



Deadline for hotel block June 21

## Make plans to attend TML 84th Annual Conference July 20-23

The cutoff date to receive TML's special hotel rate for the annual conference is fast approaching. So if you haven't made plans to attend, now is the time to register!

Slated for July 20-23 in Knoxville, the 84th TML Annual Conference promises to be one of the best.

Award-winning sports writer Sally Jenkins will serve as the keynote speaker on Sunday, July 21. Plus, we'll hear from TVACEO and President Jeff Lyash.

On Monday, the Second General Session will include a dynamic presentation on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and practical uses in municipal government.

Several panel presentations are planned that will address:

- How and Why to Conduct a Special Census
- Workforce Development
- Mental Health and Police Departments Alternative Response
- Saving Money through LED Lighting Upgrades
- Talkin' Trash – Landfills: Running Out of Space; and
- Parks & Recreation: Current Trends, Master Plans & Citizen Advisory Boards.

Many of the conference sessions will meet the continuing education requirements for the Certified Municipal Finance Officers (CMFO) and Utility Board

Member Training. Sessions will begin on Saturday and are included in the full registration fees. Other workshops scheduled for Sunday morning and throughout the day on Monday will also qualify for both CMFO and Utility Training hours. All sessions are opened to registered attendees.

One of the many benefits of attending the TML Annual Conference is the time to network with your peers. On Sunday, there are several networking opportunities planned, including:

- Annual Scholarship Golf Outing
- Black Elected Municipal Officials Breakfast
- Women in Municipal Government Lunch
- Roundtable Discussions
- J.R. Wauford Ice Cream Social
- District Meetings
- Host City Reception

Other highlights include an outstanding exhibitors hall and vendors program, the PEP social hosted by Public Entity Partners on Monday evening, and the Annual Awards Breakfast on Tuesday.

So make plans now to attend the TML 84th Annual Conference! For more information and how to register go to <https://www.tml1.org/84th-annual-conference-expo>. If you have any questions, please contact Sylvia Harris: [sharris@tml1.org](mailto:sharris@tml1.org) or call (615) 425-3903.

**An agenda complete with workshop topics can be found on Page 8.**

## Proximity and access to public charging stations key to EV success



The American public is fairly skeptical that the U.S. will be able to build the infrastructure necessary to support large numbers of EVs on the roads. The proximity to a charger is important not just because it makes it easier for EV drivers to fuel up there, but also because people who live close to a charging station have more positive attitudes toward EVs.

**BY DANIEL C. VOCK,**  
*Senior Reporter, Route Fifty*

Nearly 40% of Americans live within a mile of a public electric vehicle charging station, and another 24% live between one and two miles away, according to a new analysis.

The proximity to a charger is important not just because it makes it easier for EV drivers to fuel up there, but also because people who live close to a charging station have more positive attitudes toward EVs than those that don't, concluded the Pew Research Center, a polling and research organization.

"The vast majority of EV charging occurs at home, but access to public infrastructure is tightly linked with Americans' opinions of electric vehicles themselves," wrote researchers Samuel Bestvater and Sono Shah. "Our analysis finds that Americans who live close to public chargers view EVs more positively than those who are farther away."

In fact, that pattern holds true even when accounting for people's party identification and the type of community they live in. People who live near EV

chargers are more likely to own an electric or hybrid vehicle, to consider buying an EV as their next vehicle, and to support phasing out the production of fossil-fuel burning cars and trucks by 2035, the Pew researchers found. People with chargers in their neighborhoods are also more confident that the country will be able to build the infrastructure required to support a switch to EVs in the coming years.

"On the whole, the American public is fairly skeptical that the U.S. will be able to build the infrastructure necessary to support large numbers of EVs on the roads," the Pew analysts wrote, with just 17% of U.S. adults saying they are extremely or very confident that the country will be able to complete the task.

But those attitudes differ starkly depending on where people live. While 20% of Americans living within a mile of a charger are confident that the country can build sufficient EV infrastructure, only 11% of people who live more than two miles from a charger share that view.

Pew found that 40% of U.S. adults favor phasing out new gasoline cars and trucks by 2035. Among the public, 49% of people

See EV on Page 8

## Global investment helps Tennessee municipalities grow local economies



Gov. Bill Lee and TNECD Commissioner Stuart McWhorter are taken on a tour of the BabyNov facility in Red Boiling Springs by employees. The French organic baby food maker opened the facility in the midst of the pandemic and is one of the largest investments by a French-based company in state history.

**By KATE COIL**  
*TT&C Assistant Editor*

As the pandemic highlighted the importance of global supply chains and investments, foreign direct investment (FDI) continues to help make Tennessee's economy stronger than ever.

The top countries for capital investment in Tennessee are, respectively, Japan, Germany, South Korea, Canada, the U.K., and Italy. Japan's investment marks the longest foreign-direct investment history in Tennessee, recently celebrating Nissan's 40th anniversary of moving into the state.

Lyndi Berrones, assistant commissioner of strategic initiatives for TNECD, said FDI is vital to both the state and local economies.

"Tennessee is not new to international companies," Berrones said. "Some of our largest employers in our rural counties are international companies. Tennessee is usually leading the pack in

terms of states where international companies are creating the most jobs. A third of all the jobs created and a third of all companies that located to Tennessee in the past year were foreign-direct investments."

### SPREADING THE WORD

To help with the recruitment of international companies, the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD) maintains five international overseas offices in Japan, South Korea, Germany, the U.K., and Italy. These five offices have outreach in 12 different countries.

Karel Abboud, global director of FDI and Trade for TNECD, said the Tennesseans who work in these countries help put the state's best foot forward.

"Their job is to get the word out about Tennessee, and they do a really good job," Abboud said. "They are in the country day after day, meeting with people. It really is a huge benefit. You will notice the longer a state has these international offices, the more successful

they've been in attracting FDI."

Foreign countries are also setting up their own offices in Tennessee.

"It's a testament to Tennessee that we are not historically a state that houses foreign consulates, but the Japanese located their consulate to be in Tennessee," Abboud said. "They had the first consulate in Nashville. We now have consulates for El Salvador and Guatemala."

Because of this outreach, the state is seeing investment from new quarters. Australia is one of the newest countries with companies taking interest in Tennessee with EV charger manufacturer Trivium being one of the newest recruits.

However, South Korea has become one of the fastest growing investors in Tennessee, recently moving up to be the country with the third most FDI. Berrones said Tennessee is one of a few states to see such investment from the country. See FDI on Page 3

## Strategic planning for grants is essential as project costs soar



Taking a strategic planning approach to grant funding can help secure and bundle funds for important projects at a time when single grants are no longer covering entire project costs.

**By KATE COIL**

Many municipalities end up sacrificing valuable projects because they can't navigate the network of state, federal, and private grant funding.

Regardless of size, municipalities can take a strategic approach to grant funding. In this way, they are better able to coordinate upcoming grants, prepare successful applications, and ensure the funding is closed out correctly once it has been received.

During a recent West Tennessee Planning webinar, Brooxie Carlton, assistant commissioner of Rural and Community Development with the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (ECD), explained how towns can be more strategic when applying for grants.

By adopting this approach,

Carlton said she has seen both the state and communities better leverage funds to do more.

### WHY PLANNING WORKS

As the cost of capital and other projects rises, many communities must bundle grants to complete projects previously funded by one grant. Phasing projects is another way to stretch grant funds.

"Unfortunately, you can't come to CDBG for a \$500,000 project and max something out," Carlton said. "It can be hard to figure out how to do CDBG, EDA, and USDA all in one project. Aligning projects with funding priorities, making sure your projects and the funding sources work together takes some planning and moving parts and pieces as well. You may need to pull out some parts of the project and to think about whether phasing out a project makes sense to do."

Carlton noted many grants

now have required planning and due diligence portions with the Delta Regional Authority and the state's Three Star Program offering grants to cover these costs.

Carlton said that when it comes to securing a local match, budgeting is key. "When you're preparing your city budget in May, you need to think about a grant application you want to submit next January," she said. "You also need to make sure there is money for operations and maintenance."

Strategic planning can also give officials time to improve a grant application by seeking input from the funding entity and finding ways to tie the application to other ongoing opportunities. Carlton said most software can tell the granter when the application was submitted. Those who show they have been consistently improving their

See GRANTS on Page 7



# NEWS ACROSS TENNESSEE



## ATHENS

The city of Athens has unveiled a new quilt trail in its downtown. The "Patterns of the Past Quilt Trail" will celebrate the heritage and artistry of quilt making, inviting both residents and visitors to explore the different patterns and stories behind each square. A series of quilt squares will be displayed on historic buildings, landmarks, and local businesses throughout downtown Athens. Each square is connected to the region's cultural history and local artists. The self-guided map is available on the Distrx app, providing information, photos, and audio to enhance the experience.

## COLLIERVILLE

The town of Collierville has launched a state-of-the-art Traffic Operations Center, an initiative driven by the innovative efforts of the town's engineering division. The engineering team who spearheaded the project included Neetu Singh, Jesse Frye, and Shane Richardson. The center was approved by the Board of Mayor and Aldermen in May 2023 as a Fiscal Year 2024 Capital Improvement Project. With a budget of \$120,000, the funds were used for fiber repairs, upgrading controllers/switches, a new server, a new computer, and TV monitors. After a year of dedicated work, the center was successfully opened in May 2024. Currently, 16 intersections across the town are connected and available for real-time monitoring via the operations center. This connectivity is made possible through an extensive network of fiber lines.

## COVINGTON

The city of Covington has become the latest member of the [Tennessee Main Street Program](#). The seat of Tipton County joins 46 other Tennessee Main Street communities accredited through the state program and Main Street America, a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Main Street Program provides training, support and grant opportunities to assist in downtown revitalization efforts. The program will focus on adaptive reuse of historic commercial buildings for community events and economic vitality. The Tennessee Main Street Program requires communities to illustrate a commitment from local government and other local organizations, have an adequate organizational budget, hire a dedicated program manager, have a strong historic preservation ethic and a collection of historic commercial buildings and a walkable district.

## DICKSON

A new commuter bus service will connect Dickson to downtown Nashville via Bellevue. Nashville's WeGo Public Transit recently announced a morning and afternoon weekday bus trip between Dickson, Bellevue, and downtown Nashville along Route 88. The service will connect the Park and Ride at Beasley Drive in Dickson to the Park and Ride at Coley David Road in Nashville's Bellevue neighborhood and then the Elizabeth Duff Transit Center in downtown Nashville. Tickets can be purchased at \$4.25 each or \$73.50 for 20 rides. Coaches can accommodate 54 passengers each and will provide two morning and two afternoon runs.

## FRANKLIN

Officials with the city of Franklin cut the ribbon on the new upgraded and expanded Water Reclamation Facility. The \$132,890,000 project is the largest capital investment in the city's history and represents a substantial investment in the city's infrastructure and is designed to meet the growing needs of a growing community while ensuring the preservation and protection of the region's water resources. The facility provides a capacity of 16 million gallons-per-day, more efficient and effective treatment of wastewater including solids processing equipment, and enhanced environmental performance such as energy-efficient equipment,

optimized treatment processes, and optimized processes. For more information about the upgraded Water Reclamation Facility, visit [www.franklintn.gov/watermanagement](http://www.franklintn.gov/watermanagement).

## JASPER

Valmont Industries, Inc., officials announced the company will expand its Jasper operations by investing more than \$6 million to increase production of vital infrastructure. Through the expansion, Valmont will create 80 new jobs, including highly technical positions requiring nationally recognized certifications and entry-level positions requiring workforce development training. Valmont's location in Jasper employs 270 Tennesseans and is an important supplier of steel poles and structures to utility and transportation markets nationwide. Through this project, the company will be able to meet the ever-growing demand of the area in replacing aging infrastructure and building more climate resilient structures.

## JOHNSON CITY

BorTec USA officials announced the company will open its first U.S. location in Johnson City. The company will invest \$3.1 million and create 35 new jobs by establishing a heat treatment plant. The new operations will mainly produce wear and corrosion-resistant pipes for the oil and gas industries. BorTec is a subsidiary to German-based BorTec Group. The company will more than double its worldwide headcount through the Tennessee facility.

## LOUDON

PPG officials will open their newest paint and coatings manufacturing facility in Loudon, investing \$225 million and create 129 new jobs. The Loudon plant will be PPG's first new U.S. manufacturing facility in the last 15 years and is part of the company's greater investment to expand and innovate advanced manufacturing in North America. Upon completion, the Tennessee operations will be more than 250,000 square feet in size with dedicated space for warehousing as well as paint and coatings production. Headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pa, PPG develops, manufactures and distributes its paints, coatings and specialty materials worldwide. The company operates across more than 70 countries and reported net sales of \$18 billion in 2023.

## NASHVILLE

Nashville set more tourism records in 2023, according to data from the Nashville Convention and Visitors Corp. Tourists spent \$10.56 billion in the city in 2023, up from \$9.97 billion in 2022. The number of visitors also increased from 16.2 million in 2022 to 16.8 million in 2023. Based on current estimates, Nashville will be attracting 18.1 million visitors by 2027.

## PIGEON FORGE

Officials with Pigeon Forge broke ground on a new, \$46.5 million fire and police headquarters building. Located next door to Pigeon Forge City Hall, the facility will serve as Pigeon Forge Fire Station No. 1 and a police headquarters and will also feature a firing range. The fire and police department headquarters are presently located in the city hall building, and officials said the new facility will give both departments a chance to grow alongside the city itself. The fire department section of the building will be opening in summer 2025 while the police side of the structure will open in summer 2026.

## SOMERVILLE

The Somerville Fire Department held a hose uncoupling ceremony to celebrate the completion of the new Fire Station No. 1. Located at the corner of Old Jackson and North East Street, the one-story station includes offices, a day room, bunk rooms, utility room, three apparatus bays, and a FEMA rated tornado shelter for use by the community.

## Farragut cuts ribbon on new greenway



Officials with the town of Farragut cut the ribbon on the new Little Turkey Creek Greenway. Complete after almost a year of planning and construction, the extension links the Sheffield and Vista subdivisions to the Brookmere and Sugarwood subdivisions as well as to Kingston Pike. The 1,450-foot-long, eight-foot-wide greenway includes a three-car parking area off Virtue Road with a paved trail leading down to the historic Virtue Mill water wheel, known for its role in the Battle of Campbell's Station.

## Franklin unveils statue honoring Coach Jimmy Gentry, WWII heroes



Franklin officials, veterans, community leaders, and Sculptor Scott Wise joined members of the family of Coach Jimmy Gentry unveiled a statue honoring both Gentry and the more than 3,500 Franklin residents who served in World War II at Five Points. The project started by Leadership Franklin coincided with the 79th Anniversary of the Liberation of Dachau by Gentry's unit. A celebrated local teacher and coach, Gentry wrote a book titled *An American Life* detailing his experiences in the war from mustering at Franklin's Five Points to the death of his brother – one of 600 Franklin residents killed in action – to his heroic actions as a liberator.

## Brentwood opens new mountain bike trail



Brentwood City Commissioners, parks and recreation officials, and mountain biking enthusiasts helped cut the ribbon on the new mountain bike trail at Smith Park. The seven-mile path takes cyclists behind the Ravenswood Mansion, up inclines, and down valleys. The project has been three years in the making, utilizing the woods in Smith Park to create trails. Each trail is named in honor of the history and heritage of the Brentwood area.

## Madisonville cuts ribbon on playground, splash pad



Officials with the city of Madisonville cut the ribbon on the new playground and splash pad at Houston Park. The improvements to the downtown park were made possible through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant funds. The new playground and splash pad are a welcome addition to the park, which already includes a basketball court, lighted walking trail, and two pavilions.



# Tennessee-based pet care company seeks to make Better Cities for Pets

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

With pet ownership spiking in the past 30 years, finding a community that has opportunities for furry friends is becoming a priority for many Americans.

Ben Anders, external affairs manager with Mars PetCare, said the company launched the [Better Cities for Pets Initiative](#) to help cities better connect and market their pet-friendliness with opportunities for local businesses, animal shelters, housing, and parks and recreation.

“Mars is a manufacturing company, and people know us from our pet food and our confectionery products,” he said. “There is purpose from behind the product, and we want to help the communities we are in. The idea behind Better Cities for Pets is that we really do care about the well-being of pets, pet-owners, and people. We want to be a leader and a resource in that space to help communities achieve more pet-friendly amenities and spaces. This is more about our purpose work and making a better world for pets.”

Cities that have earned the designation in Tennessee include Franklin – where Mars Petcare is headquartered – as well as Bartlett, Brentwood, Germantown, Hendersonville, Memphis, and Nashville. There are more than 150 cities in the national network. Anders said the program fits small, medium, and large cities, and most cities just haven’t connected what resources they already have.

“A lot of the times, we find that cities sign up to become certified and they already meet all of the credentials because they have the access to shelters, access to green space and pet-friendly businesses in their community,” Anders said. “Cities have this resource available, and it’s not that difficult to be certified through this program. It is a resource anyone can tap into. It’s completely free, and once you participate in the program, you are eligible to apply for grants to help pet-friendly projects in your community. I want every city across the United States to be a part of this program.”

According to the Pew Research Center, 62% of Americans have at least one pet at home and 35% have more than one. One in five Americans brought a new pet into the family during the pandemic with 85% of those pets remaining in the family after Americans began returning to work. Furthermore, in a survey conducted by Mars Petcare, 92% of pet owners reported that having a pet improved both their mental and physical health over the past three years.

“We want communities to really focus in on those pet-friendly amenities because people are expecting them, especially younger people who are moving into cities,” Anders said. “They are really asking those questions about where they can take their dog on a walk, are there green-spaces and dog parks. Residents are really expecting these things. Our program recommends ways and re-



Pet-owners and officials with the city of Franklin celebrate the community receiving its Better Cities for Pets Designation. Franklin is where Mars Petcare is headquartered, and the company hopes the program can help build community and economic opportunity while helping pets.

sources for cities to tap into those demographics they are trying to attract. We have toolkits on our website that include model ordinances, signage for responsible pet ownership, and residential education.”

According to Forbes, Millennials make up the largest percentage of current pet owners (33%), followed by Gen X (25%) and Baby Boomers (24%). However, members of Gen Z are the most likely to have more than one pet.

“Everyone can be a pet parent,” Anders said. “We see pet ownership as important across the board for different reasons and with different expectations. It’s amazing how people really view and treat pets like family from what they feed them to how they exercise them and give them healthcare.”

Having pet-friendly spaces can also help foster a sense of community, Anders said.

“The pandemic really showed us that we need a place to gather, that gathering is important for health, community, and connection,” he said. “We see the power of pets in bringing people together, whether that is in dog parks, pet-friendly businesses, and offices that are pet-friendly. Particularly pet-friendly businesses have a real opportunity to go after that demographic and consumer base. It helps businesses to evolve. Communities can take a look at ordinances and laws to help businesses that want to be more pet-friendly. Having those resources within the community makes sure everything is done by the book and is having a safe environment for customers.”

## Better CITIES for pets™

A MARS PETCARE PROGRAM

One of the partner organizations of Better Cities for Pets is the [U.S. Conference of Mayors](#). Anders said that the network Better Cities for Pets has created through this and other partnerships also helps cities share knowledge and collaborate on new and innovative projects.

“Once you are part of the program, we try to have consistent touch points within the network via social media, email, updates and big happenings to the program,” he said. “One of the best ways we engage memberships is through our grant program. It’s an opportunity for cities to really go in and see what they can do. We get applications across the board. One project that has really stuck with me is Mt. Clair, N.J., piloted this calm room for their shelters. It can be a nerve-wracking experience for a future pet parent to go into the shelter with all the noise and activity. They created this room separate from the shelter where you can come in with a dog you are looking to adopt and have one-on-one time in a calm setting to know if it’s a right fit. It’s a very doable project with an immediate benefit and is also replicable.”

Most of all, Anders said he enjoys getting to see communities come together through the program.



Brentwood City Manager Kirk Bednar takes a moment to see how much a city employee’s puppy has grown during a visit to Brentwood City Hall. Brentwood first earned certification through the Better Cities For Pets™ program from Mars Petcare in 2020, and was recertified in 2022.

“The mayors who are engaged with the program are super thankful and passionate,” Anders said. “It’s great anytime you get to celebrate a win like a new dog park or a new pet-friendly business. It’s wholesome what we do at Better Cities for Pets, making sure we take care

of four-legged friends. It’s great to work with cities and see their progress. It’s great to see what this does not just mayors but for people in the community.”

To learn more about the program or to take the certification survey, visit [Better Cities for Pets](#).

# Global investment helps Tennessee cities grow local economies

FDI, from Page 1

“I would say it has really taken off, especially in the EV space. South Korea puts a lot of investment in developing parts and systems for raw materials for EVs. Japan has always been a little bit more conservative in their investment. They tend to take their time and explore a market, especially when it comes to the EV market.”

Word-of-mouth back home is another important recruitment tactic.

“Within Tennessee we kind of see clusters develop,” Berrones said. “Over a decade ago, Hankook Tire from Korea announced their first U.S. manufacturing plant in Clarksville. Since then, Clarksville has had the highest concentration of South Korean companies locate in that area. These companies have a familiarity and there is a lot of competition between these companies. However, when they are in their home country, they talk about where they are finding success. If one company is having success in Tennessee or in a particular area of Tennessee, other companies will listen.”

Some FDI is because of the industries that are themselves seeing success in Tennessee. The success of the state’s automotive industry has prompted investment from Japan and Germany

with many South Korean companies also involved in the state’s expansion into the EV market. The prevalence of Ball clay in the state has also made it an ideal destination for the ceramics industry, bringing in companies from Italy. The state’s chemical industry is another draw for foreign investment.

Sometimes, it is the state itself that draws certain companies. Berrones and Abboud said that many Canadian, German, and Korean investors talk about how the state’s mountains and rolling hills remind them of landscapes back home, making them feel more at ease.

### SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Of course, one of the biggest reasons for FDI came out of the pandemic.

“COVID taught us a lot about supply chains,” Berrones said. If you don’t have product in the U.S. or aren’t making things in U.S., you aren’t successful. If you are not a U.S. company or you do not have a base in the U.S., you cannot physically get your product to consumers. Companies need to be here to be successful. COVID definitely pushed a lot of issues to the forefront. The period right after COVID was one of Tennessee’s biggest years in foreign and capital investment, especially in the OEM market. The OEM cor-



Foreign-investment means big bucks for Tennessee’s economy. Japan has the largest FDI in the state, followed by Germany, South Korea, Canada, the U.K., and Italy. South Korea has recently seen the largest jump in investment.

ridor is really in the Southeastern U.S. now. It became a race to get there after the pandemic.”

Abboud said Tennessee is able to meet many of the needs companies have when it comes to getting set up for the U.S. market

quickly.

“We have a pro-business climate,” she said. “Businesses know if they come here, they will have low taxes and no state income tax for their workers. A healthy business climate, and a

quality-of-life factor helps attract an available workforce. Time and time again when we talk to companies, the No. 1 thing they talk about is being able to find and keep a workforce.”





# PEOPLE



**Leland Alexander**, fire chief of Milledgeville, died April 27, 2024, at the age of 78. Alexander had been chief of the Milledgeville Fire Department since 2010. Prior to that, he had 57 years of experience in the fire service and as an emergency medical responder, working in Shelby County. He also served for 26 years as a Shelby County Sheriff's Department deputy, for 26 years as chief of security for the Shelby County Penal Correctional Center, and at the Shelby County Sheriff's Department Academy.



Leland Alexander

**Hal Boyd** has been selected as a new legal consultant in the University of Tennessee's Municipal Technical Advisory Service's (UT-MTAS) Martin office. Boyd has operated his own law firm in Tiptonville since 2012, during which time he also served as county attorney for Lake County and as city attorney for Tiptonville. Boyd holds a bachelor's degree in chemistry from East Central Oklahoma State University and a law degree from the University of Memphis. He also served as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army from 1985 to 1989.



Hal Boyd

**Dr. Derek Anderson** has been named the new director of the Chattanooga Mayors Office of Community Health by Mayor Tim Kelly. Anderson comes to Chattanooga from San Antonio, Texas, where he has served as program director of the Bexar County Community Health Collaborative since 2022. He holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Xavier University of Louisiana, a master's in public health from the University of Toledo, and a doctorate in public health from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.



Derek Anderson

**Joyce Brackins**, former city commissioner for Pigeon Forge, died May 1, 2024, at the age of 84. Brackins served for 16 years on the Pigeon Forge City Commission. In 2001, Brackins took over the seat held by her late husband Woody Brackins, who had served on the Pigeon Forge Commission since the 1970s, after he died unexpectedly early into a new term. During her time on the commission, Brackins was known for her passion for city employees as well as parks, greenways, and projects to support the local economy. Additionally, she owned and operated Brackins Landscaping for more than 20 years.



Joyce Brackins

**Rob Bennett** has been selected as the new city administrator for Decherd. Bennett has been serving as the city's assistant street department superintendent and has spent 11 years with the city. Bennett takes over the role after the departure of Mary Aveni in December 2023.



Rob Bennett

**Ryan Ewalt** has been named the city of Chattanooga's new chief strategy and innovation officer. Ewalt has been serving as the city's chief operating officer since November 2021. Prior to that, he spent seven years at Unum and four years at Volkswagen in various project management and operations roles. He holds a bachelor's degree in systems engineering from the University of Virginia and a master's in public administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



Ryan Ewalt

**Davy Bergman Jr.** has been named chief of the Fayetteville Fire Department. A Fayetteville native, Bergman has been with the department since 2008, starting as a volunteer firefighter before joining the department full-time. He has also held the positions of engineer, lieutenant, and captain in the department. More recently, he has served as assistant chief for the past three years, and was appointed interim chief last November after the departure of Chief Tony Kimbrough.



Davy Bergman

**Bruce Guyton**, retired federal judge, has been selected as the deputy chief overseeing the Knoxville Police Department's Office of Professional Standards. Guyton previously served as U.S. magistrate judge for the Eastern District of Tennessee for 20 years, retiring in 2022. Prior to that, he was a founding partner of Knoxville law firm Woolf, McClane, Bright, Allen & Carpenter where he specialized in discrimination and employment law. He earned his law degree from the University of Virginia.



Bruce Guyton

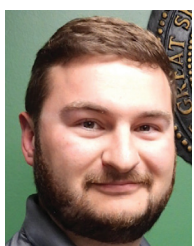
**Brandy Bishop** has been named the new city manager of Charleston after the departure of longtime City Manager Caroline Geren. Bishop had been serving as the assistant to the city manager prior to her appointment. Bishop was initially hired to help with the transition to the new Charleston City Hall facility.



Brandy Bishop

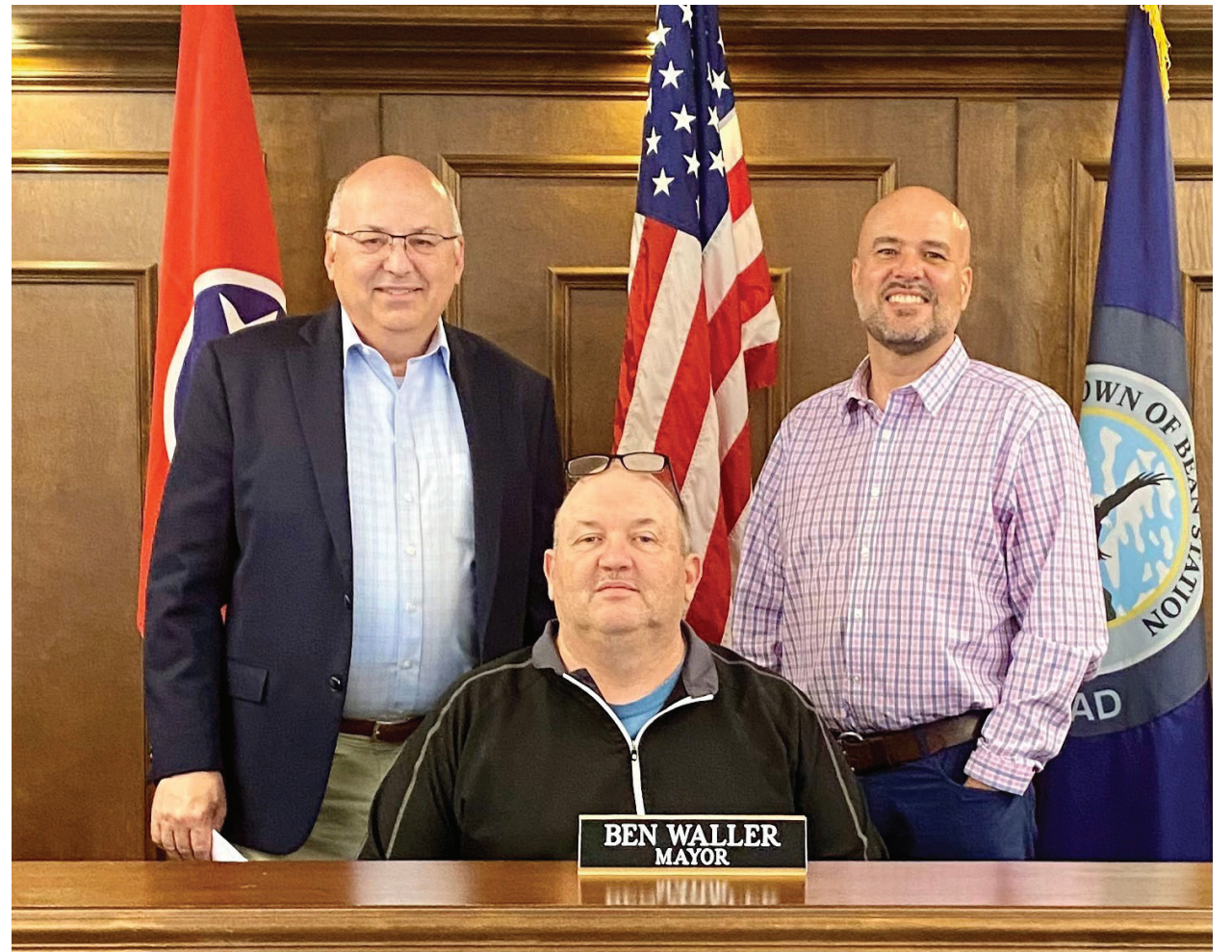
**Patrick Marsh** has been selected as a management consultant for UT-MTAS's Memphis office. Prior to coming to MTAS, Marsh served as city manager of Fernley, Nev. He has also held roles as city administrator in Fitchburg,

**Scott Bonk** has been selected as the new city recorder of Charleston following the departure of longtime City Recorder Janet Newport. Bonk is owner of Tennessee Technology Solutions, which operates in downtown Charleston. He served in the U.S. Navy's Aviation Maintenance Administration in systems administration before taking several roles in IT industry in the public sector.



Scott Bonk

# TML, TMBF visit cities in East TN



TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes and TN Municipal Bond Fund President and CEO Wade Morrell spent the day visiting cities in East Tennessee. Pictured above are Haynes (left) and Morrell (right) with Bean Station Mayor Ben Waller.



In Rogersville are Morrell, City Recorder Glenn Hutchins, Vice Mayor Bryan Hartness, Mayor Jim Sells and Haynes.



In LaFollette, Morrell and Haynes visit with City Administrator Stan Foust and Fire Chief Jimmy Pack.

Wis.; Monona, Wis.; and Coal Valley, Ill. He holds a bachelor's degree from Augustana College in Illinois and a master's degree from Northern Illinois University, both in public administration.



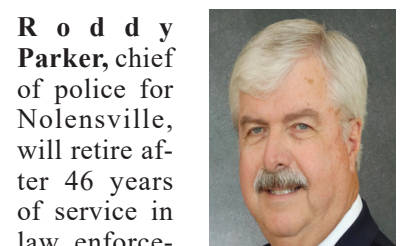
Patrick Marsh

**Hanna Miller** is the new public information officer for the city of Columbia. She will both maintain communication for the city government and assist the tourism and marketing department with a variety of initiatives. She previously served as the community risk reduction and public



Hanna Miller

information officer with the Columbia Fire and Rescue Department. Before that, she worked for Jaynes Media to assist in the production of news magazine show "Maury County Now." She holds a bachelor's degree in mass communications.



Roddy Parker

**Roddy Parker**, chief of police for Nolensville, will retire after 46 years of service in law enforcement. Parker's career began in 1978 when he joined the Williamson County Sheriff's Office. He retired as a captain from the department in 2017, the same year he became chief of the Nolensville Police Department. Parker holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Middle Tennessee State University. He is a graduate of the FBI National Academy.

**Tom Pessemeir** has been named as the new deputy city manager for Oak Ridge. Pessemeir will take over the role from previous Deputy City Manager Jack Suggs, who retired in April. With 16 years of municipal government and financial experience, Pessemeir has held roles including city manager, assistant city manager, public works director, community development director and city engineer. He comes to Oak Ridge from Independence, Ore., where he served as city manager and public works director for three years. Prior to that, he spent six years as assistant city manager with Sherwood, Ore. Pessemeir holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Portland State University and a bachelor's degree of economics from Oregon State University.



Tom Pessemeir

# WAUFORD

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



# TML Board of Directors holds June meeting in Nashville



From left to right, TML 2nd Vice President and Bolivar Mayor Julian McTizic, TML President and Farragut Mayor Ron Williams, TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes, TML 1st Vice President and Gallatin Mayor Paige Brown, TML-At Large Director and Jackson Councilman Johnny Dodd, and Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly.



TML President and Farragut Mayor Ron Williams presides over the board meeting.



Left, Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly, and right, At-Large TML Director and Newport Mayor Trey Dykes.



TML District 1 Director and Kingsport Alderman Darrell Duncan, left, talks with TMBF Executive Director and CEO Wade Morrell, right.



**Above:** TML District 8 Board Member and Millington Alderwoman Bethany Huffman, left, and TMBF President and Morristown Councilwoman Kay Senter, right.

**Left:** From left to right, TML 1st Vice President and Gallatin Mayor Paige Brown chats with TML Deputy Director Chad Jenkins and At-Large Director and Brentwood City Manager Kirk Bednar



At-Large Director and Brentwood City Manager Kirk Bednar, left, and District 1 Director and Kingsport Alderman Darrell Duncan, right, listen to a presentation.



TML 2nd Vice President and Bolivar Mayor Julian McTizic, left, listens as TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes, right, updates board members on various issues.



**Above:** TML Deputy Director Chad Jenkins provides the board with a legislative update.

**Right:** TML 1st Vice President and Gallatin Mayor Paige Brown, left, talks with TML At-Large Director and Jackson Councilman Johnny Dodd, right.



Additional board meeting photos [may be viewed online here.](#)



## STATE BRIEFS

Tennessee's economy has outpaced the national average in gross domestic product for the eighth year in a row. Data released from the Bureau of Economic Analysis shows that Tennessee's GDP has grown at a 3% yearly average since 2017, compared to the U.S. average of 2.2%. On average, 30 counties within Tennessee grew faster than the state average with Wilson County leading the way over the past five years at 6%. Much of the state's growth has been concentrated in Middle Tennessee while the state's more rural and western counties tend to lag.

A recent survey from the Tennessee Highway Safety Office (THSO) recorded the highest percentage of seatbelt usage in state history at 92%. The results from the office's annual roadside observational survey saw an increase of 1.5% in 2023 from the 2022 rate of 90.5%. The survey found the highest seatbelt usage among occupants of sport utility vehicles while the lowest was among those in pickup trucks. Female occupants were more likely than male occupants to use seatbelts while front passenger occupants were more likely to wear their seatbelt than backseat occupants.

Tennessee ranked as the top state for international visitor arrivals in 2023. The state saw a 15.7% increase in international traffic since 2019, according to new data just released from the National Travel & Tourism Office (NTTO). The state reported 66.5 million international travelers last year. Tennessee was one of only four U.S. states and territories to see an increase in overseas visitation last year with Puerto Rico, Texas, and Georgia also making the top four.

Tennessee has tied its all-time lowest unemployment in the month of April with 3.1%. New data from the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) found the state's April 2024 data is the same record low as it was from April through June 2023. The state reported a growth

of 5,100 nonfarm jobs in April 2024. The trade, transportation, and utilities sector accounted for the largest increase in new jobs followed by the education and health services sector, and thirdly by the leisure and hospitality sector. TDLWD has prepared a complete analysis of the April unemployment data, which is [available here](#).

Tennessee has become the first state in the nation to offer free diapers through its state Medicaid program. Beginning in August, TennCare and CoverKids will cover the cost of 100 diapers per month for children under two enrolled in the programs. A statement from TennCare noted that the new initiative will ease financial burdens for families and ensure the well-being of the youngest Tennesseans. Officials noted TennCare already covers diapers and similar products for children with illnesses or conditions that cause incontinence. The program drew praise from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services who said children whose parents are forced to conserve diapers can often wind up with serious medical issues. The new benefit is a component of Gov. Bill Lee's "Strong Families Initiative" approved by lawmakers last year.

Vanderbilt University and Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) have announced a partnership to develop training, testing and evaluation methods that will accelerate the Department of Defense's adoption of AI-based system in operational environments. As artificial intelligence becomes an important asset in global competition, the U.S. military is exploring the use of AI and autonomous vehicles for use to protect active service members. ORNL and Vanderbilt will partner on a project to ensure these technologies are secure, reliable, and dependable when it comes to national security. Vanderbilt's Institute for Software Integrated Systems and ORNL recently established the Center for Artificial Intelligence Security Research, or CAISER, will both be part of the partnership project.

## Tennessee Tourism launches statewide road cycling program



The state has launched 52 new curated road cycling routes covering 53 counties and 1,739 miles of roadway.

The Tennessee Department of Tourist Development (TDTD) is inviting cyclists to experience Tennessee on 52 new curated road cycling routes that wind their way through the state's picturesque landscapes.

The new program, Bike Tennessee, launched at [BikeTN.com](#) and allows cyclists to engage with the routes using the app Ride with GPS.

"From our music to our makers, Tennessee is a state full of storytellers and our beauty is unmatched," said Commissioner Mark Ezell, TDTD. "As travelers increasingly seek sustainable and authentic experiences, we invite them to explore our scenic routes and discover the charm of our small towns. We are pleased to partner with Ride with GPS and showcase the hidden gems and breathtaking landscapes that define our state."

Tennessee has been named an Ambassador for popular cycling app Ride with GPS, making all 52 routes easily accessible across the platform. Each Bike Tennessee route was meticulously mapped, ensuring cyclists have access to detailed navigation and route information. Ride descriptions provide valuable information about the terrain, waypoints and hidden gems along the way, as well as

modifications to tailor each ride to the individual.

The routes were created in collaboration with professional cycling guide Shannon Burke of [Velo View Bike Tours](#), who brings more than a decade of experience leading cycling tours. Routes were selected with safety and scenery in mind, with 1,739 miles of routes mapped and 53 Tennessee counties included in the Bike Tennessee program. They offer seasoned cyclists mostly rural, low-traffic experiences in some of Tennessee's most scenic and historic landscapes, including 14 routes in Tennessee State Parks.

"Tennessee has all the right ingredients to be one of the premier cycling destinations in the country—low-traffic backroads, welcoming communities and stunning scenery," said Shannon Burke. "It's an amazing place to ride!"

The outdoor recreation economy generates \$11.9 billion for Tennessee, according to the Outdoor Industry Association. Bike Tennessee aims to leverage the growing cycling community to increase visitation and economic impact throughout Tennessee.

Cyclists can learn more about Bike Tennessee and explore the available road cycling routes by visiting [www.BikeTN.com](#).

## Tennessee Promise program celebrates one decade

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) is celebrating one decade of the Tennessee Promise program, a milestone in the state's ongoing commitment to increasing access to higher education.

Since Tennessee became the first state to implement such a program, \$207 million in funding has supported the enrollment of more than 150,000 students in pursuing their dreams of college, creating a more skilled and competitive workforce in Tennessee.

The state's college-going rate climbed 6% in the first year of the program and a record-breaking more than 66,000 seniors applied for the program in 2024. Tennessee Promise's success is also evident in the increasing number of Tennesseans earning technical credentials from TCAT campuses, now representing nearly 17% of Tennessee Promise enrollments compared to 12% in the program's first year.

"The Tennessee Promise program has been life changing for countless students across Tennessee, opening doors to higher education and career opportunities," said Dr. Steven Gentile, Executive Director of THEC. "As we celebrate this 10-year milestone, we are proud of the program's success and the positive impact it has had on our state's workforce readiness, economic development, and overall quality of life."

"Tennessee Promise has had a tremendous impact on students, families, and communities statewide by empowering Tennesseans to pursue higher education while mitigating the burden of financial barriers," said Gentile.

Governor Bill Lee's ongoing



commitment to Tennessee Promise includes a [nearly \\$1 billion investment to the Tennessee Board of Regents \(TBR\) to expand TCAT growth in 2023](#) which continues to support affordable education and workforce-aligned programs, benefiting students and Tennessee's economic development.

"Tennessee Promise has been a model for the nation that enables many thousands of students each year to attend college and improve their lives. Promise is a tremendous value for students attending our public community and technical colleges. The generational \$1 billion investment by Governor Lee and the General Assembly will greatly expand the educational opportunities available at our colleges. The new buildings and campuses – 29 major projects across the state – are already underway and will open in 2025 and 2026," said Tennessee Board of Regents Chancellor Flora W. Tydings.

Gov. Lee's administration also stands strong in their steadfast support of Tennessee Promise. Senator Jon Lundberg (R – Bristol), Chairman of the Senate Education Com-

mittee, stated, "I'm most proud of the thousands of students this has, and continues to impact. The Promise is just that – a promise to stand alongside these students and families on their higher education journey."

Senator Mark White (R – Memphis), Chairman of House Education Administration Committee, state, "I want to congratulate Tennessee for its commitment to offering every Tennessee high school graduate free tuition for a trade school degree or a two-year community college degree. Tennessee is committed to our young people in education and workforce opportunity."

As Tennessee looks ahead to continuing the upward trend in higher education that Tennessee Promise has initiated, THEC remains committed to building on the success of Tennessee Promise and continuing to create pathways to educational attainment for all Tennesseans.

For more information about Tennessee Promise and the most recent Tennessee Promise report, visit [collegefortn.org/tnpromise](#).

## Tennessee's revenues for April 2024 are \$74.2M less than budgeted

Tennessee's April revenues were less than budgeted.

Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson said April state revenues were \$3.039 billion, which is 0.45% less than April 2023 and \$74.2 million less than the budgeted estimate.

"Total revenues for April were similar to the receipts from the same time last year but lower than the estimated amount for the month," Bryson said. "Sales and use taxes, which represent taxable sales activity in March, indicated slight growth, whereas corporate taxes remained lower. Strong growth was observed in fuel and business taxes, elevating monthly collections. All other taxes combined grew by only 1.39%."

"Since November, revenues have been mostly down compared to the budgeted estimate. Therefore, state resources are being managed with lower revised revenue estimates. State finances are being closely monitored, and economic activity is being observed to ensure that all budgeted obligations are met."

On an accrual basis, April is the ninth month in the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

General fund revenues were \$70.5 million less than the bud-

geted estimate while the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$3.7 million less than the estimates.

Sales tax revenues were \$39.6 million less than the estimate for April and 0.62% more than April 2023. For nine months, revenues are \$105.7 million lower than estimated. The year-to-date growth rate for nine months was 1.45%.

Franchise and excise tax revenues combined were \$43.8 million less than the budgeted estimate in April and the growth rate compared to April 2023 was negative 2.82%. For nine months, revenues are \$302.6 million less than the estimate and the year-to-date growth rate is negative 7.23%.

Gasoline and motor fuel revenues for April increased by 2.17% compared to April 2023 and were \$0.9 million more than the April budgeted estimate of \$110.7 million. For nine months, revenues are more than estimates by \$5 million.

Motor vehicle registration revenues were \$1.1 million less than the April estimate, and on a year-to-date basis they are \$0.5 million less than estimates.

Tobacco taxes were \$0.1 million less than the April budgeted estimate of \$18.1 million. For nine months, they are \$14 million less

than the budgeted estimate.

Privilege taxes were \$13.6 million less than the April estimate, and on a year-to-date basis, August through April, revenues are \$113.1 million less than the estimate.

Business taxes were \$24.9 million more than the April estimate. For nine months, revenues are \$25.2 million more than the budgeted estimate.

Mixed drink, or liquor-by-the-drink, taxes were \$0.2 million more than the April estimate, and on a year-to-date basis, revenues are \$3 million more than the budgeted estimate.

All other tax receipts were less than estimates by a net of \$2 million.

Year-to-date revenues, August through April, are \$494.2 million less than the budgeted estimate. The growth rate for nine months is negative 0.41%. General fund revenues are \$500.9 million less than the budgeted estimate and the four other funds are \$6.7 million more than estimated.

The budgeted revenue estimates for 2023-2024 are available on the state's website at <https://www.tn.gov/content/tn/finance/fa/fa-budget-information/fa-budget-rev.html>.

## State awards more than \$162M in broadband, digital opportunity grants

Six Tennessee cities were awarded a portion of \$167.2 million in broadband and digital opportunity grants as part of initiatives to better connect Tennesseans.

Gov. Bill Lee and Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD) Commissioner Stuart C. McWhorter announced the \$162.7 million grants designed to provide access to more than 236,000 Tennesseans across 92 counties.

Five cities will be receiving funds as part of TNECD's new Connected Community Facilities (CCF) program. Bolivar was awarded \$589,712, Brownsville was awarded \$1.98 million, Jackson was awarded \$405,433, Dyersburg was awarded \$1.798 million, and Hartsville – in conjunction with Trousdale County – was awarded \$2 million through the program.

The CCF grants, totaling \$26.5 million, will be distributed among 19 local governments and will facilitate digital opportunity by construction and renovation

of spaces that offer services for digital advancement in workforce, healthcare, and education.

Two municipalities were awarded grants through the new Broadband Ready Communities (BRC) grant program. Hartsville – in conjunction with Trousdale County – was awarded \$100,000, Jellico was awarded \$100,000,

The BRC grants, totaling \$6 million, will be distributed among 64 local governments and support community-based digital skills training, public Wi-Fi projects, distribution of free or low-cost devices and marketing for low-cost internet plans.

To promote broadband opportunity and high-paying digital jobs, TNECD also launched two other new programs during this funding opportunity: Digital Skills, Employment and Workforce Development (DSEW) and Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) Broadband Workforce grants.

Additionally, a total of \$97.2 million is being funded by the Last Mile and Middle Mile infrastruc-

ture programs, and \$65.5 million will be invested in digital opportunity programs. These initiatives are part of a broader strategy to ensure that all residents have access to high-speed internet by 2028, and have opportunities to develop digital skills, access high-quality tech jobs, connect to broadband enabled devices and access online learning and telehealth resources.

From the Middle Mile program, Dickson Electric Department received more than \$1.36 million to serve parts of Dickson, Cheatham, Houston, Hickman, and Montgomery counties; the Loretto Telephone Company received more than \$1.58 million to serve parts of Lawrence County; Newport Utilities received more than \$15.19 million to serve parts of Cocke County; and the Fayetteville Board of Public Utilities received more than \$2.64 million to serve parts of Lincoln, Giles, and Marshall counties.

For more information on the programs and a complete list of awardees, [visit here](#).



# Strategic planning for grants is essential as project costs soar

**GRANTS**, from Page 1  
 application may get more consideration over those who submit it last minute.

## BEING PROACTIVE

Carlton said proactively looking at funding program requirements can help develop a winning application. Grantees should consider the application window, when the project needs funding, and if a project can be delayed to fit the application period.

“Some grants take a long time to apply for, but the notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) is only open briefly,” Carlton said. “We have one we filled out for the state where we knew it was coming, so we started working on it early. We figured out what we needed to submit. They opened the NOFO and announced applications were due in a month. We wouldn’t have had the time to complete it on time if we hadn’t been working ahead. You have to start early on a lot of these, especially federal ones.”

Different grants have different timetables, making it useful to keep a calendar of dates like NOFO releases, webinars and forums, application deadlines, and other announcements, like TNECD Department of Rural Development [keeps online](#).

Calendars can also help determine which grants can be bundled together. Carlton suggested signing up for email lists to ensure no opportunities are missed. Participating in forums, webinars, and other informational sessions is also vital.

Reviewing past reference materials about the grant and projects that have [successfully earned the grant](#) in the past can provide information to bolster an application, Carlton said.

“If it is not a grant that is open right now, most likely last year’s information is still going to be there for you to look through,” she said. “People like to talk about their wins. You can go to the website, see who got the grant last year, and then call them up to ask about their application, for copies of their application, and they are usually generally open to providing that information. You can ask the grant entity, too, because those are typically public record.”

Grantees should establish a process for effective decision making with boards and commissions and keep them up to date on how the process works so they are ready to do their part when necessary. Communicating with regional, state, and federal agency partners and staff is also a valuable tool to making a strong application, and Carlton said many agencies have staff members whose sole job is to provide aid for grantees. Seeking input from development districts, outside consults, TNECD, and UTMAS personnel can be valuable.



Environmental assessments, like the one being conducted here, have become a commonplace feature of federal grant applications. Environmental studies can take months to complete, which means they should be done before the often short application window for a grant even opens.

costs, local matches, and costs for grant compliance. Surprise financial requirements can sink an application. To ensure municipal budgets are prepared ahead of time, Carlton recommends developing a five-year funding strategy to help with long-term grant feasibility and annually revisiting this plan during the budgeting process.

“The last thing a funder wants to do is fund something you aren’t going to be able to operate and maintain,” Carlton said.

## FINAL PHASES

Prior to the NOFO, grantees should adjust the project scope to fit funding criteria; ensure completion of engineering, environmental, and fiscal analyses; and reach out for support statements from state and federal lawmakers.

More recently, entities must update their [SAM.gov](#) or [grants.gov](#) registration. Carlton recommends having more than one point person for this registration and adding its required updates to the strategic grant planning calendar as it is easier to update the registration than redo it.

“That is something we are seeing right now really delay projects,” Carlton said. “They have gotten really tough on SAM registration, and we cannot award a grant with ECD’s pass-through of federal money if the entity doesn’t have a SAM registration. If you are using grants.gov to apply, they won’t even let you apply.”

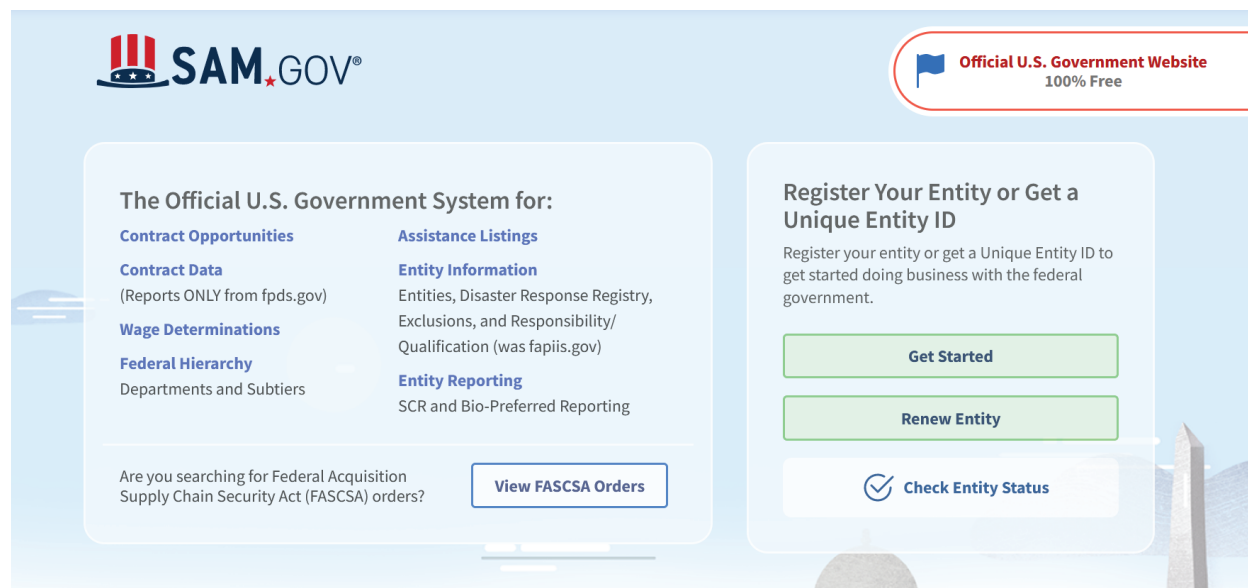
Carlton said to use the time between the NOFO and due date to gather letters of support, write the grant narrative, and adjust the story and graphics to fit requirements. With due diligence done, grantees can easily use language highlighting the grant’s priorities, formulate a clear statement of needs, provide necessary data, and make easy-to-read text, maps, and graphics.

“We always say your application needs to tell a story,” she said. “You can have four different people working on the application and putting in their pieces, but you need one person in charge to make sure it flows and tells a story. Grab the reader the first chance you can and keep them engaged in the application.”

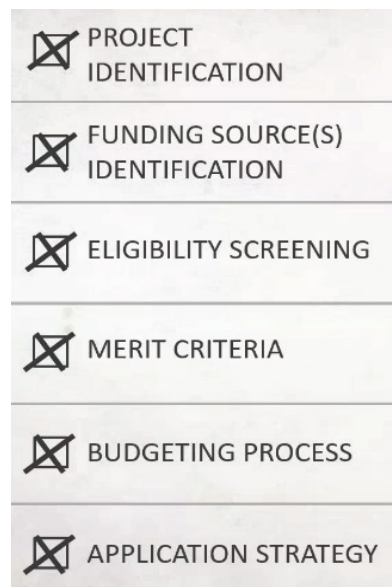
Carlton also advises giving funders everything they ask for but only in the exact pages required.

“Make it easy to read and look good; it may take some extra time, but it’s easy to do,” she said. “No funding source has time to read anything extra. Each question is in there for a reason and needs its own answer, but nothing extra.”

Finally, Carlton said ensure planning has been done for the implementation, output, outcomes, and sustainability of the project alongside the application. This will help with closing out the grant at the end of the process.



**Above:** Federal funds, even those passing through a state agency, now require recipients to have an active SAM registration. Keeping this registration up-to-date each year is less time consuming than letting it lapse and re-updating. Carlton said keeping the registration up-to-date after the initial registration takes only minutes.



**Left:** TNECD’s strategic grant planning checklist. While there is a lot of federal funding available, the grant process is getting more competitive than ever. Those who implement strategic planning for grants are often more successful in their applications, giving them more funds to do more projects.

ties, and consultants or resources.

The next step is identifying funding sources and their application timelines. Once that is done, grantees should find which projects are most appropriate for funding opportunities and revise project prioritization based on available funding.

Assess if a project is ready for the scope, definition, and purpose of the grant. Applications may require [National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\)](#) and environmental needs; a schedule; an estimated budget; public engagement; and the status of project design, procurement, or contracting. Carlton said NEPA requirements, among others,

can take six months to a year to conduct, while some application windows are only a month long.

The third step is an eligibility screening evaluating the project’s alignment with the grant program’s requirements, and determining the lead applicant for partnered projects. At this point, the application should be assessed for competitiveness. A competitive application will include merit criteria of the project; the project’s alignment with state, regional, and local goals. This is also the time to answer any outstanding requirements and refine the application’s strengths.

Strategic grant planning also includes budgeting for upfront

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



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# Make plans to attend TML Conference July 20-23 in Knoxville

## FRIDAY, JULY 19

9 am – 5 pm MTAS EOA Foundation

## SATURDAY, JULY 20

9 am – 5 pm MTAS EOA Operations  
12– 4 pm TML Conference Registration  
1-3 pm TML Policy Committees

**1– 2 pm Workshops**  
1. Fraud: Like Other Stuff... It Happens  
2. Financial Compliance and Reporting for Utilities

**2:15 – 3:15 pm Workshops**  
3. Budgeting for Revenues  
4. Internal Controls for Utilities

**3:30 – 4:30 pm Workshops**  
5. City Recorder Roles & Responsibilities  
6. Budgeting for Utilities

## SUNDAY, JULY 21

7:30 am Golf Tournament  
7:45 - 9:45 am Black Elected Municipal Officials Breakfast  
9 am – 5 pm Registration  
9:30 am – 3:30 pm Exhibit Hall Open

**10 – 11 am Concurrent Workshops**  
7. Securing Federal Grants to Address Infrastructure Needs  
8. Workforce Development Discussion  
9. Police Alternative Response through Crisis Intervention Training  
10. Enterprise Funds & Financial Statements Review for Utilities

11:30 am - 1:30 pm Lunch in Exhibit Hall  
11:30 am – 1:30 pm Women In Municipal Government Lunch  
11:45 am – 1:45 pm J.R. Wauford Ice Cream in Exhibit Hall

**1 – 2 pm Roundtable Discussions in Exhibit Hall**  
• Tennessee Building Officials Association  
• Tennessee Fire Chiefs Association  
• Tennessee Chiefs of Police  
• Tennessee Chapter of American Public Works Association  
• Tennessee Recreation and Parks Association  
• Tennessee Personnel Management Association  
• Tennessee Renewable Energy & Economic Development Council

**2:15 – 2:45 pm District Meetings**

**3 - 5 pm Opening General Session**

Keynote Speakers:  
• Jeff Lyash, TVA CEO / President  
• Sally Jenkins, Sports Columnist

**6 - 8 pm Host City Reception**

## MONDAY, JULY 22

7 – 8 :15 am Past Presidents Breakfast  
7:15 – 8 am Breakfast  
8 am – 3 pm Exhibit Hall Open

**8:30 – 9: 30 am Concurrent Workshops**  
11. When and Why to Conduct a Special Census  
12. Working with the Media: Tips, Tricks and Possible Pitfalls  
13. Save Money Thru LED Streetlamp Upgrades Panel

**9:30– 9:45 am Break**

**9:45 – 11 am Second General Session**  
AI Panel Presentation

**11:15 –12 Business Meeting**  
Installation of TML Board

12– 1:30 pm Lunch  
1 - 2:30 pm J.R. Wauford  
1:30 – 2:30 pm Door prizes

**2:45 - 3:45 pm Concurrent Workshops**  
14. Practical Uses for AI in Municipal Government  
15. Parks & Rec: Current Trends, Master Plans & Citizen Boards  
16. What Finance Directors Wish Government Body Knew

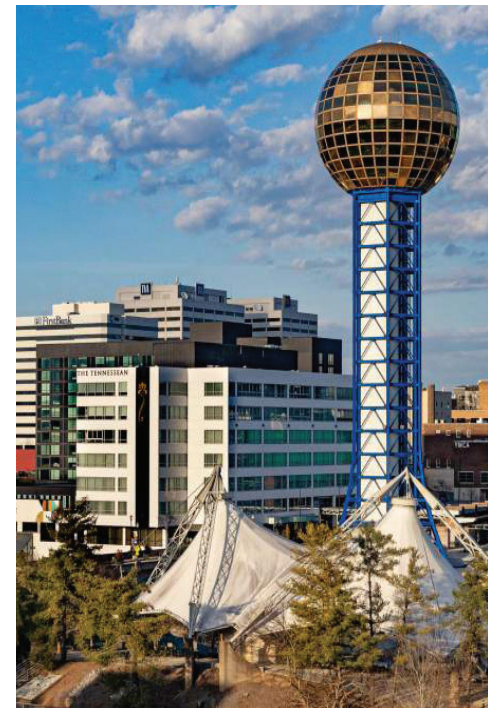
**4 - 5 pm Concurrent Workshops**  
17. Talkin’ Trash - Landfills: Running Out of Space  
18. Cybersecurity for Small Cities  
19. Principles to Move your Community Forward  
20. Understanding Financial Data

**6:30 -11 pm Public Entities Partners Social**

## TUESDAY, JULY 23

**8:00 – 10:30 am Awards Breakfast**

*\* Portions of the agenda are still tentative and times for workshops could change.*



Make plans now to attend the TML 84th Annual Conference! This year we are offering special rates and new ways to join us at our Annual Conference.

- **Full Conference Registration - \$450** (Saturday-Tuesday Breakfast)
- **Double-Day Registration - \$250** (Saturday & Sunday or Monday & Tuesday)
- **Tuesday Awards Breakfast - \$55**
- **Sunday Only - \$125**
- *Special small city rate and guest or spouse registration also available.*

For more information and how to register go to <https://www.tml1.org/84th-annual-conference-expo>. If you have any questions, please contact Sylvia Harris: [sharris@tml1.org](mailto:sharris@tml1.org) or call (615) 425-3903.



People who live near chargers are more likely to live in urban areas than in rural areas.

## Access to public charging stations key to EV success

EV, from Page 1

who live within a mile of a public charger support the idea, compared with just 30% of people who are more than two miles from one.

People who live near chargers are more likely to live in urban areas than in rural areas. Nearly 90% of all EV charging stations were in urban areas as of this February, even as the federal government is spending billions of dollars from the 2021 infrastructure law to help states build chargers along key interstate corridors.

Rural parts of the country have seen a bigger uptick in the

number of chargers being built, but deep discrepancies remain.

“Americans who live in cities are especially likely to have a public charging station very close to their home,” the Pew analysts wrote. “Six-in-ten urban residents live within a mile of a public charger, compared with 41% of suburbanites and just 17% of rural Americans.”

Pew’s analysis is based on online surveys of 10,329 U.S. adults from May 30 to June 4, 2023. The respondents were selected through national, random sampling of residential addresses.

# \$1.3B available in funding for Round 2 of charging, fueling infrastructure

New applications are due through Grants.gov Aug 28

Applications are now open for the second round of funding under the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Charging and Fueling Infrastructure (CFI) Discretionary Grant Program. This round of funding makes up to \$1.3 billion available for electric vehicle (EV) charging and alternative-fueling infrastructure in urban and rural communities and along designated highways, interstates, and major roadways.

The CFI program is administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and is open to state, regional, Tribal, and local government entities. CFI Round 2 will make \$800 million available for new applications. Additionally, \$521 million in funding is reserved for reconsideration of previously submitted applications that were not selected for funding but were rated either “Highly Recommended” or “Recommended” under the FY 2022/2023 Round 1 Notice of Funding Opportunity.

The CFI program is divided into two distinct grant funding categories:

- **Community Charging and Fueling Grants:** This program will strategically deploy publicly accessible EV charging infrastructure and hydrogen, propane, and natural gas fueling infrastructure in urban and rural communities.
- **Alternative Fuel Corridor Grants:** This program will strategically deploy publicly accessible

EV charging infrastructure and hydrogen, propane, and natural gas fueling infrastructure along designated Alternative Fuel Corridors (AFCs).

A key difference for EV charging projects in this round of funding is that the maximum distance from an AFC has been increased from one mile to five miles to align with the maximum distance for other CFI-eligible fuels.

To support the CFI Program, the Joint Office of Energy and Transportation has published resources, including upcoming webinars, on DriveElectric.gov. Another resource to guide the buildout of community alternative fueling infrastructure is the Alternative Fuel Life-Cycle Environmental and Economic Transportation (AFLEET) CFI Emissions Tool. This resource can assess estimated emissions reductions from electric,

hydrogen, propane, and natural gas fueling infrastructure along designated AFCs.

Please note that TDEC’s Office of Energy Programs can support entities in evaluating and building out project proposals for submission. For eligible applicants in need of technical assistance tied to a potential project in Tennessee, please contact TDEC.OEP@tn.gov. In the coming weeks, TDEC’s Office of Energy Programs and the Tennessee Department of Transportation will meet with stakeholders to determine project interest and needs and will evaluate a potential statewide application in response to the Round 2 solicitation.

**New applications are due through Grants.gov August 28.** Previously unselected applicants from Round 1 may request that FHWA reconsider previously submitted applications at CFIgrants@dot.gov by July 1.

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# Strongside Solutions, TML host webinar on reducing insurance, healthcare costs

Amid rising costs, many municipalities are finding it difficult to navigate the complexities of the insurance and healthcare markets.

Strongside Solutions Insurance Brokerage PLUS is a privately-held, Georgia-based healthcare, insurance broker consulting, and management company with more than 20 years of expertise, operating in 23 states across the country. Wendell Strickland, CEO of Strongside, said the company was founded in 2004 to find solutions to rising healthcare, prescription, and insurance costs. Strongside sees itself as a disruptor in the healthcare industry, working to put the “care” back into healthcare and related services.

Despite the rapid way the healthcare industry and how people utilize healthcare has changed, much of what is done to connect employees and employers to healthcare plans has not. When he was asked to build brokerage services for two large national companies and one local company in Georgia, Strickland was able to apply a fresh approach.

“In 2004, the insurance broker’s job was really to shop for insurance through 20 different carriers, and somebody would come in with a lower cost. That is how brokers used to control costs,” he said. “As insurance companies consolidated, there were less and less choices and the prices started going up. Strongside Solutions’ genesis was to find why these insurance costs are going up and what you can do to both diminish and even reverse that. From 2000 through 2010, the solutions were wellness centers and building on-site clinics to shift doctor’s visits, but that doesn’t get at the real root of the problem.”

Strickland said many people he has worked with feel the insurance system is broken because it works for insurance companies but not for the employers or employees who utilize them.

“As long as employers and brokers continue to use the national carriers – and I mean all aspects of those national carriers like the administration, access to the network, the pharmacy solutions they provide, and how they package those solutions – you can’t get at the true drivers of the cost of healthcare,” he said. “About 2% of employees at any given time are spending 50-60% of the total claims expense. We realized there was a small pop-



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**Thursday, June 27**  
**2 p.m. (EST)/1 p.m. (CST)**

ulation, but it was having a huge negative impact. We started looking at Strongside Solutions as a testing lab to optimize and reduce the cost of healthcare. Most people believe when you reduce costs you also reduce services, access, and care. That is not our model. You can still use the full networks, but you just can’t let them have control of everything.”

The two biggest problems municipalities and companies face when it comes to insurance are high-cost medical claims and high-cost pharmacy claims. The company evolved to better address these issues along with providing the services of an insurance brokerage.

Strickland said many of these high-cost medical claims are “lifestyle-changing, financially catastrophic” events to an employee, their spouse, or children. Strongside works to find solutions that will offset costs to the patient and the municipality that employs them.

“Our clients get to say when you are at your worst, your sickest, your most worried state for you, your spouse, or your children, we can step up with programs and solutions that help both the families access healthcare and financial resources,” he said. “Also, since those claims are paid for outside the plan, my clients don’t bear the expense of those plans.”

The company’s consortium has saved more than \$1 billion in prescription spending by providing brand-name maintenance medication and specialty medications at zero cost to employees, which can also bring down the cost of plans 52-73% for employers. Strickland said his clients have seen 40% of employees require no co-pays for medicines and top 2% of high-cost claimants are no longer financially burdening the employer or the plan.

Since all cities have their own needs and challenges, Strickland said the company sits down with officials to get to know their culture,

staff, strengths, weaknesses, and what services they need. Only after that do they start seeking solutions, which are very customizable.

“It might be we start off with a small portion of something to fix a problem,” Strickland said. “We don’t have to do everything for everybody, but the more we can do, the more effective we are. We can work in phases, and we can do a complete takeover. Usually, when we sit down with people it’s really evident to them and to us what we can do. This is why we have been so successful with private employers and municipalities; that’s what makes us different.”

In a climate where benefits like healthcare are largely determining what companies or municipalities can retain employees in the face of workforce shortages, Strickland said the performance of benefits and having the best health plan can help both recruit and retain employees. To do that, municipalities need someone in their corner who knows what questions to ask, how the insurance and health plan industry works, and how to navigate the industry to their advantage.

“The winners in this market are the buyers who are educated,” Strickland said. “Most consumers don’t understand how different the choices they have available are. This industry – the insurance carriers and by and large the brokerage community that delivered healthcare resources to cities and counties – hasn’t changed in 40 years. We are disruptive because we overlay and do the broker function, but we are also creating better ways for employers and their employees to have access to better healthcare.”

To learn more about how the health insurance industry works and why Strongside’s unique approach delivers real savings, [register for the joint TML and Strongside webinar](#) at 11 a.m. (EST)/10 a.m. (CST) on Thursday, June 27.



**June 21-22: Maryville Summer on Broadway**  
Downtown Maryville will hosts a series of outdoor events to celebrate the region and season. Events include the Smoky Mountain Dock Dogs competition, craft vendors, food trucks, kids area, classic car show, and the Hops in the Hills Craft Beer Festival.

**June 28-29: Bristol Country Thunder Music Festival**  
The Bristol Motor Speedway hosts this multi-state and multi-country music festival brand. Acts featured include Cody Johnson, Hardy, Bailey Zimmerman, Trace Adkins, Lonestar, Priscilla Block, Shenandoah, Travis Denning, Jake Worthington, Josh Ross, and Emily Ann Roberts.

**June 28-29: Cross Plains 36th Annual Trash and Treasure**  
Visit downtown Cross Plains for this free, two-day event featuring a variety of vendors, food trucks and entertainment.

**June 29: Franklin Blackberry Jam**  
From the porch of the Historic Hayes House, Hard Bargain Association will present an eclectic talented roster featuring Reyna Roberts, Tae Lewis, Don Adam’s Band, Tanya and Charles Harris, and Joe Hand.

**June 29: Kenton White Squirrel Festival**  
Kenton celebrates its unique residents - the rare white squirrels – at this annual festival. Visitors are invited to bring cameras to snap photos of the town’s legendary white squirrels.

**July 5-6: Smithville 53rd Annual Fiddlers Jamboree**  
If you love bluegrass and that old-time Appalachian style music, dance, and craft, Smithville is the place to be. Since its beginning in 1972, the old-time Smithville Fiddlers’ Jamboree and Crafts Festival has grown into a major event, drawing hundreds of musicians and crafts people, as well as many thousands of spectators from throughout the world.

**July 12-13: Ripley 20th Annual Tomato Festival**  
Celebrate the area’s legendary cash crop in this two-day festival. Each year the local Chamber of Commerce honors the Tomato Farmer of the Year at Opening Ceremonies. Activities vary from the festival to festival.

**July 13: Mountain City Sunflower Festival**  
Bringing together Mountain City as a beloved annual tradition, this festival was the winner of the 2023 Pinnacle Award for Festival of the Year by Northeast Tennessee Tourism.

## NATIONAL BRIEFS



**Inflation cooled slightly in April with prices climbing 3.4% and stocks rising as investors bet on the Federal Reserve cutting interest rates sooner than expected. The Consumer Price Index increased by 3.6% total and at a rate of 3.4% with the more volatile energy and food prices excluded. Both overall and core prices rose 0.3% between March and April, down from an increase of 0.4% in both February and March. While inflation fell rap-**

**idly last year, progress has stalled somewhat in 2024. Policymakers said the April drop in inflation is a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done before rates can be cut.**

**The U.S. reported robust hiring gains in May, an addition of 272,000 jobs, even as the national unemployment rate increased slightly to 4%. The U.S. Labor Department said the unexpectedly strong job growth shows that**

**employers are still hiring despite pressure from high interest rates and slowing consumer spending. Immigration has provided a boost to the labor supply. Average hourly earnings also rose 0.4% between April and May and 4.1% between the same time last year. Wage increases were stronger than expected given that they have been easing since early 2022. The labor market results are unlikely to affect the Federal Reserve when deciding interest rates.**



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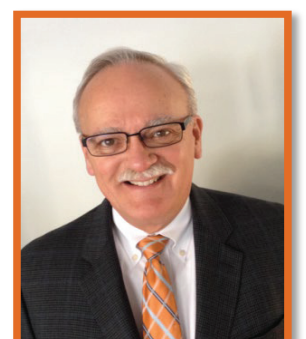
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# Tennessee municipalities celebrate National Public Works Week



**Above:** A Collegedale public works employee trims the grass around the statue of an aircraft at the city's Veterans Park.



**Right:** Nolensville's public works team has expanded their skill set to include repairs on sidewalks.



Dayton employee Jeremy took the city's street sweeper to a Mother's Day Out preschool group after learning the children wait and watch for the sweeper every day to wave at it. The children were given a chance to sit inside the street sweeper and learn how it works.



Maryville's construction crew pours concrete pads in a city park. Their work is vital for upgrades and improvements to the city's parks and recreation offerings.



Employees with the Crossville Street Department conduct leaf removal services.



A city of Goodlettsville mechanic performs maintenance on a police cruiser.



A Sevierville public works crew works to replace an aging fire hydrant.



A youngster learns what goes into treating water at Kingsport's Public Works Day event.



The Atoka public works team works to prepare a water line that broke during cold temperatures last January.

To see the full slideshow of photos celebrating National Public Works Week, [click here.](#)