said. "What AI is doing now is filing tax returns, replying to emails, and making music. It is amazing what is going on in the artificial intelligence space."

With AI already in use, Benson said cities need to take time to

consider both how they can use this technology and what parameters and policies they want to put in place for employees using AI in the office.

AI AND DECISION-MAKING

Benson said AI is defined as a branch of computer science that uses a large amount of data to predict patterns. Humans often make decisions based on information and knowledge, past experiences, and their emotions.

"In order for me to make a decision as a human, there is some data behind it, and hopefully that data is accurate," Benson said. "There is also some gut feeling and emotion that goes into it. Obviously, computers don't have emotion. We use data to help us make decisions every single day. Computers are really doing the same thing we are doing, and they are really able to understand data."

Many companies and individuals have used AI to make data-driven decisions in the hopes of providing more relevant and accurate determinations. The more data available and the higher quality that data, the better decisions can be made.

By 2026, 80% of companies will have AI incorporated into their business with an expected 37% growth rate in AI predicted between 2023 and 2030. However, 75% of consumers are concerned about AI and misinformation.

Benson used the example of a li- *See AI on Page 7*



PEOPLE

ALCOA

Alcoa City Commissioners unanimously approved the replacement of an essential water purification machine at the city's water treatment plant. The city will purchase a \$500,000 Microclor hypochlorite generation system to purify drinking water, replacing an old system that is nearing the end of its lifespan. The need to replace too many parts on the old system has complicated attempts to repair and upgrade it. The new system allows for easier maintenance and will have five cells generating necessary chemicals for water treatment, allowing back-up cells to take over if one is no longer working. The previous system only had one cell. The new system is more energy-efficient and allows staff to vary production rates based on need.

CHATTANOOGA

The city of Chattanooga has received \$2 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation to conduct crucial feasibility and design work on infrastructure components of the Westside Evolves plan. The funds are part of more than \$50 million in grant awards issued to 34 technology demonstration projects across the country through the Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) Grants Program. Residents have said that US-27 and Riverfront Parkway together contribute to the neighborhood's isolation and residents' feelings of separation from the broader fabric of Chattanooga. The Westside Evolves plan's recommendations include two crucial new street connections, as well as other street improvements that will reconnect the disadvantaged neighborhood to economic, recreational, and social opportunities in Downtown Chattanooga and the Riverfront district.

FRANKLIN

The Franklin Police Department has once again received international reaccreditation by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). Franklin Police Department Deputy Chief Scott Butler, Lt. Matt Smalley, and Sgt. Brandon Sandrell received the accreditation at CALEA's Spring Conference in Montgomery, Ala. The CALEA reaccreditation is the department's eighth since the department's initial accreditation in 2001. On the state level, the Franklin Police Department is accredited by the TN Association of Chiefs of Police.

HUNTINGDON

Intocast officials announced the company will locate its first U.S. operations in Huntingdon, investing \$15 million and creating 103 jobs. The company will construct a state-of-the-art, mega class factory at the Huntingdon Industrial Park, a Select Tennessee Certified Site. The site will be dedicated to manufacturing magnesia-carbon (MgO-C) refractories and materials to support Intocast's U.S. market. The company anticipates construction to begin in July. Founded and globally headquartered in Germany, Intocast specializes in manufacturing and marketing refractory products for the iron and steel industries. The company employs 2,000 people worldwide.

JONESBOROUGH

The town of Jonesborough is competing against 20 other small towns across America to be named among *USA Today's* 10 Best Historic Small Towns. Nicknamed the "Storytelling Capital of the World" and home of the National Storytelling Festival, Tennessee's oldest town was recommended for its museums and historic sites such as the Chester Inn. Nominees must have populations of fewer than 25,000 and be suggested by *USA Today* editors. Readers can vote once a day per category for their favorite. Jonesborough is competing against Abilene, Kan.; Berkeley Springs, W.Va.; Breckenridge, Colo.; Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif.; Chester, Vt.; Cumberland, Md.; Durango, Colo.; Gallup, N.M.; Heber City, Utah; Ludington, Mich.; Marietta, Ohio; Moab, Utah; Round Top, Texas; Ruston, La.; San Elizario, Texas; Stockbridge, Mass.; Wickford, R.I.; Winslow, Ariz.; and Winterset, Iowa, for the top honors.

KNOXVILLE

The city of Knoxville and Knoxville's Community Development Corporation (KCDC) are receiving a \$42.6 million U.S. Department

of Transportation Grant that will improve connectivity between East Knoxville and the city's downtown. The project's goal is to make the urban wilderness in South Knoxville and downtown more accessible to East Knoxville residents via walking, biking, and other multi-modal transit solutions. Plans for the seven-phase project include more than 10 miles of greenways, multi-modal transportation pathways, and other public spaces; a cultural corridor connecting schools, churches and affordable housing sites; and storytelling through virtual images, holograms, voices and sound. Work is expected to begin in 2025.

LEBANON

Bridgetown Natural Foods officials announced the company will invest \$78.3 million to expand its Oregon-based operations by locating a manufacturing and distribution facility in Lebanon, creating 219 jobs. The new facility will be Bridgetown's second location outside of its West Coast headquarters. Bridgetown's new facility will house multiple manufacturing lines, which will produce nearly 100 million pounds of the company's all-natural, organic and gluten-free snack brands annually and optimize distribution to the East Coast by shortening delivery times and decreasing shipping costs. Bridgetown Natural Foods, LLC is headquartered in Portland, Ore. The company specializes in manufacturing and distributing its innovative and sustainable food products to customers across the U.S. Upon completion, Bridgetown will employ more than 600 people across its Oregon and Tennessee plants.

MT. JULIET and SMYRNA

Schneider Electric officials announced the company will expand its manufacturing presence in Mt. Juliet and Smyrna. The company will create 355 as it locates a new facility on Maddox Road in Mt. Juliet and expand its Smyrna location with the creation of 100 new jobs. Together, both projects represent a total investment of approximately \$85 million. Schneider Electric is a global energy solutions provider that has seen unprecedented growth in the energy sector. The investment in both Tennessee locations will strengthen production capacity, allowing Schneider Electric to better meet its customer demand for energy management and automation products. Upon completion, Schneider Electric will employ more than 1,900 Tennesseans across its facilities in Franklin, Maryville, Memphis, Smyrna and Mt. Juliet.

MT. PLEASANT

Landmark Ceramics UST, Inc., officials announced the company is investing \$71.9 million to expand its tile production in Mt. Pleasant, creating an additional 78 new jobs at its North Main Street location. The expansion increases Landmark Ceramics' footprint by more than 400,000 square feet and increases its installed production capacity to 80 million square feet a year. In addition, the project includes the creation of a new logistics hub, which will be modern, highly automated and equipped with state-of-the-art technology to enhance quality, efficiency, accuracy and precision for all Landmark Ceramics' logistics services. A subsidiary of Italian-based Gruppo Concorde, Landmark Ceramics UST, Inc. is a 100%-American ceramic tile company that specializes in the production and marketing of high-quality porcelain tile from its sole location in Mt. Pleasant.

SURGOINSVILLE

Vulcan Thermal officials announced the company will invest \$5 million to construct a new manufacturing facility at 390 Phipps Bend Road in Surgoinsville. The expansion will create approximately 30 new jobs and position Vulcan Thermal in close proximity to a growing industry. Vulcan Thermal, a subsidiary of EHT, Inc., will provide heat treating services to the metal industry. Founded in 1984, and headquartered in St. Marys, Pa., EHT provides heat treatment, steam treatment and vibratory finishing, as well as inspection, packaging and related services to major suppliers in the automotive and agricultural segments. Upon completion of its 15,000-square-foot facility in Surgoinsville, the organization will employ nearly 100 people across Pennsylvania and Tennessee.

Loudon officials break ground on new water treatment plant



Officials with the city of Loudon, Loudon Utilities, Brasfield & Gorrie, and Barge Design Solutions break ground on the \$80 million water treatment plant expansion in Loudon. Pictured from left are: Josh Benton, Brasfield & Gorrie senior project manager; Loudon Utility Board Chair Don Campbell; LUB director John Cardwell; Chris Dotson, Loudon Utility Water Treatment Plant chief operator; Eduardo Adame, Loudon Utility Water Treatment Plant staff engineer and internal project manager for the expansion; LUB director Bart Watson; LUB Vice Chair Gene Farmer; Loudon City Mayor Jeff Harris; Barge project manager Kris Hatchell; Barge project engineer Luke Burris; and Barge director of projects Wendy Creek.

Springfield cuts ribbon on skate park



Officials with the city of Springfield and Kiwanis Club of Springfield celebrated the opening of a new skate park at Garner Street Park. The Kiwanis Club hosted fundraising events and matched donations to raise \$166,100 for the park over the past decade. The city funded the remaining \$53,900 of the project. The construction of the park began by Hunger Skateparks in 2023 and is accessible to the public during regular park hours. The project coincides with multiple planned upgrades to Garner Street Park which include the construction of a brand-new, ADA-compliant playground, the installation of two pickleball courts, and renovations to the restroom facilities.

Construction work progressing on new Dresden municipal complex



Construction of the new Dresden Municipal Complex is expected to be complete by the end of the year. At present, work is being done to finish the roofing and electric, plumbing, and gas utilities are nearly complete. The new complex is being constructed on the former site that was severely damaged by a tornado in December 2021. The tornado also damaged much of downtown Dresden as well as the former police and fire departments, with city leaders opting to rebuild the municipal, police, and fire complexes together in the same complex. The new complex includes offices, a courtroom, flexible meeting space, firefighter sleeping quarters, a police patrol room, evidence room, storage/records rooms, and a community storm shelter able of withstanding a tornado.

Chattanooga, Memphis, and Nashville selected for Bloomberg Sustainable Cities

Chattanooga, Memphis, and Nashville are among 25 cities selected by Bloomberg American Sustainable Cities to access federal funds to combat climate change.

Launched in March 2024, Bloomberg American Sustainable Cities is a three-year initiative to turbocharge 25 U.S. cities' efforts to leverage historic levels of federal funding to proactively build low-carbon, resilient, and economically thriving communities.

Building on the longtime leadership of U.S. cities to confront the crisis of climate change which disproportionately impacts

disadvantaged communities, the \$200 million Bloomberg Philanthropies initiative will provide deep support to selected cities to pursue transformative solutions in the buildings and transportation sectors through partnerships with PolicyLink, Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University, and Natural Resources Defense Council.

The initiative aims to ensure the participating cities – collectively representing more than 10 million people – can leverage and implement federal funds to advance local projects, especially

in disadvantaged communities historically overburdened by pollution.

The cities selected for Bloomberg American Sustainable Cities will receive support from Bloomberg Philanthropies to bolster city capacity in driving progress on climate mitigation and promoting equitable outcomes. Potential projects in the 25 cities include developing affordable energy-efficient housing, increasing access to clean energy, investing in electric vehicles and infrastructure, and more.

TML Visioning Committee holds first meeting to prepare for future

Members of TML's first-ever Visioning Committee met last month to identify ways to best position TML for the future.

The TML Board of Directors created the 17-member committee to identify issues as it relates to TML's organizational structure and challenges, mission delivery, programs and services, funding, and inter-governmental relations.

"For almost 85 years, TML has been recognized as 'the voice' of Tennessee's towns and cities, as well as the go-to organization for our state government in addressing the state's grand challenges," said Ron Williams, TML President and Farragut Mayor. "If we are to maintain, if not strengthen that unique position, we must go to work now and take deliberate steps to ensure that outcomes are successful for years to come."

Members discussed how the explosion of population growth to the state will impact cities in the next 20 years and what role should TML play now and in the future? Some areas of discussion included:

- A review of TML's marketing and communications efforts and what steps should be taken in the future to ensure our message reaches the greatest audience that works in concert with the League's advocacy program.
- Advocacy efforts should continue to be TML's No. 1 priority and should maintain a "cities first" agenda and not fall prey to partisan politics.
- Focus on telling the city story and the value municipal governments contribute to the state of Tennessee and the citizens we serve.
- Work to increase participation from all municipal officials from across the state to support the staff.
- What should the role and makeup of the TML Board of Directors look like;
- What should the role of TML's partners, stakeholders, and affiliates organization be; and
- How do we continue to fund the organization.

The Committee will continue to work throughout the year, as well as engage various TML stakeholders and partners to solicit their input on various issues, topics and challenges.

Committee members include:

- Julian McTizic, Mayor, Bolivar – Chair
- Tim Kelly, Mayor, Chattanooga
- Stefanie Dalton, Vice Mayor, Red Bank
- David Smoak, City Manager, Farragut,
- Kirk Bednar, City Manager, Brentwood
- Johnny Dodd, Councilman, Jackson
- Kim Foster, City Manager, Paris
- Joe Pitts, Mayor, Clarksville
- Mike Palazzolo, Mayor, Germantown
- Darrell Duncan, Councilman, Kingsport
- Nina Smothers, Mayor, Huntingdon
- Trey Dykes, Mayor, Newport
- Ron Williams, Mayor and TML President, Farragut (Ex Officio)
- Paige Brown, Mayor, Gallatin
- Bobby King, Mayor Henderson, (TML Past President)
- Richard Stokes, former HR Director, Spring Hill
- Blake Walley, City Manager, Savannah



Members of the TML Visioning Committee discuss their thoughts on the future of TML with Communications Strategist Tom Griscom.



From L to R, Gallatin Mayor Paige Brown, TML President and Farragut Mayor Ron Williams, and Newport Mayor Trey Dykes



Communications Strategist Tom Griscom, left, talks with Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly, right



TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes, left, and Savannah City Manager Blake Walley, right



Visioning Committee Chair and Bolivar Mayor Julian McTizic, left, and Jackson Councilman Johnny Dodd



Kingsport Councilman Darrell Duncan, left, and Germantown Mayor Mike Palazzolo, right



From L to R, Clarksville Mayor Joe Pitts, TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes, and former Spring Hill HR Director Richard Stokes



From L to R, Paris City Manager Kim Foster, Jackson Councilman Johnny Dodd, and Brentwood City Manager Kirk Bednar



From L to R, Red Bank Vice Mayor Stefanie Dalton, Clarksville Mayor Joe Pitts, and former Spring Hill HR Director Richard Stokes

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PEOPLE



Eric Bittner has been confirmed by the Clarksville City Council to become the next city attorney and will assume the role on May 1 following the retirement of longtime City Attorney Lance Baker. Bittner has practiced law in Clarksville since 1995 and has served as the city's deputy city attorney from 2021 until 2023 when he became the city risk manager. He holds a bachelor's degree in finance and a law degree, both from the University of Memphis.



Eric Bittner

Chris Cummins has been selected as the interim chief of Columbia Fire and Rescue. Cummins has more than 30 years of experience with Columbia Fire and Rescue, joining as a firefighter in 1990. He has since served as a fire engineer, driver, captain, assistant chief of suppression and retired as deputy chief of the department in May 2021. He was rehired in a part-time capacity in August 2021 and has helped facilitate FEMA/TEMA transitions, conduct training, secure grants, and implement hazard mitigation strategies.



Chris Cummins

Bruce Cureton, who served for 15 years as fire chief of the Knoxville Fire Department, died March 14, 2024, at the age of 81. Cureton served as chief from 1982 to 1997, retiring after 30 years in the fire service. Cureton was a lifetime member of the International Fire Chiefs Association. During his tenure as chief, the Knoxville Fire Department hired its first female firefighters, developed the new 911 system, and replaced 96% of the city's firefighting equipment. In addition to his work at KFD, Cureton also served in the Tennessee Air National Guard.



Bruce Cureton

Chuck Downham has been selected as the new assistant town manager and project manager for the town of Nolensville. Downham has more than 37 years of municipal management, planning, and project management experience, and joins the town of Nolensville from serving as a municipal management consultant for UT-MTAS for three years. Prior to that, he served as the assistant city administrator for Spring Hill as well as in several roles with the municipalities of Tullahoma, Collierville, and Lakeland. Downham holds a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in planning from the University of Tennessee. He is a member of the American Planning Association (APA) and Tennessee Chapter of APA, where he served as treasurer and is a member of the leadership council. He is also an active member of the Tennessee City Managers Association (TCMA).



Chuck Downham

Andrew Ellard has been selected as the new city manager for Morristown following the retirement of longtime City Manager Tony Cox. Ellard has been with the city since 2021 as its assistant manager. Prior to joining the staff in Morristown, he served as a city manager in Eagleville and held several roles with the city of Hattiesburg, Miss. He holds a bachelor's degree in public administration from Indiana University and a master's in administration from Central Michigan University. Ellard recently also



Andrew Ellard

became an ICMA credentialed manager.

Haley Elliot has been selected as the new tourism program coordinator for Visit Farragut. In her new role, she will focus on social media management, event coordination, and community outreach via the Mobile Visitor Center (MVC). Elliot is a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University.



Haley Elliot

Curtis Hayes has announced his decision to retire as mayor of Livingston after 18 years in the role. Hayes was first elected as mayor in 2006, becoming both the first African-American mayor of Livingston and the first African-American mayor in all of Overton County. A lifelong resident of Livingston, his career began with the city as a park manager at 16 before joining the Livingston Police Department. He ran for city council and was elected to that role in 2000. Hayes has been both a past board member and past-president of TML, and he was selected as the TML Mayor of the Year in 2011. He has also served on numerous public boards including Public Entity Partners, Tennessee Homeland Security, Tennessee Renewable Energy, and Tennessee Municipal Bond Fund.



Curtis Hayes

Avery Johnson, longtime vice mayor of Cleveland, has announced he will retire in May. Johnson has spent 22 years as Cleveland's vice mayor and has served on the Cleveland City Council since 1993. Johnson also retired after 44 years of service to Maytag Cooking Products in Cleveland. He is a past district director of the Tennessee Municipal League and on the regional board of the Southeast Tennessee Development District, in addition to serving on numerous boards and commissions. The city of Cleveland honored Johnson's long service to the community with the naming of Avery Johnson Park near the Blythe-Bower Elementary School, the first park in the city named after an African American.



Avery Johnson

Seth Lyles has been selected as the new police chief of Dickson following the retirement of longtime Chief Jeff Lewis last month. Lyles most recently served as assistant police chief for Dickson since 2017 and is a 27-year veteran of law enforcement. Lyles has been with the Dickson Police Department since 2000, advancing through the ranks from officer to corporal, sergeant, detective, detective sergeant, lieutenant, and administrative captain. He has served on the drug task force as a narcotics agent. Lyles holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Bethel University.



Seth Lyles

Jimmy Massengill, former mayor of Graysville, died March 20, 2024, at the age of 53. Mas-

The UT Municipal Technical Advisory Service: Serving Tennessee cities and towns for 75 years



From a staff of five in the early days to a staff of over 50 individuals today, MTAS continues to grow and evolve to fulfill its mission through a diverse range of consultative services, educational programs, and information services aimed at equipping municipalities with the necessary tools and knowledge to improve the lives of those they serve.

In what would create a unique and effective partnership that would stand the test of time, Herb Bingham, executive director of the Tennessee Municipal League (TML), introduced legislation that created a progressive concept of an agency to provide technical advice and assistance to municipalities in Tennessee.

The Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) was established by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1949 specifically to provide technical consulting services to cities and towns in Tennessee and continues to thrive 75 years later.

Once codified, MTAS was placed in the University of Tennessee's Division of University Extension with an advisory council made up of professors in the subject areas of business management, sociology, law, engineering, political science and TML's Bingham. Today, MTAS resides in the UT Institute for Public Service and is one of six agencies that serve Tennessee as part of the university's land grant mission of public outreach.

Over the years, MTAS added to the original services offered (municipal management, public works, and finance) by establishing an extensive municipal information library, fee-based codification services, and an extensive training

program for municipal officials and employees. In total, MTAS provides consulting services in the areas of finance and accounting, human resources, legal assistance, municipal management, ordinance codification, public safety (fire and police), public utilities, public works, and training.

"MTAS has existed 75 years because of a solid legislative foundation that set a purpose that is meaningful and useful to the 345 municipalities of this state," said MTAS Executive Director Margaret Norris. "I appreciate the cities and towns for their support and continued use of our services."

In fiscal year 2023, MTAS answered 37,563 requests for assistance and provided 18,139 training hours to nearly 6,000 participants. Additionally, MTAS assisted Tennessee cities and towns to realize nearly \$7,552,640 in economic impact through reducing costs and increasing revenues.

From a staff of five in the early days to a staff of over 50 individuals today, MTAS continues to grow and evolve to fulfill its mission through a diverse range of consultative services, educational programs, and information services aimed at equipping municipalities with the necessary tools and knowledge to improve the lives of those they serve.



The original legislation describes the MTAS purpose as follows:

"It shall be used for studies and research in municipal government, publications, educational conferences and attendance thereat and in furnishing technical consultative and field services to municipalities in problems related to fiscal administration, accounting, tax assessment and collection, law enforcement, improvements in public works, and in any and all matters relating to municipal government."

sengill spent more than 20 years on the Graysville City Council, serving both as mayor and vice mayor. He also spent 33 years as a firefighter with the Dayton Fire Department.



Jimmy Massengill

Chad McDonald has been appointed the first ever assistant director of Leisure Services for Cookeville. McDonald has been with Cookeville's Leisure Services for 28 years, first starting as a part-time employee and then quickly becoming the cultural arts coordinator. Since 2000, he has served as the cultural arts superintendent for the department. He has made significant contributions to the department including the use of department facilities, arts programming, and personnel management for the Performing Arts Center and Dogwood Performance Pavilion. He has additionally served as supervisor for staff at the Cookeville History and Depot Museums and manager for the School of Dance.



Chad McDonald

Bob Mullin, former mayor of Lakesite, died on April 1, 2024, at the age of 86. Mullin served on the Lakesite City Commission on and off from 1973 until accepting the position of mayor in 2004.



Bob Mullin

He served as the town's mayor from 2004 through 2010. He was instrumental in securing a land-lease for a 45-acre TVA tract for community use, beautifying the city park, and helping secure funding for home repairs and maintenance for citizens in need. Mullin also retired from the U.S. Naval Reserve as a captain and as a nuclear engineer from TVA after 33 years of service. He served on numerous boards and commissions.

Haley Smith has been named as the first communications and marketing manager for the city of Cookeville. She will report directly to City Manager James Mills and will enhance connectivity and engagement between the city and residents. Smith has five years of professional experience, most recently serving as the marketing and communications manager for Cookeville's Department of Leisure Services. Prior to that, she served as the communications and brand manager for international nonprofit Flint Global Partners, Inc.



Haley Smith

Chase Sons has been selected as the new police chief for Tullahoma after having served as the city's interim chief since No-

vember. Sons was serving as acting lieutenant before his appointment to interim chief. Sons has spent 16 years in law enforcement with 13 of those spent with the Tullahoma Police Department. He was selected following a national search with the help of UT-MTAS.



Chase Sons

Matthew Trollinger has been selected as the new town manager for Signal Mountain. Trollinger comes from Somerset, Md., where he has served as town manager since 2019. Prior to that, Trollinger served as village manager of the village of Martin's Additions, Md., for three years and as a paralegal specialist with the U.S. Department of Justice for a year. He also served as a membership coordinator with the National Rehabilitation Center in Arlington, Va., and as an academic support assistant with American University in Washington, D.C. Trollinger holds a bachelor's degree in government and political science from the University of Vermont and a master's in public administration from the American University.



Matthew Trollinger

WAUFORD

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STATE BRIEFS

Tennessee's unemployment rate dropped slightly in February 2024 to 3.3%. The 0.2% decrease from January is just above the state's all-time low unemployment rate of 3.1%, which was recorded from April through June of last year. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) reported the biggest gains were in the education and health services, business services, and government sectors with education and health services also leading the year-to-year job growth. Nationally, seasonally adjusted unemployment increased in February to 3.9%.

Tennessee is one of the top 10 states for both highest population increase and fastest population growth. The state ranked sixth for population increase with 77,513 new residents and eighth for fastest population growth rate at 1.1%. The Southern U.S. saw 87% of the population growth and is the most populous region of the country. The region has seen more than 1.4 million new residents in the past years, largely due to both internal and foreign migration. Texas saw the highest population increase, followed by Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, Arizona, Virginia, Colorado, and Utah. The fastest population growth was reported in South Carolina, followed by Florida, Texas, Idaho, North Carolina, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Tennessee, Utah, and Georgia.

With Tennessee's population swelling to 7.1 million in 2023, the state is on track to have another seat in the U.S. House of Representatives eight years from now. The seat would be the tenth for Tennessee. The largest increase has occurred in Middle Tennessee, particularly in the counties surrounding Nashville, but there has also been a population uptick in Knoxville. It would be the first time in 80 years that Tennessee added a new Congressional seat.

TN Opioid Council disperses \$80M in community grants

Tennessee's Opioid Abatement Council is releasing its [first ever community grants](#) totaling \$80,936,057.

Programs funded through the grants will support work in response to opioid addiction throughout Tennessee for up to three years.

Organizations from across the state designed programs and submitted 396 proposals during the OAC's application period last fall. Council staff and members processed, evaluated, and scored the proposals. The Opioid Abatement Council debated and approved 116 grants during a meeting in Farragut on March 18.

In meetings leading up to the grant application period, the Council decided percentages of funding to dedicate to each of six approved strategies. Final totals of programs funded in each of the areas are as follows:

- Treatment – \$32,775,972
- Recovery Support – \$18,970,500
- Primary Prevention – \$12,201,837
- Education and Training – \$8,173,701
- Harm Reduction – \$8,061,539
- Research and Evaluation – \$752,508

The 116 projects approved by the council are programs designed by 85 distinct awardees, 30 of the 116 projects are designed for state-wide reach, and about \$5.7 million of the total amount awarded is for capital projects.

"When the history of the opioid crisis in our state is written, people will look back at this date as a landmark on the road to healing the unbelievable harm done to so many families and communities," said Opioid Abatement Council Chairman Dr. Stephen Loyd. "At every meeting, we pause to 'remember our why,' and I can say that the level of thought and care put into this process truly honors the 'why' for all of our members and the countless families that have been touched by opioid addiction in Tennessee."

Funding for the community grants comes from settlements with opioid producers, distributors, pharmacies, and marketers litigated by the Tennessee Attorney

The Tennessee Comptroller's Office is looking for feedback as it begins to study the effectiveness and efficiency of Tennessee's Retail Accountability Program (RAP). The RAP was created by the General Assembly in 2012 to improve sales tax compliance among retailers of beer and tobacco products. The program has since been expanded to include nonalcoholic beverages, soft drinks, candy, and certain nonperishable foods. The program identifies retailers that underreport, either willfully or accidentally, the amount of sales taxes collected and remitted to the state. The Tennessee Department of Revenue compares reported sales of wholesalers to retailers and audits retailers that do not address noncompliance. To read the legislative brief overview, please visit the Comptroller's website at: tncot.cc/orea.

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) was awarded the National Small Business Environmental Assistance Program's Excellence Award for its Small Business Environmental Assistance Program (SBEAP). SBEAP helps Tennessee small businesses with environmental regulations. SBEAP staff recognize that small businesses are experts in their fields, but likely not proficient in understanding sometimes complex regulations. SBEAP staff are not regulators, so small businesses will not be penalized for reporting relevant environmental information when requesting assistance. The program serves as a liaison between regulatory agencies and the businesses. Their assistance activities may also include assistance internally to other TDEC divisions and collaboration with other departments such as the Tennessee Department of Agriculture.

To learn more about Tennessee's Small Business Environmental Assistance Program, [visit the website](#).

General. The settlement proceeds are first split with 15% going to local governments and 15% going to state government and 70% going to the Opioid Abatement Trust Fund.

The Opioid Abatement Fund is then split with 65% going to community grants under the authority of the Opioid Abatement Council and 35% going to county governments for approved opioid remediation activities. [The first round of direct funding to county governments for opioid abatement totaled \\$31.4M and was released about a year ago.](#)

To learn more about the Council, go to TN.gov/oac.

Congress resolves threat of a government shutdown with mixed outcomes for local government priorities

BY MICHAEL WALLACE
NLC Legislative Director

Six months into the new Fiscal Year and following four continuing resolutions to keep the government running beyond the October 1st start of Fiscal Year 2024, Congress has approved all twelve annual spending bills, which have been signed into law.

A Best-Case Scenario

For local governments, passing all twelve bills through two legislative packages was the best-case scenario in an unusually contentious appropriations cycle. The expectation for mixed results on funding levels for programs important to local governments was present from the start of the appropriations cycle due to growing pressure within Congress to address the national debt following trillions in unbudgeted emergency spending related to stabilization and recovery from the COVID-19 emergency. And this is indeed the case for FY24.

However, the looming threat of a year-long continuing resolution that locked in FY23 spending levels for all of FY24 and the worse threat of sequestration were both overcome. A year-long CR would have meant new programs would go without FY24 funding, and existing programs could not account for the costs of inflation.

TVA presents \$1.5M to Tennessee RiverLine



TVA leaders present Tennessee RiverLine, an initiative of UT Extension, with a renewed investment of \$1.5M over three years. TVA's renewed investment highlights how the missions of the Tennessee RiverLine, UT Extension and TVA align in fostering sustainability, community development and environmental stewardship. Shown from left to right are TVA interim Chief Human Resources and Administrative Officer Wilson Taylor, TVA Executive Vice President and COO Don Moul, UTIA Senior Vice Chancellor and Senior Vice President Keith Carver, TVA President and CEO Jeff Lyash, Tennessee RiverLine Executive Director Brad Collett, TVA Executive Vice President and Chief External Relations Officer Jeannette Mills, TVA Executive Vice President and Chief Financial & Strategy Officer John M. Thomas III, TVA Recreation Strategy Specialist Clay Guerry, and TVA Director of Government and Community Relations Bert Robinson.

State February revenues collections \$59.9M under budgeted estimates

Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson announced that February revenues were less than budgeted estimates.

Overall February state revenues were \$1.325 billion, which is 0.43% less than February 2023 and \$59.9 million less than the budgeted estimate.

"State tax revenues for the month of February were only slightly less than reported revenues from this same time last year despite significant environmental challenges," Bryson said. "Sales tax collections, reflecting January consumer activity, were negatively impacted by a week-long severe winter weather event that curtailed both spending and transportation. Conversely, franchise and excise tax revenues, and privilege tax receipts, both showed signs of increased growth for the first time this year."

"Despite February revenue numbers being below our budgeted estimates, we are encouraged by some of the positive signs we are witnessing. Nonetheless, it remains important for us to maintain close controls on state spending and carefully monitor continuing revenue trends."

On an accrual basis, February is the seventh month in the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

General fund revenues were less than the budgeted estimates in the

amount of \$62.3 million while the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$2.4 million more than the estimates.

Sales tax revenues were \$43.9 million less than the estimate for February and 1.68% lower than February 2023. For seven months, revenues are \$115.9 million less than estimated. The year-to-date growth rate is 0.95%.

Franchise and excise tax revenues combined were \$1.5 million less than the February budgeted estimate. For seven months, revenues are \$235.7 million less than the estimate and the year-to-date growth rate is negative 10.34%.

Gasoline and motor fuel revenues for February decreased by 5.47% compared to February 2023 and were \$5.7 million less than the February budgeted estimate of \$97.4 million. For seven months, revenues are less than estimates by \$2 million.

Motor vehicle registration revenues were \$4.7 million more than the February estimate, and on a year-to-date basis they are \$1.6 million more than estimates.

Tobacco taxes were \$0.2 million less than the February budgeted estimate of \$15.7 million. For seven months, tobacco tax revenues are \$9.2 million less than the budgeted estimate.

Privilege taxes were \$13.5 million less than the February

estimate. Year-to-date, privilege tax revenues are \$92.4 million less than the budgeted estimate and growth is negative 13.54%.

Business taxes were \$2 million more than the February estimate. For seven months, revenues are \$3.2 million more than the budgeted estimate.

Mixed drink, or liquor-by-the-drink, taxes were \$1.6 million less than the February estimate, but year-to-date revenues are \$2.5 million more than the budgeted estimate.

All other tax receipts were less than estimates by a net of \$0.2 million.

Year-to-date revenues for seven months were \$437.6 million less than the budgeted estimate. General fund revenues are \$441.2 million less than the estimate, and the four other funds total \$3.6 million more than estimates. The year-to-date growth rate is negative 0.92%.

The budgeted revenue estimates for 2023-2024 are based upon the State Funding Board's consensus recommendation from Nov. 28, 2022, and adopted by the first session of the 113th General Assembly in April 2023. Also incorporated in the estimates are any changes in revenue enacted during the 2023 session of the General Assembly. These estimates are available on [the state's website](#).

The possibility of sequestration was imposed by an earlier debt limit deal to incentivize Members of both parties with the threat of an automatic 1% cut across all federal agencies. Over time, that evolved into the threat of a strikingly deep 9% to 10% cut for nearly all federal grants local governments are eligible to receive due to reinterpretations of the debt-ceiling law by Congressional and White House budget authorities. NLC member advocacy was crucial in preventing both these worse outcomes.

Overall, federal funding for FY24 adheres closely to the spending limits originally agreed to by Congress and the White House before former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy was removed from leadership.

Positive Outcomes

Positive outcomes for cities and towns include a **significant increase in HUD's affordable housing and homelessness programs** that will ensure the renewal of all existing housing vouchers despite rising costs due to inflation. Direct funding to local governments under the CDBG program was also spared from cuts, but funding for the HOME grant program was reduced. Funding for public transit decreased by two percent, but that level is sufficient to ensure funding for 96 percent of the total authorized under the Bipartisan

Infrastructure Law.

Under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the **Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving funds are level-funded** compared to FY23 at \$1.638B and \$1.126B, respectively. Of that, however, more than half—\$1.4B between the two accounts—is allocated for earmarks supporting the construction of drinking water, wastewater, and storm water infrastructure and for water quality protection. While earmarks also meet local needs, NLC's position is that funding for earmarks should be in addition to the baseline funding, not off the top.

Within the U.S. Department of Energy, **local government energy efficiency and renewable energy programs fared well with mostly level funding.** This includes the Weatherization Assistance Program at \$366M, which helps improve the energy efficiency of low-income households, and the State Energy Program at \$66M, which supports state and local energy efficiency and renewable energy programs. Additionally, **new programs from FY22 that continue to see funding includes the Local Government Energy Program (LGEP) at \$12M**, which supports local governments in implementing clean energy projects and programs, and **Energy Future Grants at \$27M**, which provides financial assistance and technical

assistance to support local, state, and tribal government-led partnership efforts that will advance clean energy program innovation.

Challenges for Local Government Priorities

Harder hits on local government priorities include an **approximately ten percent cut across the majority of Homeland Security grant programs tracked by NLC**, with deeper cuts for a handful of programs. Incremental decreases for Brownfields, Safe Water for Small & Disadvantaged Communities grants, Reducing Lead in Drinking Water grants, and Sewer Overflow Control Grants were also enacted.

FY24 appropriations also failed to provide funds for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which provides a \$30 monthly discount on broadband service for qualifying enrolled households. ACP, which was established by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, is expected to exhaust its current funding in April. Without additional funding from Congress, the more than 23 million participating households are at risk of losing broadband service. NLC's members recently sent a letter to Congress calling for immediate action to prevent disconnection of those households.

More information is available on [NLC's Federal Budget Tracker](#).

Chattanooga Builder's Blueprint program aims to create contractor pipeline

BLUEPRINT, from Page 1
said word-of-mouth has led to an additional 15 to 20 applicants with many of the current participants themselves encouraging others to look into future cohorts.

Rivera said that one of the financial challenges to the need for \$10,000 on hand is that many people hoping to become general contractors don't have the money at hand but rather tied up in their current business.

"There are so many subcontractors who hit every professional box, but that \$10,000 is what is keeping them from getting to that next level," he said. "That's what this program does. It provides them with the additional access to capital and the ability to scale up their businesses to what works best for them. That \$10,000 can then grow as much as possible. The driving goal for this is to create generational wealth for a section of our community that has not traditionally had that."

Additionally, Rivera said the application process to become a general contractor is "confusing" and "complicated" and there are a lot of myths in the contracting community about the process that must be dispelled. While there are many who have the skill set and knowledge needed to become general contractors, the lack of cash and the application process keep them from becoming officially licensed. Having the financial literacy needed to run a business is also an important focus.

Tech Goes Home has pro-

vided Chromebooks for all participants, which Rivera said is increasingly important in a world where contractors are expected to submit digital copies of bids and proposals. Without this access to technology, contractors often aren't considered for larger projects. Providing mentorship will also give new contractors connections to reach out to for advice, ideas, and support.

Rivera said the process has helped him and other city officials see the struggles some Chattanooga face.

"I think it's really eye-opening to see how some of these men with criminal records have to navigate the system," he said. "It further brings out more inequities that are in places you never expected them to be. When you aren't interacting with people on a personal level, you aren't exposed to how challenging things can be to navigate. It has been sobering to hear how things really are for them. It gives us a level of perspective that is incredible and helps ground the work we do in all our departments. The programs and initiatives you are launching have to fit in with people's lived reality."

Allowing a diversity of contractors will help Chattanooga as the city continues to grow.

"There is a shortage of general contractors statewide, and especially a shortage of minority general contractors," he said. "When you look at the level of growth that is occurring in the Greater Chattanooga area and our



By creating a pipeline of homegrown contractors, Chattanooga is also helping invest back into the community. Locally-based contractors already have relationships in the community and will want to reinvest in the neighborhoods they come from.

need for affordable housing and the large-scale buildings that are going up, we want everyone to diversify who they are contracting with for those developments. For us, there is a huge market need that is only growing as we expand. For us to be able to prepare and bring up parts of our community so our residents can actually participate from and benefit in that growth, you have to provide assistance to help them get over those hurdles. They are very, very capable."

By growing a base of con-

tractors from traditionally underserved communities, Rivera said these contractors can then in turn help bolster the parts of Chattanooga they come from.

"Right now, we also have a shortage of general contractors willing to work with our non-profits, to do remediation to keep housing online, or build the types of affordable housing we need," he said. "There is no one better to do that work than people who already live in the neighborhoods these projects will serve. They

know the neighborhoods and the community, because they come from them. It makes total sense to have them build the housing Chattanooga most needs. We are putting development dollars right back into the local economy and are building housing types that people throughout our city needed the most. There is also a sense of pride there. You take an extra level of career and attention to detail if you know the person who is going to move in."

Supreme Court largely sides with public officials in social media case

COURT, from Page 1
personal photos and expressing his opinions separate from his role as city manager, the court ruled that by deleting and blocking Lindke, Freed had, in fact, exercised his own free speech rights rather than violating Lindke's.

The page in question had been started by Freed as a personal Facebook page and continued to contain many personal postings despite Freed taking the page public and listing himself on the page as a public official once being hired as city manager.

However, the ruling still opened the door for the *Freed v. Lindke* ruling to be revisited by the Sixth District. Barrett noted that the situation could be interpreted differently if Lindke could prove the censorship was connected to Freed's official duties as city manager and not based on personal decision. She also cautioned that public officials who fail to keep their personal accounts clearly designated as personal may be subject to sharper scrutiny.

In the California case, *O'Connor-Ratcliff v. Garner*, came out of the Ninth District Court and had aligned with rulings in Second, Fourth, and Eighth Courts. This ruling argued the opposite, that officials who post public or government



The Supreme Court ruling noted that the lines are often blurred between what is public and what is private when it comes to social media accounts run by elected officials and government employees. Public officials whose social media accounts publish information related to their jobs can further blur those lines and face sharper scrutiny for their online behavior.

information on their private accounts have then made that account an open government forum and thus violated First Amendment rules by deleting and blocking comments.

The case involved two public school parents who claimed that two school board trustees had vio-

lated their First Amendment rights by blocking the parents for posting repetitive comments regarding race relations in the school district. The accounts for the two school board officials had originally been created as campaign accounts but were later used to provide information,

communicate about, and solicit input on school board activity.

The court did not comment on *O'Connor-Ratcliff v. Garner* but instead sent back an unsigned ruling to the Ninth District to reconsider following the ruling on *Freed*.

Bethany Vanhooser of Nashville law firm Spencer Fane said officials should note that the Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit is still reviewing the *Freed* case in light of the recent Supreme Court opinion, and that there could be further changes.

Under the current framework, a social media account is determined to be "public" or a "government" account if:

Any "state law, ordinance, or regulation" compelled a defendant to maintain the account or page

The page is "designated by law as one of the actual or apparent duties

of his office"

Government funds are used in the maintenance of the page (including the use of government computers or materials)

Government employees are used to maintain the page, or

The page "belongs" to the office, meaning it would pass into the hands of the next holder of that office.

To ensure government officials and employees are not making themselves or their municipalities susceptible to similar suits, Vanhooser suggested having a written social media policy.

"Having a written social media policy for both use of official government accounts and for city employees is valuable, but those subject to this policy must be trained and knowledgeable about it," Vanhooser said. "Putting such a policy in place can help educate employees about what can and cannot be done on both government-run and private accounts, but those who do not follow the policy can create more legal troubles. Remember that while the Supreme Court's decision in *Freed* has articulated a new framework for evaluating similar cases, the ultimate decision and application may be more nuanced once the Sixth Circuit reviews this case."

No loan is too large or too small



The Town of Oakland closed a \$7 million public building authority loan with the Tennessee Municipal Bond Fund to finance water and sewer projects. The town has used TMBF programs since 2021. Pictured are Town Recorder Yvonne Bullard, Mayor H. Michael Brown, TMBF Marketing Representative Justin Hanson and Town Manager Harvey Ellis.



The City of Loretto has used the TMBF loan programs since 2021. The most recent closing was a \$2 million public building authority draw loan to be used to finance various public works projects. The loan was provided by a local bank, Bank of Frankewing in Pulaski. Pictured are City Recorder Jennifer Krushenski, Mayor Steve McMaster and TMBF Marketing Representative Kevin Krushenski.



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Local governments must be proactive about AI revolution

AI, from Page 1
brarian and a researcher to explain the difference between using a search engine and the use of AI. A search engine, like a librarian, can easily retrieve, catalog, classify, organize, manage, and provide information, but the user must do the research themselves. AI is more like a researcher, solving problems, predicting trends, collecting organization, analyzing, and interpreting data.

Computer or machine learning AI is when a computer recognizes patterns and starts to learn how to do so without being programmed. This type of AI is often used in content recommendations, credit card fraud detectors, and for traffic prediction.

Generative AI or GenAI creates something new like video, audio, text, and 3D models. This model learns patterns from existing data and then uses that knowledge to general highly-realistic and complex content. Examples of this include the text generating program ChatGPT and the visual-generator DALL-E.

RISK AND REWARDS

Like with any technology, there are inherent risks to using AI. As much of the information AI systems are mining comes from humans, Benson said innate biases in data may lead to AI generating biased results.

There is also a concern around the lack of transparency some AI uses where it is unclear to users where the data sources are coming from or how the program is making its decisions. The security of AI models against cyber attack has also been a concern.

"There is concern that AI is vulnerable to attack where they can manipulate data to deceive the model," Benson said. "What if you were on Amazon and a hacker was able to get into the site and change the review system so no one star reviews would appear. That would change your decision. If a malicious actor can manipulate the model, that is not necessarily clear to us."

AI also raises concerns about privacy concerns, especially with data mining.

"When you put information into an AI tool, that information becomes part of its data set," Benson said. "I would never, and I would encourage you to never, put any personal information or sensitive information into that tool. Anything you wouldn't put on a billboard you should not put into this tool. Even if you are dealing with a very specific issue, do not



AI is already in use in cities across the country, whether officials realize it or not. Chat features on 311 services, autocorrect and autosuggest features, and spam filters in email all use AI.

use names, emails, or any information that can be tracked back to you or a private individual."

Some city employees may already be using AI features to help write a response email to a concerned citizen or create a presentation to their city board. Benson said it is helpful to proactively educate employees about how to safely navigate AI and to [set a policy](#) about how, where, when, and why employees can use the technology.

"You may not know it, but you may have people in your organization using these tools every single day," he said. "They may not be up front about it. You need to set some governance and some messaging before your data gets exposed by someone who has not been told not to use that information before there is a security breach. I was talking about AI in a team meeting, and a recent hire informed me they had used Chat GPT to write their cover letter. Even if you are not pushing AI right now, I bet there are people in your organization using it."

Benson said AI generation shouldn't be the end result but rather a point from which the project starts.

"AI is not giving us a result, it is giving us a starting point," he said. "You have to understand it, look through it, and challenge it. There needs to be a fair amount of caution when you use this technology. I would really challenge us to think of this as an assistant to help you get a result that you thought of rather than a blanketly trust. If someone doesn't really seem right, you have

to challenge it. I would never copy paste anything I got from AI without reading it, challenging it, and verifying it yourself."

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND AI

There are many ways local governments can use AI, and many already are without even knowing it. Benson said being rerouted on Google maps due to a road accident is one way AI is being used and an example of how cities themselves can use AI for their own purposes.

Data collected for Google Maps includes historic traffic data, current traffic data, weather conditions, road quality, and even mentions of accidents on social media to better predict arrival time. Benson said many of this same data can also be used by cities. AI can use data such as trash volume, location, collection times, weather forecasts, and road conditions to help a city's public works department optimize waste collection routes to save both time and fuel.

Municipal planners have used data regarding population growth, housing development, transportation, and traffic data to make models of where their cities are growing and how to best target areas they want to grow. AI can also be used for citizen engagement from automated complaint systems through 311 that can help determine where the majority of complaints are coming from in the city so the municipality can proactively address issues in that area such as road conditions, litter, and crime.

NATIONAL BRIEFS



Inflation climbed 3.2% in the year through February, faster than predicted and a sign it may be difficult to control. The Consumer Price Index – on which inflation rates are based – had only climbed up by 3.1% in January but is still down from an overall high of 9.1% in 2022. However, this is still above the 2% considered normal prior to

the pandemic. After stripping out more volatile food and fuel costs. Inflation came in at 3.8%, faster than economists had forecast. Increases in airlines fares, car insurance prices, and housing also increased.

The Biden administration has opened applications for a new grant program that will priori-

tize greenways and rail-to-trail projects, allowing both for the building of new trails and the improvement of existing ones. Part of the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Congress has authorized \$45 million for the program. Known as the [Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program](#) (ATIPP), the closing date for applications is June 17.



April 14: Nolensville Buttercup Festival
This annual Historic Nolensville event features food, games, art, vendors, and more.

April 20-21: Beersheba Springs Trails and Trilliums
Bring your children or grandchildren to enjoy two full days of outdoor fun, brought to you by the staff of Cumberland Forest School.

April 20: Johnson City Art Struck Festival
Bring the whole family and enjoy hands-on activities such as wand making, mask decorating, bucket drumming, a weaving fence, and marbled paper making.

April 20: Lawrenceburg Bands, Butts and Beer Music Fest
Enjoy this backyard BBQ cook-off while enjoying the music of Kendal Franks, Nick Holt, Charles Mott, David Phillips and possibly more.

April 23-30: Paris World's Biggest Fish Fry
In addition to all you can eat catfish you will find parades, carnival, rodeos, catfish races, dances, arts and crafts to name a few.

April 27-24: Dresden Tennessee Iris Festival
The Iris Festival has grown into an event anticipated and looked forward to by people of all ages.

April 27: Franklin 40th Annual Main Street Festival
This festival is a highly-anticipated, annual tradition held in historic downtown.

April 27: Gallatin Square Fest
This annual spring event in Downtown Gallatin and has grown in size to more than 200 vendors, attracting more than 25,000 visitors.

April 27-28: South Pittsburg National Cornbread Festival
This quaint southern town will host a celebration of cornbread, often considered the cornerstone of southern cuisine.

May 3-4: Sweetwater Blooms, Bluegrass and BBQ Festival
Join us for blooming topiaries, live bluegrass music, over 90 vendors, carnival, BBQ competition, food trucks and much more.

May 3-4: Tellico Plains Tellico Trout Festival
This event gathers fishermen, sports enthusiasts, and families for fun, education, food, entertainment and outfitter services for the trout industry.

May 4: Dickson Old Timers Day
Since 1958, this festival honors the heritage and history of Dickson.

May 5: Greeneville Cinco de Bragco
Cycle our 23, 40, or 68-mile ride and finish to celebrate with tacos and margaritas. There will be a Kid's Bike Rodeo and a short Family Fun Ride.

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Ed Stewart, ChFC, CLU, CF Financial Advisor

Municipal cleanups help Keep Tennessee Beautiful

By KATE COIL
TT&C Assistant Editor

As weather warms across Tennessee, municipalities are conducting their own spring cleanings.

Keep Tennessee Beautiful, TML Platinum Level Sponsor and the state affiliate for Keep America Beautiful, has been working with its numerous local and municipal affiliates to conduct spring trash pick-ups and cleaning efforts as part of the [Great American Cleanup](#).

No matter size or location, Keep Tennessee Beautiful Director of Affiliate Services Kyle Howard said there are several steps that municipalities can take to start their own clean-up initiatives and build support for participation in litter removal projects year-round. Howard said communities who reach out to Keep Tennessee Beautiful can get a jumpstart on hosting their own clean-up events with ready-made kits and materials that help with everything from outreach to litter removal to disposal procedures.

"We sponsor the state-wide effort for the Great American Cleanup, and our goal is to have at least one cleanup in all 95 counties for that," Howard said. "We send out kits for anyone who registers to do a cleanup on our website. Cities can partner with their county litter grant coordinator who administers the grant from TDOT that helps tackle the litter problem in local communities. TDOT has graciously allowed part of the education funding from the litter grant to be used to join Keep America Beautiful as an affiliate. The local mayor's office can always reach out to us to see what steps they need to take. We are on the state affiliate level, which is a much lower requirement than the national affiliate. It actually doesn't cost any money to join if you do some service hours in your community or host a cleanup."

CONDUCTING A CLEANUP

As with any community effort, finding engaged volunteers willing to participate is a core part of hosting a cleanup event. Howard said identifying community stakeholders who are themselves engaged and then can help continue to build support for the efforts can help turn a one-time clean-up event into a continuing program in the community.

"I typically advise to look for stakeholders, people who benefit from a clean, green beautiful community," he said. "That could be a homeowner's association, a Rotary Club, a downtown business association who is having difficulty keeping their area clean, and volunteer groups. You really have to find passionate people, because this is really a passionate effort; it's not a glamorous job or a high-paying. Who your core group may be could vary greatly from community to community. You really need a handful of point people, because we have methods for organizing volunteers and getting them to show up. You need a person who is willing to put the work in on the local level, and having local resources at their disposal is also crucial. People who are already invested in this may just need more of a network so they don't feel like they're going at it alone. There is a real strength in the state network sharing resources so you don't have to reinvent the wheel on the local level."

Supplies are another essential part of hosting a successful clean-up. Howard said Keep Tennessee Beautiful typically sends out kits including gloves, hand sanitizer, and trash bags. He said those hosting a cleanup may also want to provide litter grabbers, especially for heavy items or unsafe items, as well as safety vests if operating near roadways.

There are also methods to identify what areas of a community might need cleaning – or more frequent cleaning than others.

"I would suggest heavily-trafficked roadways, especially those stop lights, stop signs, or bus stops where people have time to think about what is in their car and throw it out," Howard said. "We call those transition areas, and they are where you will find the most trash. Also, you can just follow the topography of your area to the lowest point. That is why river cleanups tend to get the most poundage because everything gathers at the lowest point, which is often along water."

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Safety is an essential part of a cleanup as well. Howard said Keep TN Beautiful has a [checklist for volunteer safety](#) when hosting a



Community members in Gallatin participate in a Sumner County-wide clean up event held as part of the Great American Cleanup. Keep Tennessee Beautiful, the state's affiliate organization for Keep America Beautiful, can help cities host their own cleanup events and start their own Keep America Beautiful chapters to encourage year-round beautification.



Community volunteers hold a cleanup at a vacant lot that was turned into a community garden in Jackson. After clearing out brush and trash that had collected over the winter months, volunteers also prepped the garden beds for spring planting.



Above: Volunteers with Keep Cleveland-Bradley County Beautiful conducted several community trash removal events, including this one to remove garbage and debris in and along the Tennessee River. Waterways are common areas where trash collects, and the result can be dangerous for local watersheds and water supplies.

Right: Numerous bags of trash, tires, and even a folding chair were collected by volunteers in Soddy-Daisy during a recent community clean-up event. Howard noted that those organizing community cleanups need to be aware that they will ultimately collect more than they expect and need to have a plan in place beforehand to know how and where they are going to properly dispose of what they find. Keep Tennessee Beautiful provides numerous resources on proper disposal in addition to checklists and equipment for hosting cleanup events locally.

litter cleanup that includes advice like keeping water on hand to stay hydrated, putting on sunscreen and insect repellent, and hazards to watch for during cleaning.

For special areas like riverbanks and lakes, Howard said supplies may change and Keep Tennessee Beautiful has funds set aside to help with special cleanups like these. Full Keep America Beautiful affiliates can receive up to \$10,000 to clean up waterways, areas of special concern, or to host cleanups as part of disaster recovery efforts.

"City budgets can get tied up quickly, so we like to offer special assistance to those who have taken the time to join our network and shown the network is important to them and their community," Howard said.

Before heading out for a cleanup, Howard also advises having a plan for how to dispose of what is collected – especially for items that may not be welcome at the local landfill.

"You need to have a plan for what to do with the trash after the cleanup," he said. "You need to have a vehicle to take it somewhere or know that the city or county is going to come to pick it up without charging you. That can be the

quickest way, but having a truck or something to haul away the trash is essential. You get more trash than you expect most of the time. Finding a tire or two adds up quickly. It's a nationwide issue that what you can dispose of locally varies county-to-county. Call your local landfill or look online to see if there are any resources they do not accept. We also have some resources online about where you can take certain things. Aluminum can be kept for recycling. There is also a website called Earth 911 that provides information about the closest recycling facilities near you."

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Beyond keeping the community beautiful, Howard said there are many benefits to hosting a community cleanup.

"There is actually a huge financial burden associated with litter and picking it up," Howard said. "TDOT has to spend about \$25 million a year dealing with litter, and that's taxpayer dollars that could be used much more responsibly. You will see property values drop as much as 15% in the presence of visible litter. On a more local level, it costs \$400 a mile to contract our litter cleanup.



Youngsters, including Girl Scouts, help with a community cleanup along major roadways in Columbia. Mayor Chaz Molder said tackling the area's litter problem starts with community-minded residents. "I'm grateful for their leadership, and inspired to continue the momentum," Molder said.



A riverside cleanup is held in Goodlettsville as part of efforts by local chapter Keep Goodlettsville Beautiful. Howard noted that waterways often see a lot of trash because gravity pulls the garbage to the lowest point.



In Gatlinburg, community volunteers conducted a cleanup at a local cemetery, removing debris that had gathered there.



Volunteer organizations can get that done for \$12 a mile. There is also a psychology behind the presence of litter in general. The presence of litter normalizes it as a behavior. You see litter rates go higher the more litter there is. Keeping things clean is one of the best preventative out there."

As trash tends to find its way to the lowest point, Howard said litter is also a major threat to local watersheds.

"Water made the Grand Canyon; it's extremely efficient at breaking things down," he said. "Water will break down a plastic bottle into particles so fine you will never see them, and that is why we have such a microplastics problem in the U.S. There was a German professor who swam the entire Tennessee River and took samples along his route. He found the Tennessee River had a greater concentration of microplastics than the Yangtze River in China. That was pretty shocking. If you don't want to drink it, don't litter it. It goes from the storm drain to the storm channel to your local waterway."

Community education is another important component of making and keeping a clean community.

"The awareness of the problem is extremely lacking," Howard said. "In the most recent study by TDOT of highway litter, it estimated 78% of litter is caused by negligent behavior. That means that people aren't throwing things on the ground on purpose, but three out of four pieces of litter on the highway are there by accident. You may not realize something you didn't take out of the back of your truck or an unsecured load on a shipping container has left litter. "We found a huge problem of people going too and from the local dump not securing things on their trip and it falling out. I would also encourage local leaders to participate in the litter grant program we provide for municipal police departments. Each department can receive up to \$5,000 to tackle litter, which can be used on overtime hours. It helps them to patrol problem areas and catch people in the act. We are taking applications for that now."

The [26th Annual Great American Cleanup](#) began on March 19, 2024 and runs through June 22, 2024. April is also [Keep America Beautiful Month](#). For more information and resources, visit <https://www.keptnbeautiful.org/>.