

## From the Desk of the Executive Director



### Engage state political candidates now!

It would be hard to find someone to disagree that our world, country, state and society are all undergoing rapid change. Frankly, I think most of us would agree they are changing more rapidly than at any other time during our lives.

With this, are changes in the way that government operates. We have seen a breakdown in bipartisanship, the further decline of well-informed voters, and more legislation that ignores local people determining what is best for their communities.

Hope is not lost if you yearn for bygone days of officials in government working together on issues that matter, instead of those manufactured to simply stir voters' emotions. But it will take you holding elected officials accountable for what matters to your community.

An example of such collaboration among government officials was about 20 years ago, when I served as the state director of the Emergency Communication Board or State E-911 Board. At the time, Tennessee was leading the nation in our deployment of the latest E-911 technology and being cited as a national model. I will never forget a meeting with a state senator in which I informed him of a few matters on which we needed his support. I recall him saying, "That sounds fine to me, but let me check with my mayors and I'll get back with you." I was a bit surprised by his statement given that I thought I made a convincing case of what was needed. Nonetheless, he did, and we received his support.

Are you consulted on matters that directly impact your community? My guess is that it happens, but not as often as it should. Just from this last Legislative Session, the TML Government Relations

team identified and engaged on 30 bills considered to "preempt local authority or decision making". That's too many. Thankfully, only three passed, and TML was able to make some modifications to them. Local communities should determine what is in their best interest, not an out-of-state super political action committee or industry.

It is most important this primary election season to communicate with your candidates for state office. Here are a few suggestions:

#### 1. Support and Co-sponsor TML's State Shared Sales Tax Proposal

Extend the historic practice of returning a small percentage of the last 1% of sales tax collected by the state to our towns and cities. This provides needed revenues for paving, public safety, and helps take pressure off future property tax increases.

#### 2. Stay Away from Arbitrary Caps on Property Taxes

Here's one of those emotion-stirring issues being driven (and funded) by out-of-state interests. Tennessee has the lowest tax burden of any state in the nation except Alaska according to numerous state rankings.

**3. Trust Local Leadership** – Avoid legislation that preempts local leadership and community-based decision making. State legislators do not like it when Washington preempts states. If Congress should avoid it, so should our state legislature.

More than 60 percent of Tennesseans live in 345 towns and cities. They deserve to be heard and listened to on important issues affecting their communities.

Engage your state political candidates now. Hold them accountable.

*Anthony C. Hay*

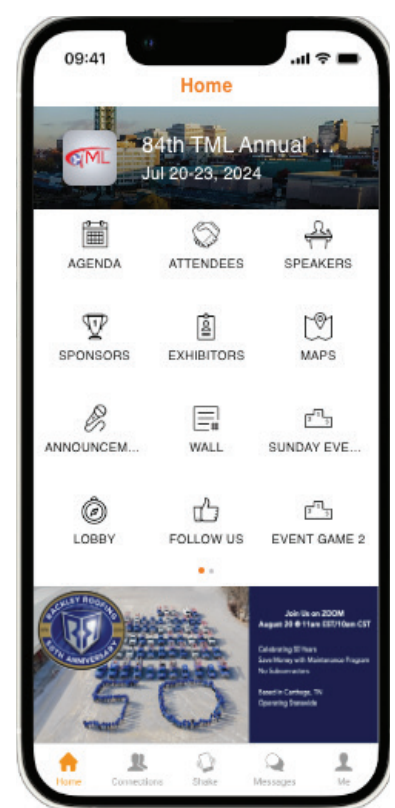
## Download free 84th TML Conference app

Download our free 84th TML Annual Conference & Expo app to enjoy the full conference experience. This easy to use digital guide contains a detailed agenda with workshops, maps, speakers, exhibitors, sponsors, and the ability to compete for prizes in our new Event Games.

To get started, download the free Socio app from the Apple app store or Google Play store. Once loaded onto your phone you will open the app and create your log in. You must provide a name and email address to join, and you may also build a profile with additional information to be seen by other conference attendees within the app. Once you're registered, the app will now be on a search page ready for you to find our event. Now, tap the search bar, and then tap the "Have a Code?" button at the bottom of the screen. A pop-up will appear asking for an Access Code. Enter **TML84** and tap SUBMIT. Now you're in and ready to use our conference app!

**How to Use It.** Once your app has downloaded to your phone, the conference schedule, workshop information, vendor contact information, plus much more are accessible through easy, navigable functions on the home page.

**Event Game.** TML's new Event Game creates challenges throughout conference that can earn you points for a chance to win prizes. Challenges may be as simple as checking in at registration, attending a workshop, or interacting with an exhibitor for a specific task. With each challenge you will be provided a code to put into the app to earn the points. There will be separate Sunday and Monday



award winners for first place finishers. It's not just getting the points but also getting there first! The first person to reach the top point value for each day will be the first place winner with those following behind for 2nd and 3rd place prizes.

**Agenda.** Tap on the agenda icon to view all of the conference events by time and date. You can tap the dates at the top to switch between days. Touching an event will reveal a description; and if it's a workshop, speaker bios are also available. As an added feature, you can create your own personal agenda by touching the plus symbol next to events. You can also set reminders for yourself of 15, 30, or 60 minutes. *See APP on Page 4*

## Additional speakers added to TML Annual Conference line-up, July 20-23 in Knoxville

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) is undergoing one of the greatest transformations in its 90-year history. As TVA deploys a number of strategies to meet growing consumer demand, AI will certainly play a key role in the utility's load growth predictability, increasing efficiencies, and maintaining system-wide reliability. TVA CEO Jeff Lyash will discuss how TVA will meet future challenges, and how AI will help transform the entire electric power industry.

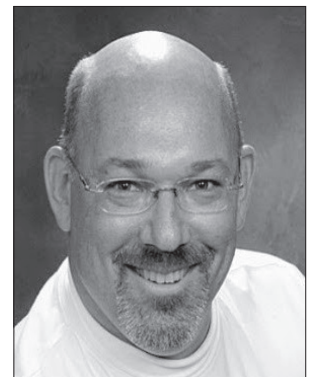
His presentation will be part of the Second General Session of the Tennessee Municipal League's 84th Annual Conference in Knoxville, on Monday, July 22, at the Knoxville Convention Center. He will be joined by Sean Maxwell of Google Public Sector.

With talk of artificial intelligence dominating much of the conversation around tech, local governments of all shapes and sizes are weighing the risks and benefits of employing AI to improve services, streamline data, and engage with the public. Maxwell will explore the various applications, and provide practical examples of how AI is already utilized to address real-world challenges that municipalities and other governmental entities face.

Google will also offer a work-



Jeff Lyash  
TVA President / CEO



Sean Maxwell  
Google Client Engineer

shop on Monday afternoon from 2:45 to 3:45 p.m. that will focus on what AI opportunities are currently available to municipalities such as chatbots, grant writing and application tools, document management, and more. Attendees will also learn how your city's IT staff can benefit from Google's training program to be ready to implement and manage AI assets.

Conference attendees will also have the opportunity to meet Bob Kesling, the "Voice of the Vols," on Monday afternoon in the Exhibit Hall from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more than 20 years, Bob Kesling has served as the lead announcer on the Vol Radio Network. The Tennessee graduate and versatile multimedia host represents Tennessee Athletics in various on- and off-air capacities as Director of



Bob Kesling  
Broadcast Director  
Vols Network

Broadcasting. So be sure to stop in the Exhibit Hall for a photo opt with Bob!

For more information about the conference, go to [www.tml1.org/84th-annual-conference-expo](http://www.tml1.org/84th-annual-conference-expo)

## Small cities can take strategic steps toward cultivating foreign investment

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

With foreign direct investment (FDI) vital to both the state and local economies, many municipalities around the state have found landing international investment can be a powerful economic engine.

Karel Abboud, global director of FDI and Trade for TNECD, said FDI can often revolutionize a local economy.

"If you are bringing investment into a small local community, they are creating jobs that will increase that local economy," she said. "It's going to help increase local business. Having foreign direct investment is just as valuable as having domestic investment because, in some cases, they can bring in more money for investment. It is going to bring more people into the city, into the county, and that's important to keep in mind."

As such, there are many steps municipal officials can take to help the state's economic developers – and themselves – bring in FDI.

### READY BUILT SITES

Lyndi Berrones, assistant commissioner of strategic initiatives for TNECD, said since time is money, many international companies want to move as quickly as possible when making investments. As such, they are typically more interested in sites that can be built on as soon as possible.

"A lot of our FDI companies end up building sites from the ground up," she said. "Tennessee has a very robust site development program where we are investing in sites prior to a company even showing up. We are putting lots of money into making sure sites are shovel-ready. Every FDI project seems to be on a timeline that is going at 300 miles-per-hour. Being able to take them to a site that is already ready to build is perfect for them and a game changer for us too."

A recent report from the Site Selectors Guild (SSG) found 82% of global site selectors said the availability of development-ready sites with sufficient infrastructure capacity is the top driver of where they choose to land. Berrones said, for this reason, having a ready-built site can almost guarantee visits from international



Dongwha Electrolyte officials are present for the ground breaking of a \$70 million battery component plant in Clarksville.

investors.

"They could be the best community for an international company, but if they don't have a site ready to show them, the international company is never going to make it there," she said. "If you have a site in your community, you are going to get a visit from an international community. We have site searches every week, multiple times a week for companies looking at Tennessee. We need our communities to focus on having something that works, can be shown and developed."

### BOOTS ON THE GROUND

While the state maintains offices and outreach in several countries, they aren't the only game in international outreach. Berrones said municipalities themselves have started taking the lead on international recruitment.

"We have very proactive communities," she said. "I just went on a trip to South Korea in the past year with a community, not a state-led trip but a community-led trip. Tennessee is ahead of the game in a lot of ways in understanding the importance of recruiting international companies. It is no longer something just the state is focused on; we have individual communities leading international trips to go recruit."

For those who do not have the means to travel abroad themselves, Abboud suggests getting involved in programs that help connect with the international community.

"If there is something a city wanted to get more involved in, there are city sister partnerships or agreements that could open them up to more international attractions and could lead to more FDI in their city or county," she said. "There are all kinds of Sister City agreements whether they are cultural, educa-

tional, business-related or a mix of all of those things. It can be an interesting way for them to increase their exposure."

When companies come calling, Abboud said most want to get a taste of Tennessee, learn from its culture, and assimilate to it. She said a little local color can help foreign investors better picture their companies here.

Additionally, Abboud said the state's in-country officials have fact sheets and contact points for other companies from the same country already operating in Tennessee to showcase how the two cultures mesh well."

"We use this a lot when we are recruiting other companies," she said. "We have a fact sheet that just has Japan's investment in Tennessee, and we use that to show other Japanese clients that we have already had successful Japanese investment in Tennessee. We use that to our advantage, to show that other companies have been happy here and are continuing to grow."

### RURAL DEVELOPMENT

FDI has become an important component of rural development and economies. Berrones said rural communities would be misguided to think they aren't on the radar of foreign investors. In fact, economic studies have shown FDI in more rural areas can create more jobs and support a more diverse range of private sector investment than in urban areas.

"There is more of a mindset that international companies would do better in big cities because they have more of a sense of openness," she said. "I have actually seen a lot that says the *See FDI on Page 7*

# NEWS ACROSS TENNESSEE



## CROSSVILLE

TSM Metal Works will expand by locating new operations in Crossville. TSM will invest \$500,000 and create 20 new jobs through the project. TSM is owned by a fourth-generation California fabrication company, and the move to Crossville represents the company's first out-of-state expansion. Upon completion, the TSM facility will be 30,000 square feet and will serve TSM's metal fabrication customers both locally and nationwide. Founded in 2023, TSM Metal Works is a family-owned, full-service metal fabrication company that provides powder coating to a variety of industries including backyard projects, construction, agriculture and equipment manufacturing.

## ELIZABETHTON

Officials in the city of Elizabethton have unveiled a series of murals depicting various moments in local history. City leaders, Main Street Elizabethton members, lead artist Cailitin Maupin, and community volunteers working on the project attended the dedication at the city's Ice House storage building. The project was spearheaded by Elizabethton Water Resources General Manager Jonathan Pleasant came up with the concept of putting mural panels into window spaces in the building. In addition to Maupin, 18 volunteers ranging from third-graders to adults helped with the project, resulting in mural panels depicting five major periods of local history.

## FAIRVIEW

Lazestar, Inc., announced the company will invest \$5.5 million to move its operations to Fairview from Livermore, Calif. The hermetic laser sealing and package fabrication company will create 25 new jobs in the area. Founded more than 20 years ago, Lazestar specializes in fabrication and laser welding components used in the defense, aerospace, microwave, biomedical and commercial industries.

## GAINESBORO

Synergy Magnetics LLC officials announced the company will locate new operations in Gainesboro, becoming the first economic development project to land in Jackson County since 2018. Synergy Magnetics manufactures transformers, and through the project, the company will invest more than \$5.5 million and create 35 new jobs at its Gainesboro facility.

## GALLATIN

Two Gallatin-based non-profits are partnering on a project to increase affordable childcare slots in the city

while renovating a former local high school property. The Gallatin Shalom Zone and Gallatin Daycare are working to renovate a currently unused wing of the city's former Union High School, where the Shalom Zone is located, to provide a daycare space. Officials with Gallatin's Economic Development Agency said the process began in late 2021 amid a rising need for affordable daycare services being requested by companies wanting to locate into the Gallatin area as well as working families. The Shalom Zone already runs programs including after-school programs, camps, Head Start, Toys for Tots, English Language Learners classes at the site, making it ideal for the daycare expansion. The project is being financed through a \$500,000 Community Development Block Grant (CBDG), a \$110,000 grant from the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD), and \$550,000 from the Gallatin Industrial Development Board on the project.

## JOHNSON CITY

The Johnson City Board of Commissioners and municipal staff celebrated the renovations of the historic 401 Ashe Street building with a ribbon cutting. Originally the Johnson City Postal Savings Bank and Post Office, the building served as the Washington County Courthouse from 1940 until 1985. It was then renovated and served as the Washington County 911 Emergency Communication District until 2017. The building sat empty for several years before it was acquired by Johnson City in 2022. The city has spent \$5 million in state funding to renovate the historic structure with the hopes of attracting new tenants and anchoring the West Walnut redevelopment project. City leaders are presently interviewing potential tenants – including in the rural healthcare industry – interested in locating to the facility.

## SPRING HILL

OPmobility – formerly Plastic Omnium – officials announced the company will undergo a \$3 million expansion at its Spring Hill plant. OPmobility, headquartered in France, is a global family-led group with 152 plants across 28 countries. The company has operated in Tennessee since 2015 with locations in Chattanooga, Smyrna, Spring Hill and Hendersonville. The project is a new opportunity for OPmobility to expand its product offerings for customers and further support electric vehicle production lines. The expansion will create 186 new jobs, up from just 18 currently in Spring Hill and 568 across the state.

emergencies.

“Connected Communities is a unique initiative that helps communities improve the quality of life for their residents, and we're excited to see what impact the next round of pilot projects will have on the people we serve,” said Joe Hoagland, vice president of Innovation and Research at TVA. “So many of our programs rely on things like the internet or innovative technologies. By working with communities to bring partners together to deploy projects that focus on these topics, we're ensuring our communities are better prepared for the future.”

Connected Communities is one of several TVA initiatives designed to help achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. This initiative enables communities' readiness for a future energy grid. Ensuring communities have access to amenities such as broadband internet, healthy environments, job opportunities and resiliency plans is important as the electric utility industry continues to grow and transition.

To learn more about TVA's Connected Communities initiative, including resources and tools for communities to implement their own Connected Communities initiatives, please visit [tva.gov/ConnectedCommunities](https://tva.gov/ConnectedCommunities) or email your inquiry to [ConnectedCommunities@tva.gov](mailto:ConnectedCommunities@tva.gov).

## Fairview breaks ground on new city center



Officials with the city of Fairview broke ground on a new 52-acre mixed-used development north of Fairview City Hall. Fairview Town Center will integrate diverse housing types, retail, restaurants, office, and community services to create a city center for Fairview. The area will include about 500 total housing units ranging from multi-family dwellings to townhouses to one-quarter acre lots with single-family homes. The development will also promote walkability, create a town square, and connect a paved greenway to the city's Bowie Nature Park Perimeter Trail. Other public spaces will also be located in the development.

## Cookeville debuts new armored police vehicle



The Cookeville Police Department recently unveiled the department's new Terradyne Armored Police Vehicle at the city's Touch-A-Truck Extravaganza. The vehicle will be used for violent crime intervention and was purchased with a grant fund from the Violent Crimes Intervention Fund (VCIF) and funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Based in Canada, Terradyne produces three different armored vehicle variants known as Gurkhas, named for Nepalese soldiers. The vehicles are built on a Ford F-550 Super Duty chassis, sharing the same engine and interior.

## Smyrna officials break ground on new Sewart's Landing multi-use development



Officials with the town of Smyrna participated in the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Sewart's Landing development. The 44-acre mixed-use property was created in close partnership between developer Equitable Property Company and the town. It will include two medical office buildings, 250,000-square-foot of street-level retail, a 240-room hotel, and 75 townhomes. The development is designed around a pedestrian-focused street grid with community greenspaces and walking trails. Future tenants already include Starbucks, Wawa, Jonathan's Grille, and others.

## Nolensville opens first fire station



Officials with the town of Nolensville held a hose uncoupling ceremony to officially open the town's first fire station. The \$12 million station is the largest capital project the town has taken on. The 18,000-square-foot facility includes a work-out room, decontaminating area, sleeping quarters, living area and kitchen with three food pantries, one for each shift, a watch office, training room and four spacious bays. The town also acquired the former fire station operated by Williamson County on an adjacent property, which will be used for EMS services. Work is already beginning on a new ladder company location for the Nolensville Fire Department, construction of which is expected to begin in 2025.

## Three cities earn grants through TVA pilot program

Three Tennessee cities were selected as part TVA's initial round of six Connected Communities pilot projects, which are working to help achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Each of the six projects located in the TVA region is eligible for up to \$2 million TVA funding to help fuel a cleaner economy as well as provide STEM education, workforce development training, and increase community resiliency. Memphis, Nashville, and Ripley in Tennessee were selected for projects with Memphis proposing two projects that received funding. Projects were also funded in Kilpatrick, Ala., and Guntersville, Ala.

The first project in Memphis will expand the technologies at the Wang Experiential Learning Center to equip local students with workforce education and skill development. The second project in Memphis will provide the community with equitable access to EV charging stations and developing a curriculum for students to learn job skills related to EV charging. Approval in process, expected to be completed this summer.

Nashville's project will enhance parental access to, understanding of and involvement in their children's academic journeys.

Ripley's funding will build a resilient microgrid to lower energy costs for local city facilities and ensure reliable power during

# TMBF, RSA Advisors partner for 30-year, long-term fixed rate loan program

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

Tennessee municipalities now have the option for a 30-year, long-term fixed rate loan as part of a new partnership program between the Tennessee Municipal Bond Fund (TMBF) and RSA Advisors.

TMBF was created in 1985 by the Tennessee Municipal League for the purpose of providing an alternative means for governmental entities to finance capital projects at a lower cost. TMBF operates a variety of loan programs and has assisted cities and counties on over 1,700 loans totaling more than \$5.1 billion over its 39 year history.

Based in Lexington, Ky., RSA has provided over 30 years of public finance services throughout the region and is nationally recognized for many of its innovative financing structures.

TMBF President/CEO Wade Morrell said the partnership between the Bond Fund and RSA has been more than a decade in the making.

"In the early 2010s, RSA reached out to TMBF about joining this newly created program in Kentucky," Morrell said. "It was not the best time to explore the partnership, so we agreed to keep in touch. In 2021, TMBF and RSA had a conversation at the NLC Public Finance Consortium conference about taking another stab at a partnership. Over the next two and a half years we hashed out legal documents and responsibilities. Lots of behind-the-scenes work went into merging an existing, out-of-state program with our existing programs."

Joe LaKofka, managing director and partner with RSA, said both the Bond Fund and RSA work toward the same goal: helping municipalities.

"RSA is pleased to partner with TMBF to offer another financing solutions for its clients," LaKofka said. "The TMBF team has put a lot of time and effort into developing this fixed rate program, which complements their existing financing programs nicely."

The new partnership presents new opportunities for the Bond Fund and Tennessee municipalities.

"TMBF was created to help our cities and towns with the borrowing process and save them money on their borrowings," Morrell said. "We have always sought to deliver the best value and opportunities for our cities and towns. On many occasions over the past 39 years, cities have requested a long-term fixed rate loan option. Until now, the Bond Fund has never been able to offer this type of loan. Under this new program, we can deliver a long-term fixed rate program that



The town of Chapel Hill has become the first municipality to participate in the new 30-year, long-term fixed rate loan program, offered through a partnership between the Tennessee Municipal Bond Fund (TMBF) and RSA Advisors.



For a small municipality, that type of program was ideal for us. One reason I like it is because it is quick to implement and get the funds."

Chapel Hill Town Recorder/Treasurer Phillip Dye said the town has looked into a USDA loan but found the RSA program through TMBF had better terms for the town.

can provide a true fixed interest rate for up to 30 years."

With the benefit of the existing Kentucky pool's backing, Morrell said all new issues through the program will be rated AA- with hopes for an upgrade in the future. One such municipality already benefiting from the program is the Town of Chapel Hill.

Danny Bingham, town administrator for Chapel Hill, said continued growth in the area has created a need for a new SVR sewer plant for the town as well as work on the town's water treatment plant to increase capacity and storage. The total cost of these projects came in at around \$16 million - \$12 million for the sewer plant alone. Officials knew the projects needed to be funded.

"We knew we have to be smart about development around here," Bingham said. "What got us directed to this program was that we had been working with Kevin Krushenski on several things. We knew him, had that relationship with him, and we had good luck with what we had worked on before. We told him about this project, and he told us about this program. It worked for us.

"It also offered us the opportunity to extend the loan out to help us better afford it without having to go through all the hoops of going through a USDA loan," Dye said. "That was a major part of our decision. Small towns like ours often run into the issue of not having enough revenue and too many expenses. Without having to raise taxes to get more money, this allows us to put something into our budgets where we can afford it without having to send the costs on to the taxpayer. It helps us get to the point where we can continue to grow. Without the sewer and water, we can't go anywhere else."

Dye said TMBF made the program extremely easy to use.

"They went by our schedule, came to our meetings at night, were very informative, and were always available to answer our questions," Dye said. "I can't say enough good about the whole TMBF team."

The ease of access means Chapel Hill is already breaking ground on the sewer plant and an engineer is already working on the water plant. Bingham said with rising construction costs, it means

the quicker projects can get done, the easier it is on municipal budgets.

"They made it very easy for us to get the numbers, crunch the numbers, and see if it made sense in our case to do it like this," he said. "They got the credit rating and all we had to do was sign the papers and say yes. It was a very easy process. They educated our board members on this and laid out all the options for them. With our situation, it was a no-brainer. The bottom line is it makes it very affordable for a small town to be able to look at some of these larger projects."

Bingham said the new sewer plant and improved water plant will not only accommodate 1,100 new housing starts in the area, it will also position Chapel Hill for more residential, industrial, and retail growth.

About the first loan with Chapel Hill, Morrell added, "we are very thankful for our relationship with Chapel Hill. They were the perfect partner for launching this new program. We enjoy working with all the town's leadership. They are personable, very hard working, and diligent. This is truly a town that is on the cusp of great things."

"This new program could be beneficial for many communities that either don't have existing credit ratings or fall below the AA level by delivering better interest rates," Morrell said. "In addition, by leveraging an existing program's infrastructure, this new program's funding timeline can be achieved much faster than many other long-

term fixed rate options. TMBF believes this program could be very beneficial to the TML membership because the recent interest rate and inflation increases have together made some necessary projects unaffordable under a normal 20- or 25-year payback. The extra five years can go a long way toward making a much-needed project fit in the budget and help our members keep taxes or utility rates as low as possible."

In addition to serving as the municipal advisor on these loans, RSA will also help with timing, structure, and municipal financial advice to municipalities participating in the program. Morrell said the friendly faces at TMBF will also still be there to help municipalities, whether they opt to participate in the new program or not.

"The process of getting a loan from this program will be very similar to our current programs," he said. "TMBF's team of myself, Linda Mooningham, Justin Hanson, Kevin Krushenski, and Steve Queener will continue to visit your communities to discuss your needs and let you know each of the options we have available. If you have a need or want to see how this new program would work for your upcoming project then TMBF and RSA will visit with your city leadership and walk through estimates, the process and expectations. We will still be with you every step of the way because we were created to make the borrowing process easier for you. We are very excited to be able to offer our membership a long-term fixed rate program and we look forward to being able to partner with you on your upcoming project."

Officials interested in learning more about this new program can reach out to TMBF at 615-255-1561.

# Autonomous mowers bring benefits to Franklin parks

By KATE COIL

Autonomous mowers are helping the city of Franklin save time and manpower, especially as summer heats up.

The Franklin Parks and Recreation Department began outsourcing some of its mowing to local contractors Landscape Services, Inc., (LSI) in 2018 and in 2023, the company approached the city about utilizing a new service: autonomous mowing.

The city had already been doing some of its own research into whether autonomous mowing would be a good fit. Franklin Parks Department Grounds Crew Chief Lee Williams said parks officials met with LSI and mower manufacturer RC Mower at the Parks at Harlinsdale Farm for a demonstration of how the mowers would operate.

Following the demonstration, Williams said the city spent some time weighing the merits of adding the service as well as talking with both companies to address safety concerns. A second meeting was held to ensure these concerns were addressed.

"Both the city and the parks department had some concerns about the mowers, mainly regarding safety," Williams said. "This was addressed through collaboration between the city of Franklin's Risk Management Department and LSI. A plan was developed to prioritize safety. LSI also has an employee constantly monitoring the mowers who carries a controller that has a kill switch that can immediately shut down the mowers. If anything comes in front of the mower, it will stop immediately. It has a buffer zone of about 10 feet or so, and if the sensors on that mower pick up



Autonomous mowers presently in use at the Parks at Harlinsdale Farms and Eastern Flank Battlefield Park in Franklin.

something that is not supposed to be in that area it immediately shuts down."

With these questions answered, LSI began deploying autonomous mowers in the large greenspaces of two Franklin Parks: the Parks at Harlinsdale Farm and Eastern Flank Battlefield Park. Williams said three mowers are presently being utilized.

"The mowers are programmed with a smart phone app and operate on a grid-pattern system," he said.

"After an operator mows the grid pattern the first time, the mower saves that information into a database. Once the mowing is complete in the designated area of the grid it will stop. The operator can then move the mower to the next area. Another manned crew then comes in to do all the other work along the edges."

While efficiency is one of the main reasons the city chose to implement the mowers, Williams said they have other benefits as

well. The danger of working outside in hot temperatures as well as the difficulty of hiring employees willing to do this outdoor work has rendered autonomous mowing a solution for both the city of Franklin and LSI.

Additionally, Williams said the three autonomous mowers only need one employee to operate them while it would take three employees to mow the same area manually.

"The added benefit for LSI is that three of these mowers can op-

erate at one time and each is mowing its own grid," he said. "Another manned crew can then be off doing another task. It's basically a normal, zero-turn mower with a lot of sensors on it. They are protected by coverings, and we have operated with them in light rain. The mowers typically can operate like a manned mower would in weather."

While the mowers moving without a driver made many Franklin residents take a second look initially, Williams said the technology is quickly becoming an afterthought for those who frequent the parks.

"There has been a lot of interest from park patrons, asking about the operations and safety," he said. "The mowers definitely attract attention and some curious stares. You'll even see cars going down the road slow down or stop so they can stare or parks patrons walking who stop to make sure they're really seeing what they're seeing. We've also had a few phone calls about it. They're not catching as much attention as they were, but there is still some interest."

For other cities considering either purchasing or contracting out work to autonomous mowers, Williams recommends reaching out to contractors and manufacturers to get more information.

"I would definitely do my research and do some demonstrations with companies," he said. "It should be what works best for each location. If you feel like it would be efficient or are down on manpower and you want to save labor costs, it's definitely something to look into. Most manufacturers are willing to do a demo, and it's neat to just watch."



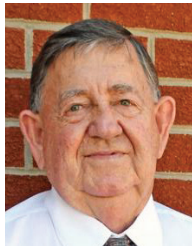
# PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

**Steve Bower** has been named the new economic development director for the city of Kingsport. Bower served in the Tennessee National Guard as a cavalry scout from 2015 to 2021. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's in public administration, both from East Tennessee State University. He began working with the city of Kingsport's economic development team as an intern with the University of Tennessee's Institute of Public Service during his graduate program. He was then hired as an economic development specialist for the city in 2022.



Steve Bower

**Gary Chandler** has been appointed to fill the Erwin alderman recently vacated by former Vice Mayor Paula Kay Edwards. Chandler is a former member of the Erwin Board of Mayor and Alderman and is also a member of the Erwin Utilities Board of Directors. Alderman Mickey Hatcher was also appointed vice mayor.



Gary Chandler

**Michael Clark** has been selected as the new director of community and economic development for the town of Collierville. Clark's first day will be Aug. 5, 2024. Clark brings more than two decades of experience in urban and regional planning, community development, and economic growth strategies to Collierville. He has held roles both in municipal government and consulting. Prior to coming to Collierville, Clark served as the planning director of Zebulon, N.C. He holds a bachelor's degree in land-use planning from Northern Michigan University and a master's in geography with a concentration in urban and regional planning from West Michigan University. He is also a graduate of the University of North Carolina's Professional Executive Leadership Academy and a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU-A).



Michael Clark

**Richard Hickey**, chief of police for the Brentwood Police Department, has announced his decision to retire next year after more than 34 years in law enforcement. Hickey has been with BPD since 1991 when he joined as a patrol officer. He has since served in numerous capacities including as



Richard Hickey

a field training officer, crime scene technician, detective, captain, and assistant chief. He was appointed chief in 2022. He holds a communications degree from Middle Tennessee State University and was the second BPD officer to attend the FBI National Academy. He is only the fourth chief in the city's history.

**Robert Knecht** has announced his retirement as public works director for the city of Memphis. Knecht has been with the city of Memphis' public works department for 23 years, moving from an engineer to the director of the division. He was first appointed to serve as director of the department in 2015 and had previously served as the deputy director of the department. Knecht holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the University of Memphis and a master's in business administration from the University of Phoenix. He also served in the U.S. Air Force as a computer specialist for four years.



Robert Knecht

**Jerele Neeld** has officially been appointed as the chief information officer for the city of Chattanooga after serving in the role on an interim basis since March. Before that, he was the director of intelligent cities for Chattanooga. Neeld joined the city of Chattanooga with more than 20 years of experience from Dell Technologies. During his time at Dell, he served as chief of staff and strategist for customer operations, director of product localization and content design, and finally vice president of global localization and context design and development. Neeld holds a bachelor's degree from Texas A&M University.



Jerele Neeld

**Robert "Bobby" Simmons, Jr.**, a former Bartlett alderman and long-time public servant, died June 19, 2024 at the age of 79. Simmons served as a deputy with the Shelby County Sheriff's Office for 35 years, eventually obtaining the rank of captain. A native of Bartlett, Simmons also served for 20 years as an alderman in his hometown, first being elected to the office in 2004. Simmons resigned his seat on the board in 2023, citing his declining health.



Bobby Simmons

**Kevin Stoltenberg** has been selected as the new assistant city manager of Maryville. The announcement comes as the city sets up succession plans for upcoming retirements to ensure leadership continuity. Stoltenberg served for five years

in the U.S. Navy before graduating from Southern Illinois University with a degree in civil engineering. He came to the city of Maryville in 2007 as a civil engineer and then became city engineer in 2017 and assistant public services director in 2023. He also earned a master's degree in civil engineering with a focus in transportation and infrastructure.



Kevin Stoltenberg

**Don Teal** has retired as police chief of Martin. Teal began his career in 1983 and has 41 years of experience with the Martin Police Department. Throughout his career, Teal has been involved in every area of the department before being named chief in 2015. He holds a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Tennessee at Martin and is a graduate of the Tennessee Law Enforcement Training Academy and FBI National Academy. He is a member of the FBI National Academy Alumni Association (FBINAA), Tennessee Chiefs of Police (TACP), and International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP).



Don Teal

**Randy Trivette** is the new deputy city manager for the city of Johnson City. Trivette has been serving as the city's assistant manager since 2022. He joined the city in 2018 as the first director of the city's facilities management department. Prior to joining Johnson City, Trivette served in Erwin as town recorder for nine years and building official for five years.



Randy Trivette

**Rydell Wesson** has retired as city manager of Dickson following 32 years of service to the city. Wesson began his career with the city of Dickson as an assistant building official in the Dickson Office of Planning and Zoning in 1988. Two years later, he returned to his hometown of Savannah to serve as the codes enforcement officer for four years. He returned to Dickson in 1994 as director of the Office of Planning and Zoning. He was appointed director of public works in 2008 and then acting city administrator in 2011. He assumed the position full-time in 2012. Public Works Director David Travis will serve as acting city administrator while the search for a new city manager is underway.



Rydell Wesson

## Nashville mourns Langster, city's first black female cop and former State House rep

Edith Taylor Langster, former Tennessee state representative, Nashville city council member, and the city's first-ever black female police officer, died June 30, 2024, at the age of 75.



Edith Taylor Langster

Langster graduated from Nashville's Pearl High School in 1957 while schools in the city were still segregated. In 1972, she became the first black, female patrol officer for the Metro Nashville Police Department – the same year the state of Tennessee ratified the Equal Rights Amendment. She served with MNPD for a decade.

She earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from Tennessee State University and began a career as a counselor. She eventually became a program development specialist at a Nashville mental health facility.

In 1991, she began a political career, winning the District 20 seat on the Metro Nashville Council. She served on the city council for one term before running for and winning the District 54 seat in the Tennessee House of Representatives.

Langster would serve in the Tennessee House for 12 years, chairing the house local government subcommittee and was a member of the house consumer affairs subcommittee, assistant majority Whip.

She returned to the Nashville city Council in 2007, serving Council District 21 seat until 2015.

Nashville Mayor Freddie O'Connell released a statement about Langster's legacy in the city.

"I join many in Nashville in mourning the loss of Edith Langster," O'Connell said. "She worked tirelessly to elevate the voices of all those she represented in the State Legislature and the Metro Council, and I say that as a former constituent. Her courage and dedication to

serving her community will be sadly missed."

The Metro Nashville Police Department also released a statement commemorating Langster along with a picture of her in uniform in 1972.

"The MNPD joins with our community in honoring the life of Edith Taylor Langster, who recently passed away," the statement read. "She was the first woman to serve as an MNPD patrol officer in 1974, and later became a member of the Metro Council and TN legislature. She loved people & public service."

Assessor of Property for Nashville and Davidson County Vivian Wilhoite said Langster was an important mentor for her and many others.

"She saw that she could be a beacon of hope for someone," Wilhoite said. "She saw that she could give help, and she also saw that she can try for somebody. You know sometimes people just want you to try. They just want to see what you can do for them and that you tried. Edith was a person who was like, 'I'll try, and we will be successful together.'"



## Elections held in seven cities

Municipal elections were held in seven cities, including a sales tax referendum in Lenoir City and elections of city officials in six other municipalities.

### BROWNSVILLE

The city of Brownsville held a municipal election on June 18.

Two incumbents ran unopposed and were re-elected to their seats. Antwan Smith ran unopposed and was re-elected to the Ward 1 seat with 17 complimentary votes while Brad Bishop ran unopposed and was re-elected to the Ward 3 seat with 39 complimentary votes.

### LAFAYETTE

Voters in Lafayette went to the polls on May 9.

Tony Day ran unopposed and was elected to the Lafayette mayoral seat with 86 votes. Day previously served as an alderman and took over the position from Jerry Wilmore, who said he only wished to serve one term as mayor.

Newcomer Dale Hix will join incumbents Roger Jones and Jason Phelps for the three open seats on the Lafayette City Council. Hix will take over the seat vacated by Day. Phelps received the most votes with 70, followed by Hix with 68 and Jones with 62.

### LENOIR CITY

For the second time in six years, voters in Lenoir City rejected a local sales tax referendum on April 13. The proposal to raise the city's sales tax from 2% to 2.75% was earmarked for expansions to the Lenoir City School system as well as a community and senior center. The referendum failed 496 to 236.

### LIVINGSTON

Voters in Livingston participated in a municipal election on June 4.

Newcomer Lori Elder Burnett defeated fellow challengers Nathan Carr, Nathan Dale, and Robert Jolley to take the open mayoral seat in Livingston. Longtime Mayor Cur-

tis Hayes announced his retirement after serving 18 years in the role.

Burnett led the tally with 393 votes followed by Dale with 242, Jolley with 132, and Carr with 46.

Incumbent Alderman Rex Dale will also be joined by newcomers Lance Ruble and Arno Proctor on the Livingston Board of Aldermen, defeating challenger Jeramie Reeder for the three open seats.

Dale led the vote count with 549 followed by Ruble with 513, Proctor with 396, and Reeder with 381.

### LORETTO

Incumbent Chris Beckman defeated challenger Louis "Andy" Etienne for the single open alderman seat in an election held in Loretto on April 23. Beckman received 66% of the vote while Etienne received 34%.

### MAYNARDVILLE

Voters went to the polls in Maynardville on June 25

Newcomer Conner Chesney will join incumbents Isaac Collins and Len Padgett on the Maynardville City Commission, defeating incumbent Tim Young and challengers Kayla McMann Luck and Danny Smith for the three open seats.

Collins led the vote count with 125 followed by Padgett with 102, Chesney with 101, Young with 86, Smith with 77, and Luck with 68.

### PLAINVIEW

Residents of Plainview cast their ballots in a municipal election on June 25.

Newcomer Lynn Beeler defeated incumbent Gary D. Chandler for the mayoral seat in Plainview. Beeler earned 226 votes to Chandler's 151.

Newcomer Keith Brantley will join incumbent Rebecca Lock on the Plainview Board of Aldermen, defeating incumbent Gordon Bright for the two open seats. Brantley led the vote count with 283 followed by Lock with 267 and Bright with 140.

## Enjoy the Full Conference Experience with Free Digital App Schedule At-A-Glance

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60 minutes. Conference events are color-coded by each event type. By using the filter button at the top right to apply a filter, you can quickly reference categories such as food, workshops, CMFO, or receptions.

**Speakers.** To learn about each of our conference speakers, scroll through the list and tap on the speaker's photo to reveal their bios.

**Exhibitors.** The exhibitors' section includes contact information, booth numbers, and links to company websites. And once you've left the conference, you can always refer back to this app to find all the contact information you need to get in touch with a vendor.

For more conference information, go to <https://www.tml1.org/84th-annual-conference-expo>



### FRIDAY, JULY 19

9 am - 5:30 pm MTAS EOA

### SATURDAY, JULY 20

9 am - 5:30 pm MTAS EOA  
12 - 5 pm Registration  
1 - 4:30 pm CMFO & Utility Board Training

### SUNDAY, JULY 21

7:30 am Golf  
7:45 - 9:45 am BEMO Breakfast  
9 am - 5 pm Registration  
9:30 am - 3 pm Exhibit Hall  
open 10 - 11 am Concurrent Workshops (4)  
11:30 am - 1:30 pm Lunch  
11:30 am - 1:30 pm WMIG Lunch  
11:45 - 1:45 pm J.R. Wauford Ice Cream  
1:15 - 2:15 pm Roundtables  
2:30 - 3:15 pm District Meetings  
3 - 5 pm General Session Sally Jenkins  
6 - 8 pm Host City Reception

### MONDAY, JULY 22

7:15 - 8 am Continental Breakfast  
8 am - 3 pm Exhibit Hall  
8:30 - 9:30 am Concurrent Workshops (3)  
9:45 - 11 am General Session Google & TVA  
11:15 am - 12 pm Business Meeting  
11 am - 1 pm Bob Kessling Lunch  
12 - 1:30 pm J.R. Wauford Ice Cream  
1:30 - 2:30 pm Door prizes  
2:45 - 3:45 pm Concurrent Workshops (4)  
4 - 5 pm Concurrent Workshops (4)  
6:30 - 11 pm PEP Rally

### TUESDAY, JULY 23

8 - 10:30 Awards Breakfast  
• TML Achievement Awards  
• TCAPWA Murphy Snoderly  
• TCMA Assistant City Manager  
• TCMA City Manager  
• Bob Kirk Local Government Award  
• TML Mayor of the Year

# UT-MTAS holds 75th Anniversary Celebration in Nashville



UT-MTAS Executive Director Margaret Norris makes remarks about the history of MTAS.



UT Vice President of Public Service Dr. Herb Byrd III makes remarks about the role of public service at MTAS.



TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes delivers remarks about the relationship between TML and MTAS.



From left to right: Retired MTAS HR Consultant Richard Stokes, former MTAS Management Consultant and former TMBF Marketing Representative Joe Muscatello, TMBF Executive Director and CEO Wade Morrell, retired Public Entity Partners Director of Client Services and former MTAS Management Consultant Randy Williams, and MTAS Municipal Management Program Manager Angie Carrier.



MTAS Business Manager Wes Fernandez discusses memories of the organization at the event



MTAS as Municipal Management Consultant Patrick Marsh, left, listen as Brentwood City Manager Kirk Bednar, right, shares memories of working with and at MTAS as a municipal management consultant.



City officials from the Middle TN area attended the reception along with current and former MTAS employees.



Above: From left to right, MTAS Municipal Management Consultant Dana Deem, retired Public Entity Partners Director of Client Services Randy Williams, retired MTAS HR Consultant Richard Stokes, and MTAS HR Consultant John Grubbs.

Top Left: From left to right, TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes, TMBF Executive Director and CEO Wade Morrell, and CTAS Executive Director Jon Walden.



Bottom Left: From left to right, PEP Director of Member Services Callie Westerfield, PEP President/CEO Michael Fann, Brentwood Police Chief Richard Hickey, and in the background, MTAS Librarian Frances Adams-O'Brien

See more photos from [the event online here](#).

Photos by Kate Coil

## STATE BRIEFS

Tennessee's state-wide unemployment rate reached a historic, new record-low in May. The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) decreased to 3% in May, the lowest rate the state has recorded since the federal government began tracking data in 1976. The rate was a 0.1% decrease from April, which had tied with four months in 2023 for the previously lowest unemployment rate at 3.1%. Tennessee employers created 3,300 new nonfarm jobs between April and May. The accommodation and food services sector was responsible for most of those new jobs. The professional, scientific, and technical services sector was the next top job creator in May, followed by the health-care and social assistance sector.

Tennessee had the fifth-largest population increase and a net increase of \$4.7 billion in adjusted gross income on individual tax returns between 2021 and 2022, according to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The net increase of nearly 60,600 residents – an increase of 0.87% – also led to an increase in tax returns in the state. The largest in-migration to Tennessee came from California with 22,000 individuals bring a net increase of \$1.5 billion in annual adjusted gross income. Residents moving from Illinois to Tennessee made up the second largest group of migrants. Meanwhile, residents who left Tennessee were most likely to move to Georgia.

Tennessee's college-going rate has increased by 2.4% over the past year, according to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC). The state's 56.7% college-going rate

for the class of 2023 represents the largest year-over-year increase since the initial implementation of the tuition-free Tennessee Promise scholarship in 2015. The college-going rate indicates the percentage of Tennessee's public high school graduates who seamlessly enroll in postsecondary education immediately after high school. The THEC report [Tennessee College Going and the Class of 2023](#) provides more insights into the trends and progress of college enrollment among high school graduates in Tennessee.

Tennessee State Parks have announced the availability of all-terrain wheelchairs at 10 state parks, bringing the total number of state parks with the service to 22. The new wheelchairs are the result of a collaboration between the parks system, the Tennessee Department of Disability and Aging, and Sunrise Medical, who designs and manufactures the wheelchairs. The new chairs are coming to Cedars of Lebanon, Cordell Hull Birthplace, David Crockett, Fall Creek Falls, Fort Pillow, Harrison Bay, Indian Mountain, Meeman-Shelby, Nathan Bedford Forrest and Sgt. Alvin C. York state parks. All-terrain wheelchairs are designed to navigate a wide range of terrains. They give visitors with limited mobility the opportunity to access and enjoy outdoor recreation that might otherwise be inaccessible. The chairs are free for visitor use and available for both children and adults. They can be operated independently and offer the option of allowing caretaker control. More information about accessibility at Tennessee State Parks and how to reserve one of the wheelchairs for use [can be found here](#).

## May state revenues grow month-over-month, still \$29.5M below estimates

Tennessee revenues for May totaled more than the state collected in May 2022 but less than the budgeted estimates.

Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson reported that May tax revenues were \$1.645 billion, which is \$52.4 million more than May of last year, but \$29.5 million less than the budgeted estimate. The total growth rate for the month was 3.29%.

"Total tax revenues in May showed strong growth compared to the same time last year," said Bryson. "Sales tax collections, which reflect taxable sales activity in April, were lower than original estimates but still increased significantly from May 2023. Privilege tax receipts were solid, driven by gains in realty transfer and mortgage tax activity. However, we observed notable declines in motor fuel tax receipts and tobacco taxes, which impacted the overall growth for the month.

"Year-to-date, we are significantly below our original general fund budget estimate with two months remaining in the current fiscal year. However, with the support of the general assembly, we passed a budget that reduced our current year's general fund estimate and reset our recurring growth rate to zero percent year-over-year. As a result, we are on track to meet our revised estimated growth rates over the final two months of the fiscal year. In the meantime, we will continue to closely monitor tax collections and economic conditions to ensure fiscal stability."

On an accrual basis, May is the tenth month in the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

General fund revenues were \$32.6 million less than the budgeted estimate, while the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$3.1 million more than the estimates.

Sales tax revenues were \$18.4 million less than the estimate for May but were 3.36% more than May 2023. For ten months, revenues are \$124.1 million less than estimated. The year-to-date growth rate is 1.64%.

Franchise and excise tax revenues combined were \$11 million less than the budgeted estimate in May, but the growth rate compared

to May 2023 was 0.96%. For ten months, revenues are \$313.6 million less than the estimate and the year-to-date growth rate is negative 7.02%.

Gasoline and motor fuel revenues for May decreased by 5.95% compared to May 2023, but they were \$1.3 million more than the budgeted estimate of \$105.5 million. For ten months, revenues are more than estimates by \$6.2 million.

Motor vehicle registration revenues were \$5.3 million more than the May estimate, and on a year-to-date basis, revenues are \$4.8 million more than the estimate.

Tobacco tax revenues were \$6.5 million less than the May budgeted estimate of \$20.8 million. For ten months, they are \$20.6 million less than the budgeted estimate.

Privilege tax revenues were \$0.3 million more than the May estimate and increased 35.17% from May 2023. On a year-to-date basis, August through May, revenues are \$112.8 million less than the estimate.

Business tax revenues were \$1.6 million more than the May estimate. For ten months, revenues are \$26.8 million more than the budgeted estimate.

Mixed drink, or Liquor-by-the-drink, taxes were \$1.4 million less than the May estimate. For ten months, revenues are \$1.6 million more than the budgeted estimate.

All other tax revenues were less than estimates by a net of \$0.7 million.

Year-to-date revenues, for ten months, are \$523.7 million less than the budgeted estimate. The general fund was \$533.5 million less than the budgeted estimate, and the four other funds were \$9.8 million more than estimated.

The budgeted revenue estimates for 2023-2024 are based upon the State Funding Board's consensus recommendation from Nov. 28, 2022, and adopted by the first session of the 113th General Assembly in April 2023.

Also incorporated in the estimates are any changes in revenue enacted during the 2023 session of the General Assembly. [These estimates are available on the state's website](#).



Students from Smyrna visit their sister city of Zama, Japan. Smyrna and Zama became Sister Cities because Nissan was opening a plant in both communities the same year. The Sister City relationship has allowed Smyrna and Zama to make numerous culture exchanges, including visits between students and community members as well as a park in Smyrna paying homage to the relationship.

## Small cities can take strategic steps toward cultivating foreign investments

FDI, from Page 1

opposite is true is Tennessee."

In fact, the demand for U.S. locations to combat the supply chain and distribution issues post-pandemic have led to more and more companies looking to rural communities as they are more likely to have the space – and space for future expansion – urban centers cannot provide.

Berrones said the rural landscape and culture can be a major draw for some companies.

"For a Canadian manufacturer we recruited several years ago, the sites that worked best for them were in very rural areas of Tennessee," she said. "When they got here, they commented on how the sites and communities we were showing them felt so much like home. They said in Canada their folks listen to country music and drive pick-up trucks, so that's what they feel comfortable with. When they invited us to their plant in Canada, I thought it looked just like rural Tennessee. It's the same with Korean and Japanese companies. There are small towns and villages that are big centers for companies over there, and so they like to see that here. It doesn't matter what country they are from, they love to see the rural side of Tennessee. They are so open and value that side of things."

MADE IN TENNESSEE

While there are many who still prefer to buy goods that are "made in America," it can be important to remember that the concept of "foreign" and "domestic" companies is starting to change.

In fact, many foreign-based brands like Bayer, BP, Bridgestone, ING, Honda, Nestle, Nissan, Siemens, Toyota, Samsung, Sony, Unilever, and Volkswagen have more investment and employees in the U.S. than in their home countries. While a company may have an international headquarters in another country, Berrones said that no longer means they should be thought of strictly a "foreign" company.

"Due to globalization, the lines are getting blurred between what is a domestic company and what is an international company," she said. "I think so many joint ventures and mergers have made it less nuanced about whether a company is based in the U.S. They may be based in the U.S., but their operations are all over the place. Ford, which people might think of as the most American companies in the world, is now a joint venture with SK, one of the largest Korean companies. What we care about is the jobs and what the project will do to increase the quality of life of Tennesseans."

Likewise, Abboud said when a company does choose to invest

in Tennessee, it is important to think of them as a Tennessee company first and foremost.

"When a company like Nissan or LG comes in and are creating 1,400 jobs they aren't bringing those jobs from overseas; they are employing all Tennesseans," she said. "The beauty of it is that those businesses established locally now have more money in their pockets because that company has brought in those workers and those jobs. They are employing Tennesseans; that's what we need to keep in mind. They may have a German headquarters, but once that company is here, they are creating jobs for the Tennesseans based here."

Abboud and Berrones both noted that once a company locates to Tennessee, they also have to officially become a U.S.-based entity and follow all of the same rules and regulations of a U.S. or locally-based company.

"Our message to any company locating in Tennessee is always 'welcome home,'" she said. "I think they become a Tennessean just like when In-and-Out moved here. That has been the way we treat companies when they locate. The foreign-direct investment that is coming here ultimately is creating jobs and is benefiting the local

## State awards \$17M in site development grants

State site development grants have been awarded to 12 municipalities as part of 15 total grants recently awarded through TNECD's Site Development Grant program.

Bolivar, Columbia, Crossville, Huntingdon, Milan, and Union City, each received funds for site development projects.

Joint grants were also issued for the Industrial Board of McMinnville-Warren County, the Industrial Development Board of Pulaski-Giles County, the Lawrence County Joint Economic and Community Development Board, Selmer-McNairy County Industrial Board, and Tusculum-Greenville-Greene County Industrial

Board. Grants were also awarded to the Decatur County Chamber of Commerce for the Decatur County Industrial Site, Macon County, McMinn County, and Morgan County. The Macon County project is located in Lafayette while the McMinn County project is in Athens.

The grants, totaling more than \$17 million, are designed to help communities invest in infrastructure and engineering improvements to land economic development projects and achieve [Select Tennessee site certification](#).

"What happens in rural Tennessee matters to all Tennesseans, and we've made significant in-

vestments to strengthen the skilled workforce in our rural counties," said Lee. "TNECD's Site Development grant program further supports those efforts by creating high-quality jobs for thousands of Tennesseans across our state and spurring future economic growth."

The Site Development Grant program is part of the Rural Economic Opportunity Act, which provides funding to improve the economies of Tennessee's rural communities. Since 2016, TNECD has awarded 180 Site Development Grants across the state, totaling nearly \$100 million in assistance to local communities and generating 7,011 new jobs for Tennesseans.

Entity	Award	Location	Purpose
Bolivar	\$700,000	Hardeman County Industrial Park	Building rehab
Columbia IDB	\$1,687,239	Columbia Rail Site	Electrical infrastructure
Crossville	\$4,523,950	Interchange Business Park	Speculative building construction
Decatur County IDB	\$843,535	Decatur County Industrial Site	Sewer infrastructure
Huntingdon IDB	\$829,452	Huntingdon Industrial Park South	Access road construction, property grading, and water and sewer infrastructure
Lawrence County Joint Economic & Community Development Board	\$4.5 million	Lawrenceburg Industrial Park	Water, sewer, natural gas, and electrical infrastructure, and property purchase
Macon County	\$936,149	Macon-Lafayette Industrial Park	Electrical infrastructure
McMinn County	\$984,752	Athens McMinn Innovation Park	Access road construction
McMinnville-Warren County IDB	\$100,000	Linden Site	Due diligence
Milan	\$100,000	Milan Arsenal	Due diligence
Morgan County	\$100,000	Darnell Property	Due diligence
Pulaski-Giles County IDB	\$1 million	Dan Speer Industrial Park South	Property grading
Selmer-McNairy County IDB	\$500,000	Selmer Industrial Park North	Engineering studies
Tusculum-Greenville-Greene County IDB	\$100,000	Greene Valley	Due diligence

# TML congratulates 2024 Achievement Award winners

## Red Bank: Excellence in Strategic Planning



Red Bank residents participate in a community engagement session as part of the creation of the city's Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Being a municipality located wholly within another municipality, city officials in Red Bank face unique challenges when it comes to growth and management.

To tackle this challenge, Red Bank leaders have adopted numerous strategic planning practices to ensure that the city's annual budget cycle, citywide needs, visions for the future, and staff concerns are all incorporated into making right-sized, educated decisions.

In recognition of the coordinated efforts made by the city of Red Bank to incorporate a strategic process for executing city projects and empower both staff and citizens in the decision-making process, the Tennessee Municipal League is pleased to present Red Bank with an award for Excellence in Strategic Planning.

The city of Red Bank has three major components of its strategic planning process: an annual commission retreat, an-

nual budget cycle, and a citywide comprehensive plan. In the past three years, city leaders have held an annual, day-long retreat in February, facilitated by UT-MTAS, to analyze and determine goals for both the city and commission in the coming year. Each member of the Board of Commission helps set one major goal for the city along with the jointly decided mission and vision-statements.

These goals then become a key part of the city's annual budget process conducted from March through May. Citizens are invited to four budget workshops and presented with a certificate for their participation in the process if they attend all four. This resulted in higher than usual participation, giving more citizen-buy in to the budget.

The city has also initiated its first-ever comprehensive plan and small area study, and worked with the firm of TSW to engage with the community. In addition to an overall comprehensive plan, the study will also focus on development of a 12-

acre parcel of vacant land in the central business district.

The planning process has also led to the creation of Red Bank's new Community Development Department, which will be organized with a director, community planner, building official, and office manager. This department will provide both continuity for city planning as well as be a one-stop-shop for private developers. Other strategic plans in the works for Red Bank include:

- A sidewalk inventory and pedestrian connectivity,
- Pavement condition index and pavement,
- Citywide signage inventory and management;
- Stormwater Assessment Management; and
- A Parks Master Plan to be overseen by the city's first-ever park manager and Parks and Rec Advisory Board.

## Columbia: Excellence in Green Leadership



Upgrades the city of Columbia has made to its wastewater treatment plant have helped both save energy costs and better protect important local natural resources, like the Duck River.

As the city of Columbia has worked to improve and upgrade various municipal facilities, city leaders have taken careful consideration to ensure projects involve environmentally resilient and green infrastructure.

In recognition of the dedicated efforts the city of Columbia has made regarding conservation-oriented and environmentally-focused projects, the Tennessee Municipal League is pleased to present Columbia with an award for Excellence in Green Leadership.

The city hired PATH Company to manage the conversion of 6,000 streetlights to LED bulbs. Prior to the conversion, Columbia Power and Water System (CPWS) owned the lights with the city responsible for paying power consumption expenses, maintenance, and installation. The conversion has reduced

those costs and saved the State Street Aid Fund \$450,000 per year. Maintenance of the lights has been transferred back to CPWS as per the agreement.

In addition, the city has made plans to upgrade its existing wastewater treatment plant, originally built in the 1970s. A new HVAC system has already been added to the administration building, providing energy and cost savings. External and internal lighting in the plant has all been upgraded to LED. Plans for a new facility now under construction include energy saving advances and LED lighting.

Finally, the city has incorporated locations for new EV charging stations into its most recent strategic plan. City leaders are working with CPWS and TVA to install charging locations downtown.

## East Ridge: Excellence in Economic Development



A conceptual design for the new Chattanooga Red Wolves Soccer Club facility in East Ridge, one of the major economic investments in the community.

Located on the Tennessee-Georgia line, the city of East Ridge has met the challenge of sales tax leakage across the border head-on with financial incentives and investments that have revitalized its downtown business district.

In recognition of the innovative efforts of the city of East Ridge to reinvest and reinvigorate its downtown and local business climate, the Tennessee Municipal League is pleased to present East Ridge with an award for Excellence in Economic Development.

In October 2011, East Ridge designed a 950-acre tract inside the city limits as a Border Regional Retail Tourism Development District, which is designed to keep sales tax dollars in Tennessee by making border cities more competitive.

East Ridge was able to enter into financial incentive agreements to spur new development on the tract and then be reimbursed for the cost of those incentives through a portion

of the state's increased sales tax revenue.

Since the establishment of the district, businesses developed in the district include a Bass Pro Shop, Hampton Inn, Chick-Fil-A, Starbucks, Jonathan's Grille, Food City, TownPlace Inn & Suites, Dunkin Donuts, Southern Honda Powersports, and more.

The district was also chosen as the first Chattanooga-area location for Top Golf and the founding USL League One professional soccer club the Chattanooga Red Wolves chose to locate their stadium in the district.

Since the region's inception, the city has seen sales tax growth of nearly \$800 million. Those funds have been used to reinvest in growth and development, benefiting both East Ridge and surrounding areas of the state.

The city has also funded a Building and Facade Improvement Grant to help existing businesses in its commercial district beautify, improve, and promote high-quality redevelopment in the city center.

## Ripley: Innovation in Energy and Disaster Resiliency



Officials with the city of Ripley have partnered with TVA, the National Institute for Hometown Security, and local provider Ripley Power and Light to make the community more resilient against increased severe weather and promote innovative energy solutions. The city secured a pilot-scale, state-of-the-art microgrid for the community as part of a highly competitive, collaborative Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Connected Communities Program.

With preparation for and recovery from extreme weather events becoming a priority for communities of all sizes, the city of Ripley has become an example of how small cities can find innovative solutions for energy and resiliency needs.

In recognition of the focused efforts the city of Ripley has undertaken to proactively plan for disaster resiliency and recovery, the Tennessee Municipal League is pleased to present Ripley with an Innovation award for Energy and Disaster Resiliency.

The city of Ripley, led by the Ripley Board of Mayor and Alderman, secured a pilot-scale, state-of-the-art microgrid for the

community as part of a highly competitive, collaborative Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Connected Communities Program. In addition to TVA, the city brought in partners including the Ripley Power and Light Company and National Institute for Hometown Security.

The partnership allowed for the planning, construction, and demonstration of a portable, solar microgrid that will lower energy costs for city facilities and ensure a source of backup power during emergencies. TVA provided \$621,000 for the project with a \$267,000 cost share from partners.

In addition to helping city facilities better withstand power

disruptions during emergencies, the microgrid has become a showcase project for other communities to emulate.

The city has also engaged in renewable energy outreach through the participation of Mayor Craig Fitzhugh in renewable energy and community preparedness panels as well as the upgrading of development regulations to allow for innovative resiliency and disaster preparedness solutions.

The city also recently completed an LED streetlight conversion project with the help of PATH Company, again modeling how other small cities in Tennessee can provide cost and energy saving solutions.

# WAUFORD

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## Shelbyville: Excellence in Downtown Revitalization



From putting utilities underground to a facade improvement grant program that led to the restoration of a historic downtown movie house, Shelbyville has shown that, by investing in downtowns, municipalities can start an economic engine to revive their unique heritage and culture. A new riverpark and multiple new businesses, including one with overnight lodging, are already in the works for downtown Shelbyville.

Downtowns often serve as the beating heart of a community, and officials in Shelbyville have made dedicated efforts to ensure their downtown continues to not just survive but thrive.

In recognition of the collaborative efforts of the city of Shelbyville to find new ways to preserve their historic city center, the Tennessee Municipal League is pleased to present Shelbyville with an award for Excellence in Downtown Revitalization.

Dating back to 1810, Shelbyville's historic downtown square is laid out in a central block bound by four streets and surrounded by a grid of square city blocks of the same size. This design, known as the Shelbyville Square or Shelbyville Plan, became a prototype for numerous other public squares through the U.S. during the 1800s.

Its unique destinations, like Pope's Cafe and the Capri Theater, have made it a draw for tourists as well as the backdrops for movies and music videos.

In 2021, the city began the Shelbyville Historic Square Redevelopment Project, designed to improve the aesthetics and momentum of the area.

This began with a Tennessee Department of Transportation Alternative Program grant of \$1.38 million that placed all downtown utilities underground, constructed new sidewalks with decorative pavers for crosswalks, and installed decorative landscaping, park benches, trash receptacles, and lamps. This first phase was completed in late 2022-early 2023 and made a more pedestrian-friendly downtown.

The city then applied for and received a 2023 Downtown Improvement Grant of \$100,000 from the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development. Working with the South-Central Tennessee Development District, the mayor and city council authorized an additional \$25,000 in funds to make improvements to facades and businesses on the historic square.

Participating projects had to provide

a match of 25% to the 75% provided through the grant fund. More than 20 businesses participated in the programs from painting, replacing windows and awnings, and updating signage.

The historic Capri Theater was able to completely revitalize their neon sign, adding a sense of nostalgia to nights in downtown Shelbyville. The city also used the funds to install a decorative informational kiosk giving visitors and locals updates on numerous events and activities happening throughout the community.

That same year, the city also sold three dilapidated downtown properties to BedCo Investments and the Grindstone Cowboy for renovation. Once completed, the properties will feature Grindstone Cowboy coffee, a restaurant, and entertainment venue, as well as an ice cream shop, retail shops, business offices, and short-term overnight rental accommodations.

At present, the mayor and city council have authorized funds for the architectural and engineering conceptual plans of a new "Riverview District." With funds from the fifth phase of the TDOT Transportation Alternative Program, this project will connect the historic square to the Shelbyville Riverwalk/River Overlook and River Bottom Park on the scenic Duck River, across the Duck River from the existing Fisherman's Park and dam.

Initial plans call for underground utilities, decorative lighting, streetscaping, a stage for events and musical performances, and more.

A catalyst for the conceptual Riverview District is the soon-to-open Glass Hollow Table and Tavern, a 270-seat steakhouse that will also have entertainment areas, meeting/reception rooms, and four short-term overnight rental accommodations for those on the Tennessee Whiskey Trail.

## Spring City Excellence in Tourism Development



A recent fishing rodeo held in Spring City. Located along Watts Bar Lake, the city is expanding its existing recreational opportunities and spreading the word about existing outdoor activities in the community. The city has begun two new festivals and is working with the Tennessee RiverLine, Tennessee Aquarium, Farmer Morgan, and Justin P. Wilson Cumberland Trail State Park to expand its

Scenically located along Watts Bar Lake, officials with the town of Spring City are using the area's natural beauty and availability of water recreation opportunities to turn their community into an outdoors destination.

In recognition of the unified efforts made by the town of Spring City to leverage local assets to build economic opportunity and recreation offerings, the Tennessee Municipal League is pleased to present Spring City with an award for Excellence in Tourism Development.

With a population of just under 2,000 the scenic beauty of Spring City has long been a local secret.

After being designated as a Tennessee RiverTown Community, leaders with Spring City took part in Tennessee RiverLine community workshops and partnered with the firm Farmer Morgan to develop a citywide master plan that would utilize the area's natural assets for economic success.

Community leaders set goals of becoming an all-season recreation destination, creating a multi-generational community with diverse amenities, and hiring a full-time marketing, grant writer, and funding strategist to make these goals a reality.

The first step was marketing Spring City's amenities, which was done through the establishment of a Visit Spring City Facebook page, newly designed welcome signs, the trademarking of the motto "The Home of Watts Bar Lake" to promote lake access, and the creation of new wayfinding signage to local landmarks and amenities.

Working with the Tennessee RiverLine, Spring City has facilitated several community engagement events and workshops to gain feedback on what recreation opportunities can be added in the area.

The town opened the Piney River Boat Ramp, an all-inclusive tournament facility with more than 200 parking spaces that is adjacent to an in-progress city park with plans for a kayak launch, paddleboarding, and outdoor amphitheater.

Improvements are also planned at the Spring City Veteran's Park along Watts Bar Lake with potential for a waterfront pier with kayak and canoe launches.

Since its inception in October 2021, the Spring City Tourism and Events Commission has successfully planned, organized, and implemented four-community events in 15 months to entertain residents and draw visitors.

The commission organized two new festivals: the Spring City Blooms Festival and Lighting the Way to Christmas. These events have enriched community spirit and bolstered the local economy, increasing an 8% year-over-year sales tax increase and the opening of new businesses.

Partnering with the Tennessee Aquarium, Spring City officials are also raising awareness of the endangered Laurel Dace, a fish found only in the rivers upstream from Watts Bar Lake around Spring City.

A "Save the Laurel Dace" festival, with kayaking and hiking opportunities in this area along with an accompanying downtown 5K and street fest, is in the works for next year.

The citywide master plan will also work to connect Watts Bar Lake to the Cumberland Trail and Justin P. Wilson Cumberland Trail State Park as well as all of the town's greenway trails.

A new 40-acre park with a town-operated RV park to increase visitor accommodation is in its second phase.

The plan will also create a town square in the heart of Spring City, allowing more cohesive connection to the city's parks, community theater, and other assets.

## No loan is too large or too small



The Town of Obion recently used TMBF's alternative loan program for a \$150,000 capital outlay note issue to finance the construction of a new public works building. Pictured are City Recorder Jana Fluty, Mayor Rodney Underwood and TMBF Marketing Representative Justin Hanson.



The City of Decherd used TMBF's alternative loan program to borrow \$701,466 to finance a new pumper truck for the Decherd Fire Department. The financing was provided by Citizens Tri-County Bank, a local bank in Decherd. Pictured with TMBF Marketing Representative Kevin Krushenski (right) are Fire Chief Chuck Williams and three of the city's firemen.



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## Townsend: Excellence in Community Planning

Known as the “Peaceful Side of the Smokies,” officials with the city of Townsend take seriously their responsibility of preserving the unique character and natural beauty that both attracts residents and visitors who come through the community as the gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

In recognition of the dedicated efforts made by the city of Townsend to preserve their local assets both for area residents and millions of national and international visitors, the Tennessee Municipal League is pleased to present Townsend with an award for Excellence in Community Planning.

While Townsend’s population is only around 550, the city is one of the three major gateways to the national park, which brought in 14 million visitors in 2021. Situated in Tuckaleeche Cove, Townsend’s clean mountain air, majestic scenery, and opportunities for outdoor recreation have made it a destina-

tion for those wanting to explore the mountain history and heritage of the region.

To preserve this culture for both residents and visitors, Townsend officials began a community plan in 2022 aimed at protecting and preserving what makes Townsend special. In 2023, Mayor Don Prater sought the assistance of UT-MTAS and the East Tennessee Development District to prepare a competitive proposal to better determine the city’s goals and vision for the future.

A Community Plan Advisory Committee was established to review proposals, select consultants, identify funding sources, hold public meetings, speak with stakeholders, and examine useful data for the plan’s framework. Meeting weekly, the committee is charged with finding a plan that helps Townsend remain attractive and economically successful while still protecting its vibrant natural, cultural, and historic resources.



Community planning is how Townsend's community leaders are working to preserve the area's unique culture and heritage while also sharing it with millions yearly.

## Alcoa: Excellence in Fire Services



An Alcoa fireman demonstrates use of fire equipment to local school children as part of the Alcoa Fire Department’s public outreach programs.

Through a dedication to service and safety, the city of Alcoa and the Alcoa Fire Department have worked to achieve two of the highest accreditations available to fire departments in the country.

In recognition of the committed efforts the city of Alcoa has made to improve how its fire department serves the community and reduce fire risk to citizens, the Tennessee Municipal League is pleased to present Alcoa with an award for Excellence in Fire Services.

The Alcoa Fire Department recently earned Public Protection Class 1 status from the Insurance Serve Office (ISO), a rating that has been earned by only three of the state’s 749 fire departments. To obtain this ranking, the city and department had to prove their capacity to prevent and combat structure fires in the community through response records, staffing levels, training protocols, commu-

nity risk reduction efforts, water department resources, and 911 communications performance.

At the same time, the Alcoa Fire Department earned international re-accreditation from the Center For Public Safety Excellence (CPSE). This accreditation focuses on the department’s ability to gather and analyze data to aid in completing the agency’s self-assessment model, evaluates the community risk assessment, assesses the adequacy of the department’s standards of cover for identified risks, and contributes to the development of a departmental community-driven strategic plan.

Earning both an ISO rating of Class 1 and CPSE re-accreditation shows how the Alcoa Fire Department and the city have worked to meet the needs of a rapidly growing municipality while simultaneously working to address public safety and reduce risk.

## Pigeon Forge: Excellence in Police Services



Pigeon Forge receives its second Tennessee Law Enforcement Accreditation Award from the Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police.

In a time when many police departments across the country are facing challenges including a lack of funding, qualified employees, and public support, the Pigeon Forge Police Department is a small-town department that provides services for an estimated 14 million people each year as they police both local residents and visitors who come to the area’s many attractions.

For their ability to maintain quality and efficient public services amid the challenges of being a small department that serves millions of visitors, the Tennessee Municipal League is pleased to present Pigeon Forge with an award for Excellence in

Police Services.

In addition to the large number of visitors Pigeon Forge sees each year, the Pigeon Forge Police Department is charged with managing a multitude of special events on an almost weekly basis from religious conventions to corporate retreats to car shows and local festivals. The department does all of this and protects its more than 6,000 full-time residents.

To keep up the pace required for this kind of activity, the department encourages officers and staff to work out while on duty. Officers are allowed 2.5 hours a week of paid time to exercise and employees who manage 50 hours of time in a 6-month period earn a day off. Those who perform 175

hours for a year get a gift at the annual Christmas party.

To focus on mental health and to encourage officers to spend time with family and friends, the department allows officers to have every other weekend off and continue to be on the four, 10-hour shifts they currently work. As a result, every other weekend each officer gets a four-day weekend, which creates higher job satisfaction and increases employee retention.

Under the leadership of Chief Richie Catlett, the department has also taken considerable time and effort to achieve its second Tennessee Law Enforcement Accreditation Award from the Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police.

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## Maynardville: Small City Progress

By promoting outdoor recreation, public art, and community events, the leaders of Maynardville have created big momentum for their small community.

In recognition of the concerted efforts made by the city of Maynardville to develop public assets that would spur community engagement, the Tennessee Municipal League is pleased to present Maynardville with an award for Small City Progress.

With a population of around 2,500, Maynardville is a small town known best for being the hometown of several country music legends. In the summer of 2022, the city opened a splash pad just below its city hall building, which began to draw residents from throughout Union County.

The popularity of this splash pad led to city leaders investing more in the area, building bathrooms, a shade structure, and installing a colorful public works and utilities mural at the site.

Building on this success, the city received a CDBG grant that will expand activities on the splash pad property. Input from social media and community meetings has created plans for pickleball and multi-use courts, an art wall, walking trail, and landscaping and drainage improvements to the area. These assets will all be interconnected with an expected completion date of January 2025.

A future phase of the project is already in the works with the goals of building a statue garden, play-



The opening of a new splash pad in Maynardville has been the catalyst to both bring citizens together and inspired more community-oriented projects in the small city.

ground, food truck area, and a stage for entertainment and events. The city is also using humorous social

media videos to keep residents up to date and solicit input on projects.

## Etowah: Excellence in Finance



Both the city of Etowah's finance and general municipal staff work together efficiently to ensure the city's finances not just meet but exceed state and local standards.

Proper financial management is essential for any city to succeed, and the municipal staff of the city of Etowah have worked hard to make the city's finances not only meet standards but exceed them.

In recognition of the dedicated efforts the city of Etowah has undertaken to ensure their finances are well maintained and efficient, the Tennessee Municipal League is pleased to present Etowah with an award for Excellence in Finance.

For the past several years, the city of Etowah has not received a single audit finding for its yearly budgets.

This is the result of the entire city staff – led by the city's

finance team and CMFO Alison Bull – working cohesively and efficiently to complete both annual audits and the city's yearly budget in a timely and efficient manner.

In addition to following the state of Tennessee and Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) guidelines, the city of Etowah operates its budget within its own high standards to ensure financial responsibility for its citizens.

The city can accomplish this because its finance team and city employees as a whole approach their job with eagerness, joyfulness, and a willingness to work together to achieve common goals.

## Eagleville: Innovation in Emergency Services

Located in a rural area and with a small population, the city of Eagleville realized and reacted to a need for around-the-clock response for medical emergencies.

In recognition of the committed efforts the city of Eagleville has made to expanding its emergency response services despite the challenges faced by its small staff, the Tennessee Municipal League is pleased to present Eagleville with an award for Innovation in Emergency Services.

With just over 800 residents, the city of Eagleville's leadership worked with the Eagleville Fire Department to find a solution to the pressing issue a lack of consistent and prompt ambulance services was creating within the community.

The Eagleville Fire Department was operating with a full-time chief and two firefighters working a non-conventional 40-hour-per week schedule, largely supplemented by part-time and volunteer staff. These limitations meant the

city couldn't ensure 24/7 availability for medical emergency response.

Town Manager Hellyn Riggins and Fire Chief Jonathan Armstrong, with support from the city council, began pioneering a new, innovative staffing model that ensures constant coverage with at least one certified fire firefighter/medical first responder on duty.

This had a profound impact on the community. A year of empirical data showed response times for all emergency incidents were reduced and that lives of at least three residents experiencing cardiac arrest were directly saved as a result of the program's implementation.

Despite its small size, the restructured fire department has significantly improved the town's public safety services and quality of life for residents. Presently, the department is working on the construction of a new fire station and other initiatives designed to improve the lives of residents.



Right: By restructuring the city's fire department, the city of Eagleville was able to ensure there was an emergency responder on duty 24/7 in the community, reducing response times and saving lives.

*Congratulations to all the award winners!*

**Awards will be presented Tuesday, July 23, at the TML 84th Annual Conference held at the Knoxville Convention Center**

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# Biggest challenge in public finance may not be money

Workforce shortages are affecting many areas of government, but public finance is particularly hard hit. Shortages of accountants are a severe problem, with too few candidates replacing aging employees.

BY ZINA HUTTON  
Governance

By now, problems with workforce shortages are pretty familiar, but here's a specialized area you might not have thought about: The nation is in the middle of a shortage of accountants that's only going to get worse.

Right now, the United States is short 340,000 accountants. Although many areas of the public sector workforce have finally gotten back to or surpassed pre-pandemic levels, public finance is one of the fields still having trouble matching supply and demand. In fact, there are fewer public finance workers on the job now than there were back in 2019. Departments are struggling to recruit and retain the next generation of workers, leading to lags in reporting, big backlogs for processing local taxes and licenses and a lack of auditors.

The workers who are still around are getting older. According to a report from the Government Finance Officers Association and the analytics firm Lightcast, nearly a third of the current public finance workforce is approaching retirement age. Within the next 10 years, they'll be ready to hang up their calculators and close their Excel sheets for good, with the report noting that "New England is particularly vulnerable to retirements."

"There are large numbers of retirements in public finance happening now, and more on the horizon," says Kyle Wedberg, se-

nior manager at GFOA's research and consulting center. "So there is a real need to focus on succession planning and leadership development."

## Planning for the Future

Succession planning in public finance could look like training younger or newer employees to take up a specific role within a department and shadow a more senior colleague who is approaching retirement age. Combined with preparing middle-career workers to take over leadership roles in their departments, this could lead to a more sustainable workforce pipeline.

Right now, however, recruiting is another major issue in the public finance workforce shortage. It's always been difficult to find new or early-career accountants who want to enter the public sector, but the challenge seems to have increased. "Budget cuts in government at all levels — city, county, state — have left investment gaps in people and positions," Wedberg says. "One of these investment gaps is in finance personnel. There's more being asked of fewer individuals."

Barriers to the profession stop many college students from entering. In particular, the 150 credit hours (or five years of study) required for accounting licenses doesn't have the same appeal as entering a four-year finance track and making money sooner. In 2023, researchers at MIT found that the long licensure requirements cause "a 26 percent drop in minority entrants," effectively robbing the profession of a greater workforce pool.

## In Brief:

The public finance workforce is still below pre-pandemic numbers. A third of the existing workforce is eyeing retirement.

Recruitment is a challenges, with college students deterred by barriers to entry including lengthy licensing requirements and sub-par pay.

Possible solutions include more financial aid and a streamlined hiring process.

Pay differences also serve as a roadblock. Public sector positions such as tax examiners and license clerks often pay below \$50,000 — less than starting salaries for accountants in the private sector.

But there are potential solutions, including lowering the 150 credit-hour requirement and offering financial aid to students from minority groups. Ideas that could be effective more broadly in government work, such as accelerating the hiring process and bringing in workers with skills who have not yet completed their degrees, would work in the finance arena.

Wedberg says that governments offer a fantastic place to start a career. It's all a matter of making sure that potential employees understand what public finance has to offer them.

"Telling the story is essential, he says. "Candidates need to be told that a career in local government finance is a way to make a difference in people's lives."



**July 20-23: Brownsville Summer Jamz Music Fest**  
The rich musical heritage of Brownsville is showcased during this four-day festival with performances in local venues.

**July 26-27: Franklin Bluegrass Along the Harpeth Fiddlers Jamboree**  
Honoring the legacy of Sam and Kirk McGee, this bluegrass festival in downtown Franklin benefits the Williamson County Cultural Arts Commission.

**July 26-27: Pittman Center Greenbrier Mountain Festival**  
This free, exciting event offers a variety of enjoyable activities for people of all ages, including delicious food, live music, and engaging children's entertainment.

**July 27: Gruetli-Laager Swiss Heritage Celebration**  
Besides enjoying polka music, dancing, and Swiss wine, Swiss Heritage Celebration visitors can glimpse rural life in the late 1800s by touring the historic farmhouse and viewing its furnishings, documents, memorabilia, and quilts.

**July 27: Monteagle 65th Annual Mountain Market**  
This 65th annual arts and crafts event will feature over 150 artisans and crafters.

**Aug. 5: Hendersonville SummerFest**  
Nestled on the shoreline of Old Hickory Lake, Sanders Ferry Park is the idyllic backdrop for a celebration filled with food, fun, and non-stop entertainment. Summer Fest has established itself as a must-do event in Sumner County.

**Aug. 9-10: Johnson City Meet the Mountains Festival**  
Promoting Johnson City's world-class outdoor assets to all.

**Aug. 9-11: Farragut: 8th Annual Dog Daze**  
The Village Green Shopping Center hosts this day of fun, food, shopping and regional aquatic canine aquatic competitions by Dock Dogs International.

**Aug. 17: Ardmore Grape Myrtle Festival**  
Join us for a fun family day of craft booths, music entertainment, great food, and grape myrtles.

**Aug. 17: Loudon Riverfest**  
Held at Legion Park, this annual event includes paddling, food, craft vendors, fireworks and fun in Historic Downtown Loudon.

**Aug. 17: White Bluff World Honeybee Day Festival**  
Celebrate the importance of the honeybee with this festival featuring live music, kids' activities, local honey, food trucks, and more than 40 vendors.

## NATIONAL BRIEFS



**Home building fell to its slowest pace in four years in May despite a supply shortage, potentially putting an even greater strain on homebuyers.** Builders have pulled back on new residential projects, largely in response to high interest rates. Government data showed that new home construction — also known as housing starts — fell 5.5% in May to an annualized rate of 1.28 million. The drop was attributed to slower construction on both single-family and multi-family dwellings with building permits dipping 3.8%. At the same time, the average rate on 30-year mortgages has reached the highest rate in decades at 6.87%. Home builder sentiment also dropped to its lowest level in May this year.

**The U.S. labor market added 206,000 new jobs in June, according to a new report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.** The labor market participation rate was at 62.6%, essentially unchanged from both the previous month and the same time last year. The biggest job gains came in the

government, health care, and social assistance sectors while the retail trade and professional and business services sectors both lost jobs. Average earnings also increased by 0.3% or 10 cents an hour, meaning average wage gains are still outpacing inflation. Wages have increased 3.9% year-over-year while inflation has increased 3.3% in the same period.

**Only around a third of Americans believe a college education is worth its cost,** according to a new poll by Gallup and the Lumina Foundation. The survey found 36% of adults say that they have "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in higher education, a decline from a peak of 57% in 2015. Almost 32% of respondents overall said they saw "very little" or no confidence in higher education. Declining student enrollment, the student debt crises, high tuition costs, and political debates about political leanings on college campuses have eroded confidence in higher education in recent years. Only one in four Americans believe a bachelor's degree is necessary to secure a well-paying job with young men seeming to benefit the most

financially and salary-wise from not pursuing a college education. Republicans were also more likely than Democrats or Independents to see less value in a college education.

**Younger Americans are choosing to have less children — if they chose to have children at all** — according to a new Pew Research Center Poll. The survey found 30% of those aged 18 to 34 without children aren't sure if they want children and 18% said they definitely don't want children. Between 2018 and 2021, there was also a steady rise in the rate of nonparents under 50 who said they weren't likely or definitely were not having children. Experts believe factors like gender inequality, financial realities, childhood trauma, political and environmental fears, mental illness, concerns about reproductive health and freedom, and lack of childcare and parental leave policies at work have all contributed to the long-shrinking birth rate in the U.S. However, America is not alone in this trend with the global birth rate also being on a steady decline for decades, bottoming out around 2019.

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# Tennessee RiverLine helps cities reimagine waterfront access

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

Municipalities along the Tennessee River are rethinking how they utilize this resource economically, recreationally, and ecologically as the first concepts are unveiled as part of the [Tennessee RiverLine's](#) inaugural round of its [community planning initiative](#).

The Tennessee RiverLine and its [Tennessee RiverTowns program](#) is an initiative of the University of Tennessee Extension in partnership with the University of Tennessee and Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). The goal of the program is to create a continuous, multi-modal system of both greenway and blueway trails along the Tennessee River from Knoxville to Kentucky – 652 miles.

By creating more recreation opportunities along the river, the aim is to boost the economies of cities along the river and encourage environmental conservation of the river as a local resource. In Tennessee, the municipalities of [Clifton](#), [Kingston](#), [Saltillo](#), and [Savannah](#) are among the first to put this plan into practice.

Patrick Osborne, senior planning and design manager with the Tennessee RiverLine, said the two year-project was funded through a USDA Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge grant, with support from the University of Tennessee and TVA allowing for both a public feedback and design phase.

“What we want to do is provide each community with a true sense of ownership and pride in the Tennessee River,” he said. “If we can get folks out – like we’ve seen in Chattanooga the past 15 to 20 years – engaging with the river and communities begin to make infrastructure investments, an economic piece comes along with it too. We look at this as being a catalyst for more tourism and for people to move to communities where populations may be dwindling. Outdoor recreation is a strong, core basis for drawing people into a community, especially to revitalize the economy.”

## PUBLIC FEEDBACK

Each two-year project began its first year with the 652 to YOU public engagement program, which sought feedback about how communities could best utilize their river access based on the needs and desires of stakeholders. This program also rated strengths and weakness of what was already being offered along the river and highlighted what opportunities could be developed with local stakeholders.

Osborne said this first phase was conducted not just by holding public meetings but also hiking, paddling, windshield tours of the area, and other community events.

“We got a sense of what each community’s opportunities and constraints are with the river,” he said. “From that, we developed a list of recommendations from a design and program standpoint that they could move forward with to improve their stretch of the river.”

Some communities, like Savannah and Kingston, already had existing facilities and infrastructure on the river while others, like Clifton, were starting from scratch with undeveloped land.

Rena Purdy, executive director of the Wayne County Joint Economic & Community Development Board (JECDB) said the stakeholder meetings and guidance from the RiverLine helped better connect Clifton residents of all walks of life who were interested in turning river access into a boost for the community.

“I think the greatest value has been the relationships formed and still growing among the partners,” Purdy said. “Locally, the RiverLine continues to bring together residents of all ages and backgrounds all along the RiverLine having a shared interest of protecting and promoting their communities and the Tennessee River. We’ve discovered areas that are primed for recreational development and have learned ways of becoming better stewards of our natural resources. Some people show up to our events out of curiosity but leave better informed of the Tennessee River’s history, present state, and future potential.”

Lauren Whaley with the Hardin County Convention and Visitors Bureau said the process has helped municipalities like Saltillo and Savannah to take ownership of their relationship with the river.

“By participating in the Tennessee RiverLine program, people in our community have been given opportunities to experience the river and learn about its significance to our history and our future,” Whaley said.



Kayakers paddle along the Tennessee River. Paddle events like these, hosted by the Tennessee RiverLine, are helping communities, local residents, and visitors see new potential for the river as a source of recreation and catalyst for economic development.



Kingston Councilmember Stephanie Wright and City Manager David Bolling joined other members of the Tennessee RiverLine Local Leadership Team to unveil twelve new kayaks and a trailer that were recently donated to the city, funded through an investment by the University of Tennessee and TVA. The kayaks will help more residents have a chance to get out on the river.

“We now host events throughout the year that allow all generations to learn about stewardship and different types of river recreation. Seeing some of these events become recurring and involving families who make an effort to return each year has really been encouraging. By participating in the Tennessee RiverLine and their 652 to You program, I believe many residents were given an opportunity to look at their relationship with the Tennessee River in a new way. It is so much more than just a place for recreation and commerce. It is our story.”

While each community had different design preferences and ideas about how the river could best be utilized in their communities, Osborne said many developed these designs based on similar core values. Goals like developing more paddling support and opportunities, connecting recreation on the river to other outdoor amenities, educational components, and connecting the river to economic centers were shared by each community.

“While each project is unique, there are some overall pillars that we aspire to,” Osborne said. “Each of these projects have a role to play in economic development and improving quality of life and public health through the introduction of new outdoor recreation amenities. They are also breaking down barriers and providing equitable access to people who may not have the funds or ability to participate in recreational activities.”

## CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

Based on this feedback, local leaders in each community began focusing on conceptual designs for projects that would meet their goals. With all the designers involved being landscape architects, Osborne said each design considers environmental stewardship of the river.

“Our hope is that as we get people out on the water we are really educating folks on the fragility of our river landscape,” he said. “In many cases, we incorporated interpretive signage and different elements to educate folks on their river landscape, either from a cultural or ecological perspective.”

Clifton’s project at Ross Creek Park will focus on providing river access for non-motorized users, establishing more camping and outdoor recreation opportunities, and celebrating, protection, and restoring local biodiversity. The project will build on the city’s Parks and Recreation Master Plan and has brought in partners including USDA, the Wayne County Joint Economic Development Board, Columbia State



This concept drawing of a boardwalk and fishing pier for the city of Clifton is one of the designs recently completed by the initial round of Tennessee RiverLine public engagement program.

Community College, and TVA.

Purdy said the design phase has helped build excitement about Clifton’s future use of the river.

“When asked our thoughts on the designs created, one of Clifton’s elected officials immediately replied ‘When do we start?’,” she said. “Every person that has attended a community stakeholder meeting, stewardship event, or paddle has expressed interest in seeing the vision come to life and have become more involved in the Tennessee RiverLine.”

In Kingston, the project to enhance the Kingston Waterfront builds on an existing boat dock, parking area, and walking trails. Plans include adding kayak access, trails, picnicking, restrooms, and concessions. Other goals include cleaning stormwater run-off, and better connecting protecting the surrounding area, connecting existing amenities to downtown Kingston, and finding new opportunities to develop Watts Bar Lake and the Tennessee River as tourism assets.

The Saltillo Landing and Savannah Riverwalk are two parts of the four-part project connecting river assets in Hardin County. The other two areas of focus are Pittsburg Landing and the beach at Pickwick State Park.

The site plan for the Saltillo Landing will renovate the boat ramp area to accommodate more vehicles and space for events, including a food truck plaza. A kayak launch and boat storage are also planned. A pavilion, riverfront seating, and playground will also be installed. The entire area will be connected to downtown Saltillo through sidewalks, providing a link between residents, businesses, and the river.

In Savannah, the project will connect a trail to the Cherry Mansion, the city’s Riverfront Boardwalk, and Wayne Jerrolds Park. Bike and pedestrian improvements will then connect these locations as well. A marina is planned for Wayne Jerrold Park with a future hotel site possible between the boardwalk and the park.

“I think the opportunity for us to eventually have riverside trails that tie our county together and tie us to the entirety of the Tennessee River’s 652 miles is exciting,” Whaley said. “While we all share the Tennessee River, our interactions and history with the river are unique to each community. The projects presented to us by the Tennessee RiverLine provide a chance to tell our stories as well as give people another way to enjoy the Tennessee River.”

One consideration of each plan is how others are already using the river in the area.

“In a lot of ways, the Tennessee River still plays a major role in power generation through the TVA and is also a very heavy transportation lane for industry, and so we want people to think of the river as a shared space,” Osborne said. “We want to make sure that people who go out in a kayak and canoe know this is also an area for motorized boaters and barge traffic. In areas where the river really narrows and industrial transportation is high, we may make suggestions that paddling occur in local tributaries or other, safer stretches of the river.”

## FUTURE GOALS

The next phase for Clifton, Kingston, Saltillo, and Savannah is finding grant opportunities to move



their designs into reality. Osborne said the RiverLine will continue to work with these communities to finalize design and construction plans as well as find grant dollars to cover these costs.

“We want to make sure that these projects are visible at the state legislative level, because the state help and be a driver of getting some of this infrastructure built,” he said. “Beyond that, it is up to the communities to take on the ownership of these projects to get them built.”

Purdy described the RiverLine as a “gamechanger” for Clifton and surrounding communities.

“Once the project identified for development at Ross Creek Inlet/Clifton Riverfront Park comes to fruition, it is sure to be an economic boom for Clifton,” she said. “It will create a welcoming environment for local residents and visitors to enjoy walking, biking, camping, fishing, kayaking, nature viewing, festivities, and more.”

Whaley said the project will help cities like Savannah and Saltillo build on existing assets.

“Through the creation of these riverside trails spread through our area, it will encourage people to get out and explore places they have never been before, learn new stories, and see the Tennessee River and our river towns from a new perspective,” she said. “These projects will benefit our county through increasing health benefits or both our local community and our visitors thanks to well-planned trails. We believe that we will also see an increase in economic development. While enjoying the river, we believe visitors will also chose to enjoy our local restaurants, stores, and year-round special events.”

These initial projects have also served as a pilot for the other projects currently in the works in municipalities along the Tennessee River.

“There are currently 22 communities enrolled in our RiverTowns program, which is the framework we use to go through the community engagement and design processes,” Osborne said. “We are currently working with Knoxville and Spring City to develop conceptual designs through the remainder of this year. Next year, the municipalities of Chattanooga, Dayton and Loudon, will join local governments in Meigs, Benton, and Perry counties as they move forward with conceptual designs. Over the next two years, we hope to have another seven or so Tennessee communities with conceptual designs for projects along the RiverLine.”

Osborne said the RiverLine has also been working in South Pittsburg, who already had a conceptual design for a river park.

“They were ahead of the Community Planning Initiative project,” he said. “To date, they have been awarded about \$1.5 million to get the first phase of that project started. They are making great strides in improving their stretch of the river.”

Ultimately, Osborne said the goal is to connect all these communities together via their projects.

“The Tennessee RiverLine is really the modern land-grant mission in action,” he said. “We are really striving to improve the quality of life for the people of Tennessee and the Tennessee River Valley.”