

## From the Desk of the Executive Director



### It All Comes Down to You

During its Fall Meeting, the TML Board passed bylaw changes that demonstrated its continued commitment to ensuring that TML is dynamic, fosters opportunities for service on the Board, and remains committed to the values and integrity expected by our members. The latest bylaw changes come just more than two years since the Board passed what may have been the most significant bylaw changes in its history. These changes were made with one goal in mind: to ensure that TML remains the respected voice of Tennessee's towns and cities.

Organizations can become stale, complacent, and fail to continually improve on delivery of their mission. Taking steps to avoid these pitfalls has never been more critical given how rapidly society and politics are changing. To this end, the Board has made significant changes to TML's bylaws during the last two years to ensure even greater member participation and organizational integrity. Earlier this year, the Board created a Visioning Committee to help chart TML's next 25 years. But as much as we continually work

to refine and improve TML as an organization, it all comes down to you! What makes TML effective, respected and able to deliver, depends on your participation.

To borrow from the popular UT rallying slogan, "Are you giving your all for your town or city today?" Are you making the most effective and best use of opportunities to amplify your city's voice with others via TML? Are you encouraging others, a neighboring city or colleague, to get involved and do the same? Pat Head Summitt once said, "Teamwork is what makes common people capable of uncommon results." TML is where your city and others "take to the field or court."

As 2025 approaches, make a commitment to join the team by engaging state legislators and learning from other officials by participating in TML conferences. Get others involved to do the same. And let's show everyone the truth about what makes Tennessee great - its towns, cities, and their officials all working together through TML.

On behalf of the Board and staff, we wish you the very best of the holiday season and new year!

## City leaders can help as AI linked to rise in Internet Crimes Against Children



AI is creating new ways for online predators to victimize children and teens. However, community leaders can help fight back to protect both children in their own lives and their communities.

By KATE COIL

With tablets, laptops, phones, and gaming systems under the Christmas tree, law enforcement officials are asking parents, teachers, and other mandated reporters to educate themselves about the rising risk of Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC), especially through the use of AI.

The [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#) (NCMEC) reported a 300% increase in reports of online exploitation of children between 2021 and 2023, an explosive increase verified by the UN and other agencies. Robert Burghardt, TBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge with TBI's Cyber-

crime and Digital Evidence Unit, works with [Tennessee's Internet Crimes Against Children](#) (ICAC) Squad based at the Knoxville Police Department. The task force brings 72 affiliates from municipal, county, and state government together to investigate these crimes.

While some departments have their own in-house departments or officers to deal with this work, the task force works with other local law enforcement to investigate ICAC cases and make arrests. Since he started with the unit in 2017, Burghardt said the unit has gone from seeing 30 cases a month to over 100 a month in 2024. The types of crimes and the profile of

See ICAC on Page 6

## State Funding Board approves conservative budget projections; growth still expected

By KATE COIL

While policy changes have led to a decline in revenue, Tennessee's state budget is expected to rebound amid positive economic growth.

The four present members State Funding Board - Comptroller of the Treasury Jason Mumpower, Secretary of State Tre Hargett, State Treasurer David Lillard, and Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson - unanimously approved a conservative revenue estimate for Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026.

The projected FY24-25 budget will range from \$21.76 billion on

the low end to \$21.84 on the high end with a general fund of between \$18.72 billion on the low end to \$18.83 on the high end. Depending on the outcomes of the FY24-25 budget, projections for the FY25-26 budget could range as low as \$22.037 billion on the low end to \$22.309 billion on the high end with a general fund of \$18.907 on the low end and \$19.211 on the high end.

Finance and Administration Director of Budget David Thurman said [staff recommended](#) the following:

- A range of -1.68% and -1.34% for total taxes in FY25
- A range of -2.5% to -1.91% for

## TN Senate, House caucuses elect candidates for leadership roles

Republican and Democratic caucuses in both Houses elected key leadership positions for the upcoming 114th Tennessee General Assembly set to convene Jan. 14, 2025. Randy McNally, R-Oak Ridge, was nominated by his party to serve a fifth term as the lieutenant governor and speaker of the Senate. McNally has served in the role since 2017 and represents State Senate District 5.

"Our conservative majority has transformed state government and delivered freedom and prosperity to the people of Tennessee," McNally said. "And the people have responded by giving Republicans in Tennessee and across the nation a true mandate."

Rep. Cameron Sexton, R-Crossville, won the Republican nomination to serve a fourth term as speaker of the House. He has served in the role since August 2019 and represents State House District 25.

"I truly appreciate the support and confidence my colleagues have placed in me to continue in my role as speaker," Sexton said. "Tennessee continues to grow and thrive because of our conservative philosophies and our dedication to preserving Tennesseans' freedom and liberty. We will continue fighting for solutions that strengthen and protect Tennessee families and communities."



Sen. Randy McNally  
Lt. Gov. and Senate Speaker



Rep. Cameron Sexton  
House Speaker



Sen. Jack Johnson  
Senate Majority Leader



Rep. William Lamberth  
House Majority Leader

The entire General Assembly will vote to confirm the nominations for lieutenant governor and speaker of the house when they convene in

January. **Senate Republican Caucus** Other leadership positions in See **LEADERS** on Page 4

## Rising tech costs, employee pay among concerns across state budget hearings



From left to right, Tennessee Chief Operating Officer Brandon Gibson, Gov. Bill Lee, Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson, and State Budget Director David Thurman listen as department heads make their budget presentations.

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

Rising technology costs and increased wages needed to recruit and retain employees were among top concerns expressed by multiple state departments as part of Gov. Bill Lee's yearly budget hearings.

As data is migrated to the cloud, use of AI is expanded, security concerns increase, and technology companies like Microsoft renew their enterprise licensee agreements, state departments including Human Resources, TennCare, General Services and Revenue reported needing extra funds to maintain current software to continue to provide essential services or upgrade to cloud services.

Tennessee Chief Operating Officer Brandon Gibson noted she was concerned by the cost increases for the basic technology required by state departments. Stephanie Dedmon, the state's Chief Information Officer, said this is an unfortunate fact of doing business as these enterprise licenses support basic functions like email and office suites.

"We are equally concerned about the rising cost and do try to push back with the vendors," Dedmon said. "We are pretty much in line with other states, which doesn't help us in terms of dollars but does show we are negotiating as best we can. Technology is so much more part of what we do to deliver our services than it was 10 or 15 years ago, and it's frustrating how the vendors

want more and more." Additionally, departments including Disability and Aging, Labor and Workforce Development, General Services, TDOT, and TBI noted they were requesting funds to increase employee wages or provide training and promotional opportunities in order to attract and retain workers.

### FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Financial requests from the department included funds for moving data to the cloud, utilizing AI for more efficient operations to automate business enterprises and security functions, and technology maintenance.

The department also noted that Violent Crime Intervention Fund (VCIF) granted \$150 million to 267 local law enforcement agencies to provide funding and support through 2027. So far, the program has helped fund 2,800 investigations, 50 positions, and 9,600 overtime hours, 142 vehicles, and 1,300 radios. Other budget requests include:

- \$5 million non-recurring for modernization to replace the Edison software in the next three to five years
- \$3 million non-recurring to create a business gateway that will take information currently spread across 12 different government websites into a single site
- \$5 million non-recurring for contractors to do remediation and \$500,000 for tools to help meet new federal accessibility

See **BUDGET** on Page 5

### Review Committee.

Despite a strong underlying economy, Thurman said spending patterns are slowing and COVID relief funds are running out. As a result, previously accelerated economic growth is slowing.

He said policy changes have also impacted growth, which accounts for the projections made for FY26. The fact that the state has used recurring funding for non-recurring items means that the state is cushioned against slowing growth.

Thurman also noted that a "normal" growth range is between 3-5%. See **FUNDING** on Page 5

# NEWS ACROSS TENNESSEE



## CHATTANOOGA

Avail Enclosure Systems, part of Avail Infrastructure Solutions (AIS), announced the company will expand its presence in Southeast Tennessee by expanding manufacturing operations at its Chattanooga facility. Avail Enclosure Systems will create 82 new jobs and invest more than \$10 million through the move, which will help the company meet its growing customer demand for modular e-houses. Avail Enclosure Systems is part of Avail Infrastructure Solutions, the global provider of application-critical equipment, highly engineered technologies, and specialized services to the power generation, transmission, distribution, and industrial markets. From fully integrated electrical enclosures and custom switchgear to medium and high voltage bus systems, the company's proven solutions meet the most exacting requirements for safe, reliable operation. Headquartered in Suwanee, Ga., Avail Infrastructure Solutions has over 1,750 employees and operates through a global network of 15 strategically located manufacturing facilities.

## CHATTANOOGA

Mayor Tim Kelly has announced Chattanooga has applied to be the first National Park City in North America. [National Park Cities](#) are long-term grassroots movements for everyone making their city greener, healthier and wilder with cities adopting the [National Park City Charter](#) with the goal of rethinking how cities and their park spaces work together. Presently, only London and Adelaide, Australia, have received the designation with the organization setting a goal of 25 new National Park Cities around the world by 2025. Chattanooga joins a list of applicants including Glasgow and Southampton in the U.K. and Breda and Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

## COLLIERVILLE

The town of Collierville has opened the expanded disc golf course at Hinton Park. Holes 10 through 18 of the course are now open for play after the expansion project began in May. The project was completed primarily by the dedicated Hinton Park grounds maintenance crew alongside their regular day-to-day duties. Despite an initial estimate of \$320,000 for the project, the town managed to complete the expansion for approximately \$41,000, staying well within the approved budget of \$75,000. Cost savings were achieved through in-house labor and strategic cost management, making the new course a reality for the community at a fraction of the expected expense.

## COOKEVILLE

Moody's Investor Services has upgraded Cookeville's bond issuer rating and outstanding General Obligation Bonds to Aa1 from Aa2. The city requested the rating on its \$10 million General Obligation Bonds, Series 2024 which were concurrently rated by Moody's as Aa1. This comes as Cookeville continues to experience remarkable growth as shown by a recent surge in building permits. The city issued 106 permits in October 2024, the second highest amount issued in a single month and just short of the city's all-time high of 107 set in January 2024. A significant portion – 63 in total – were for single family or multi-family homes accounting for \$19.4 million in investment.

## DICKSON

Officials in Dickson have broken ground on a new higher education

facility in the community. Nashville State Community College officials joined local leaders to break ground on the community college's new Dickson County Center for Higher Education, which will serve as a permanent campus for both NSCC and the Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) Dickson's nursing and allied health programs. Additional space will be used to house the local non-profit the Jackson Foundation. The multi-million-dollar, state-of-the-art facility will feature work/study areas for students, a student lounge, learning resource center, multipurpose room, and a Welcome Center that will help students with financial aid, admissions, and other concerns. The facility is being constructed on nine acres of land donated by the TriStar Horizon Natchez Emergency Room, which is also next door to the facility.

## MEMPHIS

AAON, Inc. (NASDAQ: AAO) will expand its presence to Tennessee, creating 828 new jobs and investing \$238 million in Memphis in the next five years. AAON has selected the former American Snuff facility in Memphis to house its new HVAC production operations. The expansion to Tennessee will position AAON to better serve its customer base, and upon completion, the 787,000-square-foot facility will produce various types of thermal management equipment for data centers under the BASX brand, including air-cooled systems, computer room air handlers (CRAHs), direct evaporative coolers and liquid cooling distribution units (CDUs). Based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, AAON, Inc. is a global leader in HVAC solutions, employing nearly 4,000 people worldwide. The company engineers, manufactures and sells premium HVAC equipment consisting primarily of semi-custom and custom rooftop units, data center cooling solutions, clean-room systems, packaged outdoor mechanical rooms, air handling units, makeup air units, energy recovery units, condensing units, geothermal/water-source heat pumps, coils and controls. Founded in 1988, AAON is a world leader in HVAC solutions for commercial and industrial indoor environments.

## OAK RIDGE

Centrus Energy Corp. is investing \$60 million to resume using and expanding centrifuge technology at Oak Ridge with the goal of making the U.S. more energy-independent. The company recently secured the \$2 billion in contracts needed to make them eligible for a portion of the \$3.4 billion from the U.S. Department of Energy for building up U.S.-based energy supplies. Centrus presently employs 140 people at their Oak Ridge facility and hopes to expand those numbers. The company also has a facility in Ohio. Meanwhile, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) approved construction permits for Kairos Power's Hermes 2 Demonstration Plant, which will be built adjacent to the company's first reactor at the Heritage Center Industrial Park in Oak Ridge. Hermes 2 is the first electricity-producing Gen IV plant to be approved for construction in the United States. The facility will include two test reactors, that will use molten salt to cool the reactor cores, and a shared power generation system.

## SEVIERVILLE

Three new blueway landings

## Crossville breaks ground on fire station



Officials with the city of Crossville have broken ground on the city's new Fire Station No. 2. Located at Interstate and Cottonpatch Drives, the new station will replace an aging facility on Industrial Boulevard. The \$3.55 million project will allow more efficient service to the community with a projected completion date of late 2025. The new station will provide a ladder truck, engine, hazardous materials trailer, various support equipment, and a squad to Crossville's growing north side. A third fire station is also in the planning process for the city.

## East Ridge breaks ground on multi-purpose center



Officials with the city of East Ridge were joined by representatives of Pillar Construction, ASA Engineering, and HK Architects to break ground on the new East Ridge Town Center's Multipurpose Event Center. Serving as a vibrant new space for community events and activities, the multi-purpose 12,000 square foot facility will include 7,072 square feet of event space. Boasting 20-foot ceilings, the event space will have glass doors that can be opened when weather conditions allow. Two smaller multi-purpose rooms, a catering kitchen, outdoor entertainment space, and indoor public restrooms are also included in the plans. City leaders envision a space that will host farmer's markets and craft shows to wedding venues, birthday parties and everything in between.

## Knoxville opens supportive housing for veteran housing



Knoxville's Community Development Corporation (KCDC), along with business and community leaders and residents, officially opened Liberty Place, a 32-unit permanent supportive housing development for veterans. The residential development, which is located at 3627 Division St. in West Knoxville, is KCDC's first housing site specifically for veterans and provides one-bedroom units to veterans who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. The fully furnished units, which include 16 fully accessible ADA units, provide utilities and conveniences such as walk-in showers and on-site maintenance. Liberty Place residents are participants in the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) voucher program, a joint effort between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to move veterans out of homelessness and into permanent housing. The VA also will have offices onsite to offer case management services to residents that include coordination of medical services and community resources.

have been opened to the public in Sevierville. Part of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan approved by the Sevierville Board of Mayor and Aldermen in 2018, the landings on the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River provide safe, ADA compatible access for kayakers, canoers, small boat anglers, and others. The three landings are part of five landings dubbed the "Rivers and Ridges Experience" that will provide

new recreational opportunities to both residents and visitors. The project has been financed through a combination of private donations, grants from the state of Tennessee, and matching funds from the city.

## SPRING HILL

The city of Spring Hill has received an AA+ long-term rating on both its \$57 million series 2024 general obligation bonds and retained the same rating on its outstanding

debt from S&P Global Ratings. The credit rating agency also described Spring Hill's financial outlook as "stable." The ratings will help as the city moves forward with several capital improvement projects including a new police department headquarters and fire station. Spring Hill previously made the jump to "AA+" in 2022, a rating it has sustained since.

# WAUFORD

J. R. Wauford & Company, Consulting Engineers, Inc.

# Ready sites can set cities apart for industrial development

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

As Blue Oval suppliers and other industries begin to open facilities in Tennessee, there are several steps municipalities can take to ensure local industrial sites are ready for business.

Jonathan Gemmen is the senior director with Austin Consulting, the firm that provides the consulting work for the Select TN Certification Program as well as the state's Property Evaluation and Site Development Grant programs. Since 2015, the company has reviewed more than 200 sites in 60 counties for TNECD and seen the certification of more than 70 sites under the Select TN program.

At a recent Blue Oval Community Impact meeting, Gemmen detailed ways cities can ensure their sites are ready to meet the needs of industry and manufacturing, giving them a competitive edge over others.

While Blue Oval is located in Stanton, Gemmen said that the supplier chain may reach further out into Tennessee than even the 50-mile radius around the plant, especially as suppliers have already landed in Clarksville and Lawrenceburg. Additionally, the flood-prone land around the Mississippi River in Arkansas means Tennessee's higher ground is a safer bet.

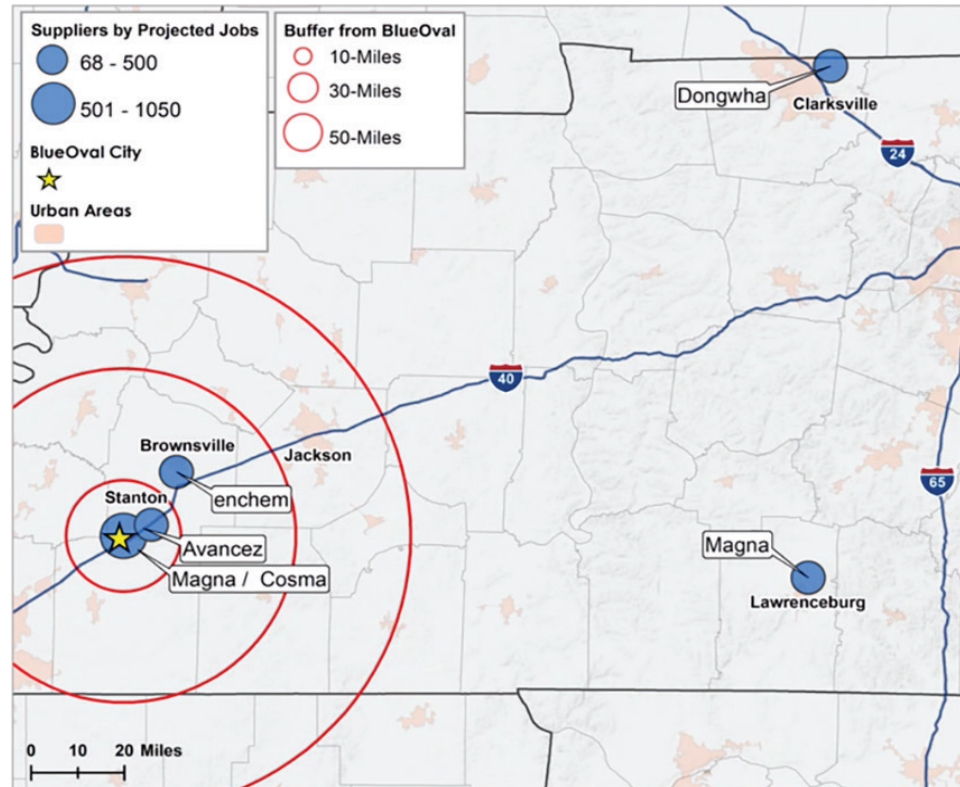
Gemmen noted many communities have already done much of the preliminary work they need to prepare for industrial development, such as taking advantage of state-sponsored development programs. He advocated for communities to continue having strategic discussions around smart growth and revisiting past property evaluation reports for ideas as well as how to move forward with infrastructure and community improvements.

Often, a company's locations strategy focuses on transportation, available sites, utilities cost, freight costs, sustainability, and if there is room for expansion. When it comes to specific sites, they will look at labor market analysis, property evaluations, infrastructure, availability of sites and buildings and operating costs such as real estate, labor, transportation, utilities, and taxes.

Once they have narrowed down their top regions or sites, the company will then look into deep dive evaluations on topics like site feasibility, zoning, pre-development approvals, permitting,



Construction is still underway at Blue Oval City in Stanton with more suppliers expected to come on board. With new industrial prospects on the horizons, Tennessee cities can position themselves for manufacturing wins.



Miles from Metaplant	Number of Projects	Jobs Created	Capital Investment
10-miles	2	1,551	844 Million
30-miles	1	190	152 Million
50 or more	2	318	270 Million

Present locations of Blue Oval City and Blue Oval suppliers.

environmental and geotechnical surveys, and other studies.

Some of the most critical operation conditions determined by location include labor market sustainability, customer and supplier

proximity, utility availability, government support, business climate, and regulatory environment.

Gemmen said companies will be more willing to compromise on some cost-savings versus others.

Studies have shown that companies are less likely to want cost variance for workforce but are more willing to see variance in costs for freight and electric power.

"If the labor market is not there, it's an ongoing headache for usually many plant managers," he said. "You get a lot of turnover when a bad decision is made location-wise for labor. If you have to, on the financial side, you will bite the bullet and spend \$2,000 an acre on real estate. A Fortune 500 Company that can honestly afford it, they are going to do it if they know they are in a sustainable labor market where there won't be issues."

Gemmen said there is a misconception that incentives help land projects, when really an incentive can serve as a "tie-breaker" putting one site above another if both are equally suited.

"The one thing that is essentially 100% in your control is having a good site and preparing to get utilities there," he said.

Companies will also look for different things in an undeveloped site than they would an existing structure or spec building. Winning sites are flat and cleared of

major vegetation, have utilities on site with sufficient capacity, have transportation access (road/rail), suitable soil drainage, zoning suitable for use, compatible neighbors, free of contamination if previously used, environmental documentation, and a willing seller at a competitive price.

For a site with an existing building, Gemmen said the focus is often on the layout or design of the building, if the building has multi-functional space and is in functional condition, there is room for circulation of trucks at docks, there are separate entrances for employees and truck traffic, and includes a clear height of at least 28 feet, environmental documentation, and a competitive asking or lease price.

"I was at the airport in McKenzie in 2015 where they had a bunch of existing buildings, mostly empty," he said. "There were mostly storage buildings and had all closed down about 15 years before. It was really tough to see. When you have existing buildings, it can be easy come, easy go. They can shut down. But when someone needs to get up and running quickly and need a building, you can meet that need. I went back to McKenzie just before the pandemic and all those buildings were full. They were older buildings, but when you need to be up-and-running as a supplier it's a real advantage to have a building."

One essential factor in a site's viability - regardless of if there is a spec building or not - is its utility infrastructure, including electricity, water, natural gas, and sewer. Gemmen said competitive rates, reliability and redundancies in ensuring delivery of utilities, and low impact fees can give a competitive advantage to communities.

Unreliable utilities, such as electric grids damaged by weather events or water resources known for going dry, can mean higher production costs.

"You may have a substation right next to the site, but is the transmission line that services that substation resistant to straight line winds?" Gemmen said. "It's not just about utility cost; it's about do you have the distribution voltage, how much capacity is at the substation, and how much capacity is in the line by the site. Time is money when an operation is down and you have employees who are going to get paid either way. Electric shut down due to loss of power can cost tens of thousands of dollars per hour in lost revenue."

## Opioid Abatement Council addresses underpayment, discusses funding strategies

By KATE COIL

The Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council will be correcting an underpayment of county allocations in a future disbursement.

During the Oct. 15 meeting of the Government Operations Joint Evaluation Committee on Judiciary and Government, Mary Anne Hagan, legislative senior auditor with the Tennessee Comptroller's Office, reported an audit of the committee uncovered one audit finding and another observation linked to that audit finding.

Hagan said this is the first audit the council has undergone since its inception and included the areas of membership, open meetings requirements, annual reporting requirements, policies and procedures, disbursements to counties, and its approved use list. She said the audit finding regarded the need for the council to "develop written policies and procedures to govern its operations and ensure it meets its vision."

"While the council has developed informal policies and procedures as the need arose, it has not yet documented those policies and procedures when used," Hagan said. "Without written policies and procedures, management risks noncompliance and inconsistent operations, such as those identified in the observation in our report."

Hagan said the council miscalculated the 2024 county disbursement of funds resulting in an underpayment of about \$5.6 million as a result of management not implementing a consistent method of calculating county disbursements. Council staff informed the auditors of this miscalculation due to a "math error" after altering the planned county disbursement schedule at the request of the attorney general.

The underpayment will be



Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council Executive Director Mary Shelton, left, and Chairman Dr. Stephen Loyd, right, address the Government Operations Joint Evaluation Committee on Judiciary and Government.

corrected in the upcoming 2025 payments to counties. Hagan said the council staff used inconsistent calculation methods between 2023 and 2024 disbursements, including administrative expenses and interest earned. Hagan said auditors recommended formal written policies to prevent this error from happening in the future.

"The council is expected to receive more than \$833 million in opioid settlement funds for those settlements already entered into, \$227 million of which have already been by May of this year," Hagan said. "From the 70% of settlement proceeds the council receives and directs the use of, the council has made disbursements of the required 35% to the counties in 2023 and 2024 for a total of about \$62 million to date."

Mary Shelton, executive director of the Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council, said she and

the council were in complete agreement with the findings and the suggestions of the auditors. She said the council hired a senior policy analyst in September, who has since drafted upward of seven policies. Shelton said she would bring at least two of these to the committee for review in December.

"Additionally, to ensure we are in statutory compliance, our office will consult with the attorney general's office before finalizing any policies," she said. "We are also in agreement with the observation of implementing a consistent method of calculating the county disbursements. Our accountant, who began employment in July, is currently assisting with the crafting of policies and procedures to accurately outline the payment methodology of the payment disbursement to the counties. When the counties receive their letters of agreement in February 2025 for the 2025

disbursements, the accompanying information will include information about the \$5.6 million underpayment and that those dollars are also included in those payments."

Shelton noted the council is also implementing program and fiscal monitoring, performance outcome measures, and semi-annual reporting for counties and grantees. She also further broke down the funds disbursed from the fund, noting that in addition to the \$62.4 million allocated to county use nearly \$1 million had been distributed to contracted users.

Sen. Janice Bowling, R-Tullahoma, inquired about what type of treatment programs are being funded, expressing concerns about medical treatments that replace opioids with other drugs.

"I hate to see Perdue Pharmaceutical and other companies laugh all the way to the bank as they are being paid to provide more

opioids to treat the opioid epidemic that they - from all the evidence and all the research - knowingly started," Bowling said.

Shelton said several strategies are being funded through the trust fund, including primary prevention, recovery support, research, education, and training.

Dr. Stephen Loyd, chairman of the Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council, said the council tries to fund all strategies that help individuals in recovery.

"I am a product of abstinence-based recovery myself, and I am a big believer in that," Loyd said. "Everybody's path to recovery is different. A lot of times, it looks like Big Pharma created the issue and now they have the answer for it. Unfortunately, for some people, their use is such that the only way we can keep them alive is medication. That needs to be available to those who needed, but we also need to fund abstinence-based strategies."

More importantly, Loyd said he has found recovery is more successful when social determinants of health are addressed.

"We are talking about housing, job training, and the things people need to put their lives back together, he said. "Our council has been pretty sensitive to that. If you look at the breakdown of our awards from the first round of grant money, you will see a lot of the funding went to those social determinants of health. The goal for everyone is to get to live like I live. A lot of them can get there if we give them the resources; some of them can't. We have to use a discerning eye to find the path that is right for them."

With a move from Vice Chair John Ragan, R-Oak Ridge, and a second from Bowling, the committee unanimously voted for a four-year extension for the council.

# TN Senate, House caucuses nominate candidates for 114th leadership roles



Sen. Ferrell Haile  
Senate Speaker  
Pro Tem



Sen. Ken Yager  
Republican Caucus  
Chairman



Rep. Pat Marsh  
House Speaker  
Pro Tem



Rep. Jeremy Faison  
House Majority  
Caucus Chair

## LEADERS from Page 1

the Senate include Sen. Jack Johnson, R-Franklin, as the Senate majority leader; Sen. Ken Yager, R-Kingston, as the Republican caucus chairman; Sen. Ferrell Haile, R-Gallatin, as Senate pro tempore; and Sen. Dawn White, R-Murfreesboro, as secretary.

## House Republican Caucus

House Republicans have selected their leadership for the next Tennessee General Assembly, electing Rep. William Lamberth, R-Portland, as House majority leader; Rep. Jeremy Faison, R-Cosby, as caucus chairman; Rep. Pat Marsh, R-Shelbyville, as speaker pro tempore; Rep. Johnny Garrett, R-Goodlettsville, as majority whip; and Rep. Kip Capley, R-Summertown as secretary.

## Senate Democratic Caucus

Senator Raumesh Akbari (D-Memphis) has been re-elected to serve a second term as Senate Minority Leader. Senator London Lamar (D-Memphis) will continue her service as Caucus Chairwoman for a second term; and Senator Charlane Oliver (D-Nashville) has been re-elected as Vice-Chairwoman.

## House Democratic Caucus

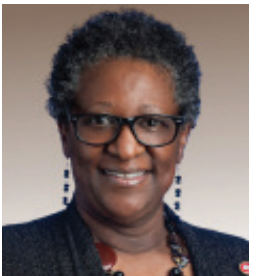
The House of Democrats has elected everyone to their leadership position for the 114th General Assembly. Rep. Karen Camper, D-Memphis, was elected House Democratic Leader; Rep. John Ray Clemmons, D-Nashville, as Caucus Chair; Rep. Larry Miller, D-Memphis, as Leader Pro Tempore; Rep. Sam McKenzie, D-Knoxville, as Democratic Whip, and Rep. Yusuf Hakeem, D-Chattanooga, as Secretary



Sen. Raumesh Akbari  
Senate Minority  
Leader



Sen. London Lamar  
Caucus Chair



Rep. Karen Camper  
House Minority  
Leader



Rep. John Ray Clemmons  
House Minority  
Caucus Chair

**114th Tennessee General Assembly  
Convenes  
January 14, 2024  
12 noon (CST)**

# Longtime city mayors Joyner, Coleman, retire from service

Two long-time West Tennessee mayors are celebrating their retirements after a combined 46 years of service to their communities.

Collierville Mayor Stan Joyner has retired after 26 years of service while longtime Medina Mayor and past TML Board Member Vance Coleman retired following 20 years of service.

Joyner's retirement was celebrated at Collierville's Historic High School, which Joyner graduated from and was instrumental in acquiring for the city to be renovated into an office space for the town government. Built in 1935 and constructed with CCC labor, the building was named in Joyner's honor at the ceremony as the Stan R. Joyner Municipal Annex.

At his retirement ceremony, Collierville Mayor-Elect Maureen Fraser recalled Mayor Joyner's "generous sharing of knowledge and insight, as well as his desire to simply do the job and not be in the spotlight." She thanked him for his guidance over the years and in the years to come. Former Town Administrator James Lewellen noted Mayor Joyner's "generous gift of his time to the Town of Collierville, and his decision to put criticism aside and to always do what he felt was the right thing for the town".

Tennessee State Representative Kevin Vaughn, Shelby County Commissioner David Bradford, and Tennessee State Senator Brent Taylor all thanked Mayor Joyner for his friendship and guidance over the years and wished him a wonderful retirement.

Coleman was first elected mayor of Medina in 2004 and served 12 years on the TML Board as District 7 Director and an At-Large Director.

"At the time, Medina was on the verge of enormous growth projections, and I was approached to run for mayor and provide an optimistic outlook for building a strong community while maintaining our hometown environment," Coleman said of his initial run for mayor. "I have met a lot of great people in the last 20 years including U.S. Rep. David Kustoff, UT President Randy Boyd, all the governors during this time span, but for me, the individuals I have had the privilege to work with is personally the most interesting. Their dedication and commitment to the city has always amazed me.

"All these extraordinary, wonderful people have become part of my family. I am so blessed to have had these friends by my side. On a special note, Kim Gilley (Medina's city recorder) has been with me from Day One. Thanks, Kim, for making me a better person and mayor- always helping point me in the best direction. To all my co-workers, thank you for all you do for me and the city. Words cannot express what each of you mean to me."

During his tenure, Medina has grown from a city of 969 residents to one of more than 6,000. Coleman this growth presenting his biggest challenge as mayor, which was "preparing the city for the growth



Collierville Mayor Stan Joyner



Medina Mayor Vance Coleman

by implementing policies and procedures to safeguard building standards, putting the right people in place to inspect and oversee the growth, and partnering with state and local officials to secure grant funds to supplement the cost of amenities such as parks, infrastructure, traffic signal, fire and police equipment so that the taxpayers did not have to bear the burden."

Coleman said he has had the pleasure of working with "extraordinary people" throughout the state of Tennessee, Gibson County, and all the surrounding area mayors on projects like parks and recreation, economic development, and overhauling the city's buildings and codes.

"One of my most memorable moments was the day we walked into the new municipal building," he said. "We were meeting with the potential investors of Food Giant, prior to them committing to building in Medina, they came to visit our new municipal building when it was just a footprint with sand and a layout. It was so important for them to see that we were investing in our city, just as we were encouraging them to do. It was a known fact that we could not expect anyone to invest in our city if we did not show our dedication to investing in Medina ourselves."

Coleman hopes his successor gets to build the same relationships with city employees and citizens that have made his own time as mayor such an honor.

"To the next mayor, I say stay positive, stay proactive and always put Medina first, which in turn puts the citizens first," Coleman said. "Always remember, you don't do it alone. It takes a team to make this city work. I want to thank the citizens of Medina for entrusting me as mayor for the last 20 years. It has been an honor to serve and has been my most important and challenging job of my career. A special thank you goes out to my wife, Kay, as she has stood by me and supported me through this journey."

# Tullahoma receives two awards for Urban Forestry



The Tennessee Urban Forestry Council (TUFC) has recognized two outstanding arborists from Tullahoma for their exceptional contributions to urban forestry and community sustainability. Lyle Russell, community engagement officer and arborist for the city of Tullahoma, has been named the 2024 Government Employee of the Year, while Monty Hawkins, utility arborist for the Tullahoma Utilities Authority, has been honored as the 2024 Private Professional of the Year. These prestigious awards celebrate the dedication, expertise, and innovation demonstrated by urban forestry professionals across Tennessee. Russell has led initiatives to enhance the city's green spaces, improve tree health, and engage the community in sustainable urban forestry practices. His leadership in planting and maintaining native tree species has significantly contributed to the city's ecological health and aesthetic appeal. Hawkins has been instrumental in implementing innovative strategies to balance utility maintenance with urban forestry preservation. Pictured: Russell, left, and Hawkins, right.



## PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

**Randy Evans**, chief of the Cookeville Police Department, will retire on Jan. 31, 2025, after more than 41 years of service to the department. Evans began his career as a patrol officer with CPD in 1983 and was promoted to sergeant in 1990, lieutenant in 1998, captain in 2007, major in 2010, and has served as chief since 2013. During this time, he has been involved in various aspects of policing from patrolling the city, serving as a departmental instructor, SWAT commander, shift sergeant, shift lieutenant, and uniform services commander.



Randy Evans

rience – including serving as deputy finance director and chief accountant for the city. Reed most recently served as CFO for the Nashville Symphony and also spent more than 23 years in financial roles with the Tennessee Titans, including nearly 12 years as its CFO. Reed holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of Tennessee.



Jenneen Reed

**Chase Sons**, chief of police for the city of Tullahoma, has been accepted into the 293rd Class of the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Va. The elite training program is by competitive nomination with less than 1% of law enforcement officers worldwide earning the honor. Sons started with the Tullahoma Police Department in 2011, has served as Tullahoma's interim chief since November 2023 and was officially hired as police chief in February 2024. Under his tenure, the department has implemented several initiatives such as school resource officers in each city school, updating and upgrading patrol cars, crime prevention, and fostering positive relationships with Tullahoma residents.



Chase Sons

**Cliff Mann** has been selected as the new stormwater coordinator for the city of Farragut. Mann has served as an engineering technician with the city since 2023. Prior to that, he worked for the city of Knoxville as a stormwater engineering technician and then as a stormwater specialist with Blount County. Mann holds a bachelor's degree in aviation management from MTSU and has also worked in the aircraft engine maintenance industry.



Cliff Mann

**Jenneen Kaufman Reed** has been unanimously confirmed as the finance director for Metro Nashville. Reed takes over the role from interim finance director Kevin Crumbo and comes to the city with 30 years of experience

**Capt. Nick Surre** has been selected as the next assistant police chief for the Brentwood Police Department. Surre has 18 years of experience and will take over

from new Chief Jim Colvin in February. He has been with the Brentwood Police Department since April 2007, serving as a crime scene technician, field training officer, patrol sergeant, patrol lieutenant, and tactical response team commander before being promoted to captain of the patrol division in 2002. Originally from Lake Orion, Mich., Surre earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Saginaw Valley State University.



Nick Surre

**David Townsend** has been selected as the assistant chief of police for the Collierville Police Department. Townsend has been with the department for 29 years and has held numerous leadership roles, most recently as inspector over the Community Services Division. He is a graduate of session 249 of the FBI National Academy and has received multiple awards and commendations in his career, including the prestigious Leadership Collierville H.R. Houston Award. Townsend takes over the role following the death of previous Assistant Chief Jeff Abeln earlier this year.



David Townsend

**Will Wiley** has been selected as the new public works director for Farragut. Wiley comes to the city from Poway, Calif., where he served as the assistant director of public works maintenance and operations for the San Diego suburb. Wiley will take over following the retirement of longtime Public Works Director Bud McKelvey, who is staying through the completion of renovations to Farragut Town Hall and the Campbell Station Inn in 2025. A native of Michigan, Wiley moved to California in 1985.



Will Wiley



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# State Funding Board approves conservative budget projections; growth still expected

FUNDING, from Page 1

Economic leaders told members of the Tennessee State Funding Board that the state has seen strong growth in sales tax collections, but policy-related drops in franchise and excise collections, predictions that the economy will see a soft-landing for inflation, and uncertain geopolitical concerns may impact the economy.

Bruce is projecting a decrease of -1.2% this upcoming fiscal year due to policy changes and growth of 2.7% in the next year, while Newhard predicted a more optimistic forecast with growth of 0.6% for the upcoming fiscal year and 4.54% for the next.

The state Department of Revenue is projecting 1.6% revenue growth this fiscal year and 2.2% next while the Fiscal Review Committee projected 0.79% growth this fiscal year and 3.17% in the next. The new franchise and excise tax policy is estimated to have eliminated 11.54% and 17% from revenue projections. Officials noted that the economic future for the state could prove riskier because of geopolitical situations in Europe and in the Middle East as well as if federal domestic policy changes post-election.

All four groups of economic experts agreed recent policy changes will lead to a decline in state revenues, the days of double-digit growth for state revenues are over, and that the state is in an enviable position for unemployment. Population and job growth is expected



From left to right, Tennessee State Funding Board members Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson, Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury Jason Mumpower, Tennessee Treasurer David Lillard, and Tennessee Secretary of State Tre Hargett

to slow and there remains a gap in the state's workforce that may not be filled.

Bruce noted that there is a 64,000 gap in the workforce participation rate, meaning there are many more open positions than people seeking employment. This may be because of factors like a geographic disparity between where these jobs are located and where those seeking employment live as well as factors such as many of those moving into the state doing so for retirement. The workforce participation rate also does not count retirees, full-time

students, stay-at-home parents, or those who work gig economy jobs, such as driving for Uber or Lyft.

In his projections, Bruce said the state can expect slow but real growth with Tennessee's economy projected to do better than the national average. Tennessee's individual per capita income is also rising to meet the national rate. Bruce said the present rate for Tennessee is \$62,229 per year while the national average is \$69,810.

Newhard expressed concern that housing costs may also be impacting the state's growth, es-

pecially as median home prices in Tennessee were higher than the U.S. average and all adjacent states save Virginia – which is somewhat of an outlier. While listings are beginning to return to pre-pandemic levels, he noted mortgage, rent, and other housing costs are eating into sales tax revenues. Many Tennesseans have taken on debt or taken money out of savings for housing, and owning a home remains one of the best ways to build wealth.

Both the Department of Revenue and Fiscal Review Committee officials noted strong growth in sales

tax with policy-related declines of 17% in franchise and excise tax. The Department of revenue has projected 5% growth in sales and use taxes next year and 3% the following year. Sales tax will remain high as prices remain high.

Prices for basic goods are expected to remain high as the U.S. typically does not see deflation of prices once they have inflated. Jeff Bjarke, director of research for the revenue department, noted that there have only been two instances of deflation in the U.S. economy in the past 60 years.

## Rising tech costs, employee pay among concerns across state budget hearings

BUDGET, from Page 1

- standards
- \$2 million non-recurring for storage refresh for FTI data.

### GENERAL SERVICES

Ongoing capital projects from the department include:

- The \$425 million Multi-Agency Law Enforcement Training Academy (MALETA) in Nashville on track for a ribbon cutting in 2026
- A new, 126-bed Tennessee Veterans Home in Arlington for West Tennessee at the former Aging and Disability Campus
- Funding for six THP headquarters offices being constructed across the state
- A new TBI lab and office in Knoxville with the current TBI facility being repurposed for the Department of Health
- Construction of Blue Oval Wastewater plant

### TNECD

Officials with TNECD noted the state has seen \$38 billion in capital investments – half of which was in rural communities – in the past six years. In that same time span,

TNECD has landed 633 projects, close to half of which are in rural areas. The \$76 million invested in the state's site development program has led to the creation of 460,000 jobs and \$1.6 billion in capital investments. Nearly 60% of investment in the state occurred in rural Tennessee. The department has also seen success with the \$700 million invested in broadband and the \$4 million in placemaking grants awarded to nearly 60 projects.

Commissioner Stuart McWhorter noted that many companies investing in Tennessee are putting more investment dollars in equipment upgrades and facilities rather than creating new positions, often doing more production with less personnel. He said this is particularly true of advanced manufacturing.

Budget requests from the de-

partment include:

- \$45 million with \$17.2 million recurring for Rural Development projects such as site development, Main Street programs, placemaking programs, and downtown improvements. A new program – the Grant Opportunity or GO Fund – will provide grant matches for distressed counties applying for federal funds.
- \$25 million non-recurring for Fast Track and Entertainment Commission
- \$2 million recurring for the Entertainment Commission
- \$63 million non-recurring research and innovation requests including:
- \$10 million for SBIR/STTR matching funds
- Tennessee Technology Advancement and Tennessee Innovation Exchange pilot program to create partnerships with the state's research universities to improve corporate research and development collaboration
- \$25 million non-recurring for the REV program with ORNL
- \$5 million for West Tennessee/Blue Oval City planning

### TDOT

Tennessee spends less than half of the budget of peer states like Florida and Texas and is in the middle of the pack on gas tax, but revenues are slowing and not keeping pace with inflation, particularly the 20% inflation on construction costs. As the state continues to attract business and residents, investments must be made in infrastructure. At present, the gas tax is only growing by 4%.

Much funding is needed to keep existing roadways in a state of good repair with the majority of those fundings going to bridges and pavements. The state presently is putting more money into repair projects and is still able to do less projects than previously. The longer it takes to complete a project, the more expensive that project becomes. Other

highlights include:

- The single-largest TDOT project remains the replacement of the I-55 Bridge in Memphis
- The first Choice Lanes will come online on Interstate 24 in mid-2026.
- A \$50 million non-recurring request to help in Hurricane Helene recovery that will provide low-interest loans to help local governments tap into match funds for state and federal dollars
- An \$8 million budget request for spot safety as federal funds are only provided reactively to safety needs and Tennessee has recoded 1,300 fatalities on roadways in past three years. The funds will address a safety project backlog.

### TBI

TBI Director David Rausch said that 50 scientists have been added to TBI labs and that turn around for sexual assault kits has gone from 45.4 weeks up to 13 weeks with an ultimate goal of all crime lab returns being done within eight to 12 weeks. He also noted that TBI technology investments and its new aviation unit have proven vital, especially during the Hurricane Helene efforts, to identify flood victims and perform search and rescue functions. Budget requests included:

- Increased personnel, including 29 positions for victims' services and seven new intel analysts. Rausch noted an increase in cybercrime is leading to a need for additional personnel, particularly new staff positions to deal with Internet Crimes Against Children as no new personnel have been added to that area since 2011.
- Four positions to create a second state aviation team
- Funds for digital storage and technology to help with fentanyl and meth detection, which will both protect agents in the field and help with lab backlogs.

- The development of real-time crime centers in major municipalities which will serve as hubs to help clear violent crimes and provide intel analysis.
- A pilot program in Knoxville that will test wastewater for drug use similar to that used to test wastewater for the presence of COVID-19. The pilot program will be deployed on high school and college campuses and can also help narrow down homes where drug manufacture and dealing may be taking place.

### DOH

With two-thirds of Tennessee counties without a hospital that provides maternity care, the department is developing telehealth programs for medical and mental health care. There are presently 31 counties involved in these programs.

The Department of Health is also working to establish a Center of Excellence to help develop resources and best practices to address the loss of medical providers, both hospitals and private providers, in rural communities.

The information hub will also develop research grants and programs to provide solutions to the often-unique problems different communities face.

### DISABILITY AND AGING

With nearly 20% of Tennesseans soon to be retirement age and East Tennessee being the top retirement destination for retirees in the Southeast, funding requests from the Department of Disability and Aging have included senior-focused programs such as:

- Expanding seed money for rural transportation options for seniors, particularly in more rural municipalities and counties;
- Providing center grants;
- Grants for downpayments and housing renovations for seniors and those with disabilities;
- Programs that provide community support of seniors,

- particularly programs that help navigate dementia; and
- More funding for inclusive playgrounds. A grant program in 2024 received 84 applications, but only seven of those could be funded.

### OTHER DEPARTMENTS

- The Department of Revenue noted that of the 120,000 taxpayers eligible for the \$1.6 billion in franchise and excise tax refunds, 41,400 had claimed their refund, totaling \$865 million.
- TDEC announced six new state parks are expected to come online in the near future and the \$28 million Tennessee Water Education and Training Center at UTIA's Lone Oaks Farm is expected to be complete in 2026. The "wet center" will provide opportunities for hands-on training programs in hydraulics, hydrology, erosion, and flood management.
- TEMA is requesting funds to deploy Mesonet across all 95 counties. The program provides a network of real-time, automated weather stations for improved weather monitoring, severe weather warnings, and emergency response.
- TDIC said construction is underway at the new residential burn building for training with completion expected in six months.
- Labor and Workforce officials noted that Tennessee is in a unique position where there are more employers seeing talent than people seeking employment. The reason for this gap may also be because the workforce participation rate does not take into account full-time students, retirees, participants in the gig economy, or stay-at-home parents. Additionally, external factors such as housing, transportation, and childcare.

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# City leaders can help as AI linked to rise in Internet Crimes Against Children

ICAC, from Page 1

both perpetrators and victims are also changing.

“Coming into it, this seemed like a white male crime, but now it’s just anybody,” he said. “We’ve arrested teachers, police officers, pastors, and there is really no certain type of criminal. Sextortion is also becoming huge post-pandemic, and that mainly focuses on 14-17 year-old boys because boys are more apt to send out nude photographs than a female. Of all the CSAM [child sexual-abuse material] in the world, the majority are still girl victims because it’s usually a male crime, but needless to say, there are tons of male victims out there, too.”

While companies are getting better at finding and reporting inappropriate images on servers, the fact that more people are on the internet and have more ways of accessing the internet also makes it easier for predators to connect and groom victims. Burghardt said predators know where to go to meet underage victims online and will often convince victims to follow them to another site before exploiting them.

The advent of AI is also changing the landscape of ICAC, and Burghardt said the majority of new photos he is seeing have used some AI technology.

“A lot of the AI cartoonish pictures we see are infants, and a lot of the AI-created pictures we are seeing you can’t even tell that it is a fake photograph,” he said. “That is how good the technology is getting. I do a lot on the dark web, but I’ve even noticed AI sites on the clear web where these guys are online all day, every day creating CSAM. They are literally bragging about what they created with each other in chatrooms.”

AI has also added frightening new capabilities for predators, allowing them to use seemingly innocent photos for dark purposes. While before a predator might solicit a naked photo, Burghardt said AI capabilities mean this step is no longer needed.

“It’s so easy now; you just click a button and can turn anyone nude,” he said. “Know whatever your post on the Internet is out of your hands, and people can do whatever they want with that photograph. If you just Google AI to nude photos, there are tons of sites you can subscribe to. Some even have where you can throw a link to Instagram account in, and it will generate photos from that account. I can go on your Facebook page, grab a picture of your child – whether it’s an infant or a 17-year-old – and instantly turn that into an AI image where I can put that child’s head on a photograph of CSAM.”

The ability to create these images from ones innocently posted online is driving the rise in sextortion reports.

## Take It Down

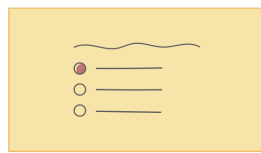
**Having nudes online is scary, but there is hope to get it taken down.**

Take It Down is a free service that can help you remove or stop the online sharing of nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit images or videos taken of you when you were under 18 years old.

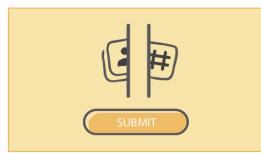


### Here’s how it works:

Visit [TakeItDown.NCMEC.org](https://TakeItDown.NCMEC.org) and click on “Get Started”.



Answer a few simple questions.




Select the image or video on your device that you’re concerned about.



Take It Down will assign a unique digital fingerprint, called a hash value, to the image or video.



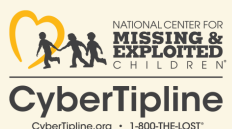
The hash will be shared with participating online platforms that can use it to detect copies of these images or videos on their services and take action to remove the content or limit the spread. This all happens without the image or video ever leaving your device or anyone viewing it, and you don’t have to share any personal information.



Remember, losing control of your image could happen to anyone, and you’re not alone. **For more information about how NCMEC can help, visit**

[TakeItDown.NCMEC.org](https://TakeItDown.NCMEC.org)

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This is an example of the Take It Down flier that NMEC created to give underage victims of exploitation help in reporting and scrubbing the Internet of unwanted images. A Spanish version is also available and a companion site exists for images taken of those over 18. Placing this flier in bathroom stalls at schools, public libraries, and other places children might visit allows victims to report crimes anonymously using the QR code.

“They don’t even have to reach out to a kid now,” he said. “They will randomly find a kid online, find a photograph of that kid, make a nude image, and then reach out to the kid and say ‘hey, I’ve got your nudes.’ The kid never did anything. They then threaten to send that photo to all his friends and family, and these kids feel trapped. They don’t know who to turn to or who to tell. They don’t think anyone will believe they didn’t take that photo.”

Once online, an image there is forever, and once posted, an image may circulate for decades. NCMEC said that less than half of exploitive still images and less than a quarter of videos on the web are unique, meaning discovering a unique image may mean a child is presently in danger.

“Unfortunately, those photos will still be circulating long after we’ve passed away,” Burghardt said. “When NCMEC reports a tip, they will mention if they have never seen that photo before. That

means there is a new victim out there we have to identify. When that happens it’s a priority, and we put everything down to start working that case over any other. We will then report it back to NCMEC.”

AI technology is also being used to combat CSAM production. Those catching predators are also utilizing AI technology, both to identify children in images and to trick predators into think they are talking to children.

“Whatever the bad guys are using, law enforcement is using too,” Burghardt said. “If I want to pose undercover, I may take a photo of myself and make myself into a ten-year-old.”

At present, Burghardt said there is a difference in how AI-generated images are prosecuted. Taking a picture of a child in-person is production of child sex abuse material, but work is presently being done to add AI-image generation under the definition of creation. Burghardt encouraged any local

officials or residents who want to back such a bill to contact their state legislators and voice their support.

“The only way you are going to defeat this entire issue of exploitation of children is education; we can’t arrest our way out of it,” Burghardt said. “If you can stop the communication part, you will get rid of a lot of the crime. Even if a local police department or school doesn’t have a lot of education themselves on this, they can go to NCMEC’s website and download free presentations and materials to educate teachers, kids, parents, and the public.”

Burghardt said he would like to see more of these materials out in public, to help educate and start conversations and to encourage children who may have been victims to contact those who can help. By putting up a NCMEC flier in a bathroom at a school, library, or public park, children who may be hesitant to talk to their parents, guardians, or other authority fig-

ures about being exploited can make reports directly to NCMEC.

“The overall topic is taboo,” he said. “Everyone knows about it, but no one wants to talk about it because it is uncomfortable. Even if a library or a school goes to NCMEC’s website and prints out one of their fliers to put up in the bathroom it can help. They have a flier and a website called [Take It Down](https://TakeItDown.org) where if a child has a picture or video they are worried about being out there, they can go to that website, answer a few questions, and without the image leaving their laptop or phone, the app searches across the Internet to find if that image is there. The company is then notified to take the image down. I would like to have one of those fliers in every single school bathroom stall so kids can secretly scan QR codes without everyone knowing.”

With more ways for children to access the internet, Burghardt said parents have to stay vigilant with their children’s devices and online time. He recommends parents know what games their kids are playing, find out what features those games have for themselves to see if they have chat functions, and put rules in place. He also recommends making sure children are following these rules.

“Parents have to be parents,” he said. “People worry about taking their kids’ phone and ruining their privacy, but at the end of the day, that is your phone not your child’s. When we do a search warrant where a kid is involved, we don’t ask the kid if we have permission to take their phone; we ask the parent. I think in society alone a device is an easy, quick babysitter, and even I’m guilty of it. For a lot of kids, their device and the internet is their world. It’s how they communicate to their friends. Just be aware of what is going on.”

He also recommends that children only use electronic devices in family or common areas and not while alone in the bedroom or bathroom. Burghardt said 90% of images he sees taken by a child is done in a bedroom or bathroom. He also suggests instituting rules that ban devices after dinner or at bedtime.

Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti led 31 state attorneys general in a letter to Congressional leadership urging them to pass the bipartisan [Kids Online Safety Act](https://www.kids.gov/online-safety-act) (“KOSA”), crucial legislation protecting children from online harm, before the end of the year.

The coalition letter emphasized the urgent need to address the growing crisis of youth mental health linked to social media use, with studies showing minors spend more than five hours daily online. One provision of the act would be providing parents with new tools to identify harmful behaviors and improved capabilities to report dangerous content.

## No loan is too large or too small



The City of Madisonville recently closed a \$700,500 note issued to finance the purchase of a new fire truck. The city has used the TMBF loan programs seven times since 1999. Seated L to R are: City Recorder Sherri McCrary and Mayor Scott Hunt. Standing is Steve Queener, TMBF Marketing Representative.



The Town of Tiptonville has used the TMBF loan programs three times since 1998. The most recent was for a \$1,000,000 fixed rate loan through the Clarksville Public Building Authority to renovate the Reelfoot Lake Armory Building to use as a community center for the town. A portion of the funds will also be used to renovate the town’s baseball complex. Seated L to R are: City Recorder Fran Hearn and Mayor Cliff Berry. Standing is Justin Hanson, TMBF Marketing Representative.



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## STATE BRIEFS



Tennessee's high school graduation rate broke another record in the 2023-24 school year. The rate was 92.1%, above the previous school year's record-breaking 90.6%. Clay County Schools, McKenzie Special School District, South Carroll Special School District, and West Carroll Special District each had over a 99% graduation rate while 73 districts graduated 95% or more of their students on time. A total of 78 districts also improved their graduation rates over last year with 67,232 students – 1,756 more than the previous school year – graduating. For more information on graduation rates for individual districts and schools, please visit the department's Data Downloads [web-page](#).

TNECD has announced the approval of the state's Digital Opportunity Plan. The department has been allocated \$15.8 million to implement the plan, which supports digital skilling and workforce development programs. With this approval from the U.S. Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), TNECD can begin deploying the allocated funding. TNECD's ongoing efforts to expand broadband are part of a broader strategy to ensure that all residents have access to high-speed internet by 2028, and have opportunities to develop digital skills, access high-quality tech jobs, connect to broadband enabled devices and access online learning and telehealth resources. TNECD anticipates that applications for digital opportunity grants will open in the second quarter of 2025.

Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti, alongside a bipartisan coalition of 30 state attorneys general, announced the completion of the \$1.37 billion settlement agreement with Kroger, addressing the grocery chain's role in the opioid crisis. Tennessee will receive up to \$42.9 million for opioid abatement, with payments anticipated to begin early next year. Kroger's settlement is part of this Office's ongoing efforts to hold accountable those responsible for the opioid epidemic. To date, Ten-

nessee has secured more than \$1 billion in settlements from various parties involved in the crisis, with most funds directed to the state's Opioid Abatement Fund. In addition, Kroger has agreed to injunctive relief that requires its pharmacies to monitor, report, and share data about suspicious activity related to opioid prescriptions. Kroger operates 116 grocery stores across Tennessee. You can read the settlement between Kroger and the state of Tennessee [here](#).

Tennessee's October unemployment rate remained near its all-time low and well below the U.S. rate, according to the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD). The state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 3.3% in October, an increase of one-tenth of a percentage point over the previous month. Despite the uptick, Tennessee's rate is eight-tenths of a percentage point below the national rate of 4.1%. Earlier this year, Tennessee recorded a rate of 3% — its lowest ever — three months in a row. The state's October rate of 3.3% is two-tenths of a percentage point lower than its rate in October 2023. The U.S. rate of 4.1% held steady from the month before and is three-tenths of a percentage point higher than it was in October 2023. Between September and October 2024, Tennessee employers added 2,600 nonfarm jobs. The largest increase was in the education and health services sector. The government and manufacturing sectors accounted for the next-largest increases.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee signed Executive Order 108, to establish the Duck River Watershed Planning Partnership and further the state's commitment to balancing economic growth, water resource management, and environmental and habitat conservation to ensure the long-term sustainability of Tennessee's watersheds. The Order specifically recognizes the Duck River Watershed as North America's most biologically diverse freshwater river and its critical contribution to Tennessee's outdoor recreation economy and communities as the sole water source for approximately 250,000 Tennesseans.

## Broadband, digital opportunity grants awarded to 20 cities

The state will award 20 cities part of \$101.6 million in funding as part of the second round of broadband and digital opportunity grants.

These investments will provide last-mile broadband access and digital opportunity programs to more than 97,000 Tennesseans across 75 counties. With this latest grant round, TNECD's total commitment to expanding the state's broadband infrastructure rises to \$683 million, with an additional \$132.6 million invested in digital opportunity initiatives, connecting more than 700,000 Tennesseans across 280,000 residential and business locations.

Connected Community Facilities (CCF) grants were awarded to 12 cities, who will share in funds totaling \$49.4 million. These funds will enable workforce development, virtual health monitoring, virtual education, and broadband access, all within one building for communities throughout Tennessee.

Recipients of the award include \$1.8 million for the Dandridge Municipal Library, more than \$1.38 million for Etowah, \$2 million for Kingsport, \$727,048 for Henning, more than \$1.58 million for Memphis, \$1.98 million for Mt. Pleasant, more than \$1.79 million for Newbern, \$736,200 for Oneida, more than \$1.8 million for Ripley, more than \$1.9 million for Somerville, \$609,980 for Sweetwater, and \$2 million for Whiteville.

Broadband Ready Communities (BRC) grants were awarded to eight cities, who will share in \$1.6 million. These funds will support community-based digital skills training and deliver the technology necessary to equip communities with digital adoption resources.

Recipients of the grants include \$45,956 for Baxter, \$100,000 for Clinton, \$94,763 for Dayton, \$100,000 for Dunlap, \$100,000 for Knoxville, \$21,782 for McMinnville, \$100,000 for Sparta, and \$94,763 for Spring City.

## Tennessee October revenues \$30.1M less than budgeted estimates

The Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration announced that revenues for October were \$1.5 billion, which is \$22.6 million more than October of last year, but \$30.1 million less than the budgeted estimate.

The total growth rate for the month was 1.53 percent.

General fund revenues were \$27.1 million less than the October estimate, and the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$3.0 million less than the estimates.

On an accrual basis, October is the third month in the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

"October's total tax receipts fell below budgeted expectations for the month but showed an increase compared to October 2023," Bryson said. "Sales tax revenues came in slightly below estimate, though they reflect

nearly \$60.3 million in adjusted growth from last year's reduced tax base. Corporate tax revenues, or franchise and excise taxes, also missed estimates, but fuel taxes, realty recordation and transfer taxes surpassed monthly expectations.

"Despite the modest revenue growth in October, we are only slightly above our year-to-date estimates. As a result, we will closely monitor revenue and spending trends for the remainder of the fiscal year."

On a year-to-date basis, August through October, total tax revenues are 1.40 percent greater than the budget estimate, or \$72.4 million above expectations. When compared to this same period last year, total tax revenues have grown 1.51 percent or \$77.8 million.

General fund revenues are

## 30 municipalities awarded share in \$26.6M in CDBG funds

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee and Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner Stuart C. McWhorter recently approved \$26.6 million in Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), which will assist communities with infrastructure improvements and health and safety initiatives.

"Forty new communities are increasing the quality of life for Tennesseans through these crucial infrastructure grants, and I look forward to seeing the benefit and economic growth this funding brings to their regions," said Gov. Lee.

The allocation of CDBG funds is based on priorities set through the public meeting process at the local community level. The CDBG program is funded through HUD and administered in Tennessee by the Department of Economic and Community Development. Funds are available for water and sewer improvements, health and safety projects and other improvements to enhance the quality of life in Tennessee's rural communities.

In addition to traditional community improvement and safety projects, funding was also made available for community development projects, such as sidewalk and walking trail improvements, street paving and community centers.

"Having the right infrastructure is essential to the work we do as a department because it can be the deciding factor in a company looking to expand or locate in Tennessee," said Commissioner McWhorter. "The CDBG program is crucial to TNECD's rural and community development efforts, and we are proud to announce additional funding today that will

City	Project	Amount
Allardt	Fire Protection	\$320,695
Big Sandy	Water System	\$585,619
Bolivar	Fire Protection	\$420,000
Cowan	Water System	\$546,000
Cumberland Gap	Fire Protection	\$282,750
Ducktown	Copper Basin Utility District Water System	\$1,000,000
Erin	Water System	\$697,379
Greenfield	Water Meter Replacement	\$622,168
Harriman	Sidewalk Improvements	\$840,419
Huntsville	Town Park Improvements	\$704,060
Jamestown	Sewer System	\$702,691
Lafayette	Sewer System	\$1,000,000
Loretto	Water Treatment Plant	\$609,009
Mosheim	Wastewater Treatment Plant	\$1,000,000
Mount Carmel	Fire Protection	\$420,000
New Johnsonville	Sewer System	\$419,240
Niota	Water System	\$1,000,000
Oliver Springs	Water System	\$516,000
Oneida	Library Improvements	\$907,100
Paris	Eiffel Tower Park ADA Accessibility	\$717,600
Parrottsville	Fire Protection	\$84,000
Parsons	Regional Community Park Stormwater Improvement	\$1,000,000
Pulaski	Fire Protection Improvements	\$420,000
Sneedville	City Park Improvements	\$831,580
Sweetwater	Community Center Improvements	\$1,000,000
Tazewell	Park System Improvements	\$487,898
Tracy City	Fire Hall Project	\$1,000,000
Tusculum	Pedestrian Safety	\$1,000,000
White Pine	Sewer System	\$496,986

enable new growth in 40 communities statewide."

Each application was support-

ed by the community's senator and representatives in the Tennessee General Assembly.

## 18 municipalities awarded downtown improvement grants

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee and Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner Stuart C. McWhorter announced that 18 Tennessee Main Street and Tennessee Downtowns communities are recipients of Downtown Improvement Grants.

More than \$4.76 million in Rural Economic Opportunity funding is being awarded to improve structures in Tennessee Downtowns and Main Street communities. Grants were awarded to organizations that illustrated the need for improvements and the ability to execute an effective design plan for building facades, wayfinding signage, gateways and streetscapes. As part of the program, each new grant recipient will be required to match 25% of the funding received.

Communities receiving Downtown Improvement Grants are:

- Columbia, \$300,000
- Cookeville, OperationCityscape, \$255,000
- Covington Economic Development Corporation, \$300,000
- Cumberland Gap, Guardians of the Gap LLC, \$300,000
- Fayetteville, \$225,000
- Main Street Greeneville, \$300,000
- Jackson Downtown Development Corporation, \$300,000
- Jonesborough, \$104,494
- Downtown Kingsport Association, \$300,000
- Downtown Maryville Alliance,



More than \$4.76 million in funding was awarded to 18 downtowns

- \$233,027
- Morristown, \$300,000
- Main Street Murfreesboro, \$300,000
- Oneida, \$202,775
- Somerville, \$300,000
- Tellico Plains, Monroe County, \$235,128
- Tracy City, \$214,005
- Trenton, \$300,000
- Winchester, \$300,000

"I'm excited to see more Tennessee communities secure funding

to help restore and revitalize their downtown districts," said TNECD Main Street Director Kim Parks. "These grants will help stimulate economy, tourism and job creation for years to come."

To be eligible for a Downtown Improvement Grant, communities had to submit an application and be a designated Tennessee Downtowns or Tennessee Main Street community. To learn more about the Downtown Improvement Grant Program, visit the [website here](#).

1.45 percent greater than the year-to-date budgeted estimate, or \$61.7 million higher. Likewise, general fund collections compared to this same period last year have increased by 1.99 percent or \$84.3 million.

### Individual tax performance compared to October 2024 Budgeted Estimates:

- Sales Taxes: Below estimate by 1.11% or \$13.1million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Below estimate by 26.61% or \$21.2 million
- Fuel Taxes: Above estimate by 1.18% or \$1.3 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 1.85% or \$2.9 million

### Year-to-date performance compared to Budgeted Estimates:

- Sales Taxes: Above estimate

- by 0.95% or \$34 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Above estimate by 0.82% or \$6.4 million
- Fuel Taxes: Above estimate by 0.98% or \$3.3 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 6.04% or \$28.7 million

### Individual tax performance compared to October 2023:

- Sales Taxes: Up 4.39% or \$49.2 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Down 29.85% or \$24.9 million
- Fuel Taxes: Up 4.33% or \$4.7 million
- All other taxes: Down 3.78% or \$6.3 million

### Individual tax performance compared to August through October 2023:

- Sales Taxes: Up 5.24% or \$180.3 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Down 11.94% or \$106.5 million
- Fuel Taxes: Up 0.37% or \$1.3 million
- All other taxes: Up 0.57% or \$2.8 million

The budgeted revenue estimates for 2024-2025 are based upon the State Funding Board's consensus recommendation from November 29, 2023, and adopted by the second session of the 113th General Assembly in April 2024.

Also incorporated in the estimates are any changes in revenue enacted during the 2024 session of the General Assembly. All monthly estimates [are available on the state's website](#).

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# Going into 2025, cities plan for leaner budgets

BY DANIEL C. VOCK  
*Route Fifty*

A new report from the National League of Cities shows that city officials are preparing for a tougher budget situation, despite many indicators that local governments are in good financial health.

Nearly two-thirds of city finance officials surveyed by the group last year said they were in better shape going into 2024 than they had been entering 2023. But going into 2025, only half of the financial officers surveyed reported a similar improvement.

That wariness has led cities to use more conservative revenue estimates for the coming year, as inflation-adjusted revenue increases have started to level off after booming in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-induced recession.

Still, property and sales taxes are increasing, bolstered by a robust housing market. Local income taxes are declining, but barely. Inflation has been heading down for nearly two years and the unemployment rate remains low.

“The overall health of the economy is really in tip-top shape,” said Farhad Omeyr, the author of the report and program director for the National League of Cities’ Center for Research and Data. Property and sales taxes “do not show any signs of slowing down,” he noted during a virtual event for the report’s release, and many local governments have healthy fund reserves.

But several factors might be making local officials more skittish as they head into 2025, Omeyr said. The federal stimulus money made available through the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act will run out in the coming year, which means city officials must find new revenue sources to pay for any ongoing programs that were initially funded with those federal dollars. While most cities did not use ARPA money for ongoing initiatives, the end of that revenue source could make local officials

more cautious, he explained.

The country’s political situation could also be affecting how city officials are planning for the future. “This is an election year, so in general, elections ... always make governments think more about their future years, as policies at the federal level and state level could change.”

Lisa Cipriano, the director of budget and evaluation for Newport News, Virginia, said another factor weighing on the minds of city officials is paying off future debt for infrastructure improvements, an issue that is top of mind for Cipriano because Newport News is preparing a five-year capital improvement plan.

The city is keeping about 16% of its general funds in reserve, even though the official policy is only to set aside 7.5%.

“We have a very interesting relationship with fund balance: We don’t use it, we build it,” Cipriano said. “We don’t use it, which is very hard for an elected official to understand that you’re just banking money.”

The extra money helps the city improve its standing with bond rating agencies, but it could also help the coastal city in the event of a hurricane, a severe nor’easter or coastal flooding that could strain city resources, she said.

David Schmiedicke, the finance director for Madison, Wisconsin, said the budget for the capital city has benefitted recently from high interest rates that drove up investment returns and a tight labor market that kept city payroll expenses down. Madison has experienced high turnover.

But, he warned, neither of those were likely to last. In fact, Madison relied on federal ARPA funds to keep current services going through the pandemic and its aftermath. Now that the pandemic relief is ending, the city is asking its residents for a property tax increase in the November election because that’s the only source of major revenue that Wisconsin lawmakers allow the city to collect, he said.

City officials in Madison are also looking for other sources of revenue to supplement property taxes, Schmiedicke explained. The city imposes a monthly “urban forestry” charge on residential properties. “The idea is that there’s

a benefit from the forestry canopy, and that’s a benefit that applies to all properties in the city,” he said. “We may move that into other infrastructure areas as well.”

Meanwhile, Madison is exploring ways to use city land to build transit-oriented development, which could also improve the city’s financial situation, Schmiedicke said.

Another source of pressure on city budgets is labor shortages for municipalities.

“We refer to it as a ‘nuclear arms race’ when it comes to salaries in this area,” said Cipriano from Newport News. “It has to come to a point where we all have to agree we need to stop, but that doesn’t stop the competition with private industry.”

In Michigan, Rebecca Fleury, the outgoing city manager for Battle Creek, said the competition for workers has led to collaborations with the county or nearby municipalities.

“We’ll maintain your fire trucks if you help us with code and inspections. It’s kind of like a barter system, but [otherwise] we’re finding that we’re poaching talent from our own neighbors, and that doesn’t help,” she said. “So what can we do? Can we consolidate those services? Can we use public-private partnerships to leverage the private sector with the talent that we already have?”

“Pre-pandemic, we would have never done that,” Fleury added. “What the pandemic showed us is we better be working better together to serve our residents because our money is tight. The expectation of our residents is not lessening, it’s greatening.”

“And the pandemic created a whole other subset of vulnerable people in our communities” such as people who are unhoused, she said. “It was so much easier when we said, ‘Oh well, the county handles all types of social services,’ but that’s not the case anymore. We are seeing those social service pressures and needs within communities we hadn’t really addressed before.”

“We’re doing our best to work better together in any way that we can, leveraging each other’s dollars or partnering with private as well as philanthropic partners in our communities,” she said.

## NATIONAL BRIEFS



**Inflation increased slightly in October as predicted by economists.** The Consumer Price Index increased 0.2% for the month, taking the 12-month inflation rate to 2.6%, up 0.2% from September. Excluding more volatile food and energy prices, the core CPI rose 0.3% for the month and was at a 3.3% annual rate, as predicted. Stock market futures also increased slightly while Treasury yields fell. Shelter prices continue to be the biggest driver of inflation as energy costs remained flat and the food index in-

creased 0.2%. The readings have taken inflation further away from the Fed’s 2% goal and economists said the future of inflation is now uncertain with potential tariffs and policies from the incoming administration.

**Nearly a third of Americans expect to take on debt in order to give gifts this year.** A survey found that 30% of those who plan on giving holiday gifts say they are prepared to break their budget on holiday spending while 47% say they have done so in the past. At least 12% of shoppers said they are still trying to pay off debt

they incurred during last year’s holiday season as they begin their shopping for this year. Of those who expect to go into debt, 46% blamed inflation and rising costs. Additionally, a third of Americans are opting out of gift-giving altogether with cost being the top reason. The National Retail Federation expects holiday spending to hit a record \$902 per person this year with 74% of shoppers planning to use credit cards for purchases. Additionally, a third of shoppers are already heading into the holiday season with \$5,000 or more in debt.



- Dec. 27: Memphis**  
[Liberty Bowl 2025](#)  
An annual tradition dating back to 1959, the Liberty Bowl game brings together the two best teams in the country, all but ensuring an exciting matchup.
- Dec. 30: Nashville**  
[27th Annual Music City Bowl](#)  
The 27th annual TransPerfect Music City Bowl returns for another exhilarating showdown between the Southeastern Conference and Big Ten this December on ESPN.

- Dec. 31: Gatlinburg**  
[Gatlinburg New Year's Eve Celebration](#)  
Since 1987, this free, family-friendly celebration has been one of the largest organized New Year’s Eve events in the nation, and this year’s celebration is set to be a spectacular end to the year.

- Dec. 31: Knoxville**  
[New Year's Eve at the Sunsphere](#)  
Ring in 2025 with your friends and family at World’s Fair Park with food trucks, free activities including a silent disco at 9:00 pm, DJ music with Knox Vegas DJs on the main stage

- Dec 31: Nashville**  
[Nashville's Big Bash](#)  
Ring in 2025 with hours of live music, fireworks, and the signature midnight Music Note Drop with Keith Urban, Kane Brown, and Jelly Roll as headliners for the FREE main stage event at Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park.

- Jan. 8-11: Memphis**  
[Elvis' 90th Birthday Celebration](#)  
Come to Memphis January 8-11 for a milestone Elvis Birthday Celebration including three nights of live concerts at the Graceland Soundstage, conversations about Elvis with those who knew him best, dance parties, Presley for a Day tours, and more.

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**Ed Stewart, ChFC, CLU, CF**  
Financial Advisor



# Meta data center begins operations in Gallatin

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

Officials with the city of Gallatin were on hand to celebrate the opening of Meta's Gallatin Data Center.

The new data center is now serving traffic, which means it is serving as part of the global infrastructure that brings technologies and services by the company to life. Meta, the parent company of Facebook, broke ground on the data center in 2020.

"Since we broke ground on this data center in 2020, Gallatin, TN, has become our home," Meta said in a statement. "We chose this location because it offered excellent infrastructure, access to renewable energy, a strong pool of talent for both construction and operations staff, and great community partners that have helped us move forward quickly. Construction of the Gallatin Data Center has resulted in an average of 1,100 skilled trade workers on site at peak, and the facility currently supports over 100 operational jobs. Once fully built out, this facility will represent an investment of more than \$1.5 billion in the state of Tennessee."

Gallatin Mayor Paige Brown said Meta has served as a valuable partner for the Gallatin community already.

"Since choosing Gallatin, Meta has consistently made meaningful contributions to our community, both in volunteer time and in monetary contributions — more than \$1 million to our non-profits, the county school system, Volunteer State Community College and our local chamber," Mayor Brown said. "They consistently ask how and where they can help and follow through on their commitments. Gallatin is better with the partnerships of Meta and other businesses like them that are committed to being a positive contributor to our city."

Rosemary Bates, executive director of the Gallatin Economic Development Agency, said Meta has integrated itself into Gallatin long before this grand opening.

"Meta has been a model business partner since breaking ground in 2020, from caring for our community to paying for infrastructure upgrades to bringing 100 quality jobs to the area," Bates said. "By choosing Gallatin, they've generated worldwide attention that has spurred other tech industry investments in our region. We appreciate our partnership with Meta and their team."

As part of the opening, Meta also announced a new partnership with the Gallatin Shalom Zone to help restore the historic gym on the organization's campus, which had previously served as the all-black Union High School. The nonprofit also serves one of the most underserved neighborhoods and will be supported by a \$250,000 grant from Meta.

"Revitalizing the gym at Gallatin Shalom Zone breathes new life into a building that has long been a source of pride and promise," said Gallatin Shalom Zone Board Chair Kaneisha Dotson. "As a beacon of hope in our community, Shalom Zone stands as a testament to resilience and opportunity. Meta's investment creates a beautiful, welcoming space that people and students absolutely deserve — a



The new Meta Data Center in Gallatin is not only a major investment in the community but also represents more than \$1.5 billion in investment in Tennessee.

place where they can dream, grow, and be inspired for generations to come."

The data center is matched with 100% renewable energy and has partnered with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to be one of eight Meta-support projects adding 530MW of renewable energy to Tennessee. The facility also has the goal of being water positive by 2030, meaning it will restore more water than it consumes.

As part of Meta's commitment to sustainability, the Gallatin Data Center will be LEED Gold certified, and 30 acres of native pollinator habitat have been planted on site to date. The company is also partnering with the [Tennessee Environmental Council](#) to install 6,000 square feet of pollinator gardens across Sumner County middle schools, providing students with hands-on opportunities to learn about sustainable practices and environmental conservation.

Gov. Bill Lee said that this is hopefully the first of many partnerships with the company.

"The state with the workers will win every time, and I am proud to welcome Meta to Sumner County," Gov. Lee said. "I thank Meta for their significant investment in the Volunteer State, and look forward to our continued partnership, which will drive our economy and deliver even greater opportunity for Tennesseans."

Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner Stuart McWhorter said Meta's partnership with Gallatin is an example of how economic investment can be revolutionary for communities.

"Four years ago, we announced that Meta would locate a state-of-the-art data center in Tennessee with Gallatin as its first location," he said. "What was an \$800 million investment then has surpassed that amount and grown to an approximately \$1.5 billion investment in our state. Meta's investment is not only driving Tennessee's economy, but the company is also making an impact at the local level, becoming a true community partner."



TNECD Commissioner Stuart McWhorter, far left, and Gallatin Mayor Paige Brown, second from left, join Meta officials in officially turning on the new Meta data center to traffic.



As part of community outreach efforts, Meta has partnered with Gallatin's Shalom Zone to help renovate the historic gym on the organization's campus, which had previously served as the all-black Union High School. The nonprofit also serves one of the most underserved neighborhoods in Gallatin and will be supported by a \$250,000 grant from Meta.



Above: The server room at the Meta Data Center in Gallatin

Left: Meta provided local teachers with a hands-on workshop to assemble the new VEX V5 Workcell construction system — made possible through support from a Data Center Community Action Grant. The system will enhance workforce development training for Advanced Manufacturing occupations for area students.