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Groundhog Day, again

Once again, the General Assembly has come and gone from Nashville and ignored the request of local governments to share revenues that historically have been used to help offset local municipal costs. It's remanent of a scene from the 1980's movie Groundhog Day, where every day is a repeat of the previous day as if it's the first time.

A look at the numbers is puzzling and disappointing. According to the state budget document, the State anticipates over collecting \$263 million in recurring surplus for the budget year that ends June 30. In addition, the State will start its next fiscal year on July 1 with more than \$420 million in recurring revenue but will use \$412 million of it as one-time spending. This means that unless revenues decline, the State will have more than \$420 million in recurring revenue to program next

For perspective, if legislators decided to return the historic share of the last one percent of sales tax collections, the cost would be approximately \$90 million. These funds could help make debt service payments during a time of unprecedented growth and investment in local infrastructure. Extending revenue sharing to the last one percent of sales tax collections would help cities with increasing personnel costs due a to salary inflation, retirement and employer health care costs. And yes, for many cities, these funds help take pressure off increasing local property taxes.

Over the next several months, let your legislators know why they must address this issue. Before the 2026 elections, TML will educate the citizens in our towns and cities on how this issue affects each community, the tax burden and the impact on every pocketbook. Together, let's start now for success next year!

Anthony Haynes TML Executive Director

Meet Donnie Campbell, the heartwarming coach who inspired Ted Lasso

Coach Campbell to deliver keynote at 85th TML Annual Conference

Coach Donnie Campbell is not just an inspirational coach, but also in part, the impetus for the wise and ever so cheerful lead character of the Emmy Award Winning show, Ted Lasso.

His colorful keynote, will be offered at the opening session of the 85th TML Annual Conference, slated for Augut 2-5 in vibrant Chattanooga. His presentation will provide valuable leadership lessons that can be seen on the basketball court, but more importantly can be applied every day at city hall.

At a time when embracing your uniqueness is a rare quality, he shows how to define your core values while forming your mission, values and plan.

This one-of-a-kind keynote is a real treat for the audience as it combines heartfelt storytelling with specific lessons in leadership that are just as successful on the basketball court as they are when applied in the real world. Coach Campbell weaves together his personal stories of inspiration with



tactical take-aways that are more than applicable and welcomed in today's challenging environment.

To learn more about Ronnie Campbell, you can watch a video posted on our website, https:// www.tml1.org/85th-annual-confer-

City officials won't want to miss this opportunity to be part of the premier event designed exclusively for Tennessee's municipal leaders. This is your chance to join fellow leaders from across the state who are tackling the same challenges and See CONFERENCE on Page 5

Spring elections held in 14 cities



By KATE COIL TT&C Assistant Editor

Elections have been held in 14 municipalities across the state of Tennessee this spring.

Results include new mayors in five municipalities: Alamo, Brentwood, Maury City, Sneedville, and Spring Hill.

ALAMO

Alamo held a municipal election on May 3.

Newcomer Kenneth L. Bodkins defeated incumbent John Avery Emison for the mayoral seat. Bodkins earned 262 votes to Emison's 181.

Incumbents John Reddick, Paul B. Conley IV, and Jim Knox will be joined by newcomer Laura Bell after upsetting incumbent Michael Moore and newcomers Ty C. Conley and Benjamin Duffey in the race for the four open aldermen seats.

Reddick led the vote count with 290 followed by Bell with 248, P. Conley with 234, Knox with 222, Moore with 198, Duffey with 176, and T. Conley with 131.

BELLS

The town of Bells held a municipal election on May 3.

Incumbent mayor Eric Jordan defeated sitting vice mayor Alice F. McDearman and Alderman Ricky Pender to retain his seat. Jordan led the vote count with 154 followed by Pender with 102 and McDearman with 73.

Incumbents Bob Pigue, Scotty Runions, and John Pigue will be joined on the Board of Aldermen by newcomers Adam Alley and Grover King, defeating challenges from James Evans, Edwin R. Goode Jr., Udell Pledge, and McDonald Yanc-See ELECTION on Page 6

First Session of 114th Tennessee General Assembly adjourns, passes \$59.8 budget



Following the adjournment of the first session of the 114th Tennessee General Assembly, Gov. Lee along with Republican Senate and House leaders held a press conference to provide an overview of the 2025 session. Pictured L to R: Caucus Chair Jeremy Faison, House Majority Leader William Lamberth, House Speaker Cameron Sexton, Gov. Lee, Lt. Gov. Randy McNally, and Senate Majority Leader Jack Johnson

On Tuesday, April 22, lawmakers completed their business and adjourned the first half of the 114th General Assembly.

Highlights of the session included passing a \$59.8 billion dollar balanced budget, funding for disaster relief, immigration reforms, and new transportation funding.

When the 114th General Assemin 2026. bly convened in January, a notable change was made to House policies immediately following the conand practices. In the name of a streamlined process and improved efficiency, the House reduced the total number of bills an individual member can file yearly from 15 to

The Session began in earnest clusion of the third Extraordinary Session (Special Session) called by Gov. Bill Lee, which addressed the Education Freedom Act, immigration, disaster relief, and trans-12 in 2025 and 10 bills per member See BUDGET on Page 5

Changes to meeting agenda publication requirements, effective May 5, 2025

BY JOHN WADDELL MTAS Legal Consultant

On May 5, 2025, Gov. Bill Lee signed SB212/HB885 into law amending the "Advance public availability of meeting agendas"

The previous version of T.C.A. § 8-44-119 (the before May 5th version) required a local government legislative body to make its agenda public at least forty-eight (48) hours prior to a regular meeting.

Under the new law the list of bodies has expanded to include:

- the legislative body of an incorporated city or town, a metropolitan government, or a county;
- a regional or municipal plan-

ning commission;

- a board of zoning appeals; a public utility board;
- an industrial development corporation board of directors;
- a housing authority; a regional or municipal airport
- authority; a county election commission;
- the budget committee of a legislative body of an incorporated city or town, a metropolitan government, or a county.

The new law also states that "a local government body that maintains a website shall make an agenda available to the public through the website." Previously the law simply allowed these agendas to be

posted on the website, but now that the "may" is a "shall," an agenda must be published on the website if the legislative body maintains a

Keep in mind, this requirement only applies to municipalities that "maintain a website." Those of you who do not have a website do not need to create one to be in compliance with this year's legislation.

The changes from SB212/ HB885 are already in place. This legislation took effect upon the governor's signature on May 5, 2025.

If you have questions about this or other changes from this year's legislative session, please reach out to your MTAS management or legal consultant, https://www.mtas. tennessee.edu/staff

Kingsport holds first prescribed burn at Bays Mountain Park

By MATTHEW LANE Kingsport Communications Specialist

Bays Mountain Park completed its very first prescribed burn on

The burn covered roughly seven acres of land near the peak of the mountain (where the radio towers are located) and was planned as a proactive measure to help reduce the catastrophic damage of wildfire by safely reducing excessive brush and leaf debris.

Thank you to the **Tennessee** Department of Environment and Conservation, Tennessee State Parks, Kingsport Fire Department, and the Dobyns-Bennett Pulaski Club students for allowing everything to run smoothly.

We also appreciate the team at Central Dispatch with Kingsport Police Department for fielding calls from concerned citizens regarding the burn.

What burnt? The top layers of leaves on the ground, the tree canopies of the blowdowns from Helene. The burn was low flames, slow moving across the leaves.

A few bigger trees charred near the base. Everything did not burn. Due to the low and slow flames, larger rotten trees on the ground and larger branches did not completely burn.

Over the next few days, Bays Mountain Park staff and volunteers kept watch over smoldering areas. The burnt area will smell smokey or charred for the next few weeks.



Fire management students got hands-on experience with fire stewardship and how it renews nature as part of the prescribed burn at Kingsport's Bays Mountain Park.

We are very thankful for the rain. We look forward to seeing how this burn will help to revitalize the land in the future.

"Fire was a stewardship tool used on this landscape for thousands of years," said Dobyns-Bennett High School Fire Management and Math teacher Bryan Kerns. "By putting fire back into the Bays Mountain management plan, we are honoring the wisdom of the past and creating a more resilient resource for future generations."

According to TDEC, a prescribed fire is an important tool in forest health management. Prescribed fires help

reduce the catastrophic damage of wildfire by safely reducing excessive brush, shrubs, and trees.

They also encourage native vegetation to grow and are used to maintain the many plant and animal species whose habitats depend on periodic fire.

"We are making history with our first-ever prescribed burn at Bays Mountain Park," said Park Manager Megan Krager. "Once we've done this burn, we're going to evaluate its success and potentially plan for future burns at the park to ensure we're being good stewards of this amazing asset of ours."

NEWS ACROSS TENNESSEE



BRISTOL

The Bristol Police Department has received its fifth re-accreditation from the Tennessee Law Enforcement Accreditation (TLEA). The presentation was made during the Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police (TACP) meeting held in Nashville in April. The Bristol Police Department successfully accomplished TLEA accreditation by meeting criteria that measured the level of professionalism, organization, and overall readiness in law enforcement policy and procedures. The TLEA Accreditation status represents a significant professional achievement and acknowledges the successful implementation of written directives, policies, and procedures that are conceptually sound and operationally effective. It takes commitment, dedication, and hard work from the agency head, agency personnel, and community leaders to meet the standards prescribed by the program.

CHATTANOOGA

The Chattanooga EPB Board has partnered with IonQ (NYSE: IONQ), a global leader in quantum technology, to jointly develop the first U.S. quantum technology center to provide commercial access to both quantum computing and quantum networking resources. Through the partnership, IonQ will establish an office in Chattanooga to provide quantum computing, networking, and application development support and training. The newly established EPB Quantum Center will serve as a comprehensive resource for quantum application development and further establish Chattanooga as a catalyst in Tennessee's emergence as the national hub for quantum innovation.

CLIFTON

The city of Clifton has received a \$15,903,809 loan for improving water infrastructure. The loan comes from the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program. It will address the construction of a new drinking water treatment plant. As a disadvantaged community, Clifton is receiving \$4.999 million in standard loan forgiveness. It has also been determined there are high amounts of PFAS in its source water. Therefore, Clifton took additional protective measures, securing \$5.188 million in additional loan forgiveness for technology it will use to address and remove PFAS from treated drinking water.

COLUMBIA

The city of Columbia has announced the results of a special census have shown a 17.26% population increase since 2020. The special census counted 48,885 individuals and 21,492 housing units. This data provides a more current and detailed snapshot of the city's population and housing landscape than previous estimates. The numbers represent "Official Census Statistics" according to Title 13 United States Code Section 196. This will ensure Columbia has more accurate funding allocations for infrastructure projects (roads, bridges), healthcare, housing assistance, community development, and public safety. City Manager Tony Massey noted the \$928,000 allocated to contract with the U.S. Census Bureau to conduct the special census has resulted in a \$6.4 million increase in state shared revenue for Columbia over the next five years. This data will be made available to the public on the city's website at www.ColumbiaTn.gov.

COOKEVILLE

The city of Cookeville, Putnam County, and CHM, LLC celebrated the official groundbreaking for the Willows, a new multi-retail development now under construction and with an anticipated opening date of October 2026. The Willows will bring two highly anticipated retailers to the city, Target and Home Depot. Both national brands have already secured their local retail locations. In addition to these big-box giants, the development will bring an exciting variety of new shopping and dining establishments to the area.

KNOXVILLE

Knoxville's McGhee Tyson Airport had the most growth in passenger traffic of the top 100 airports

in the country last year. Recent data from the U.S. Department of Transportation found the airport grew more than 18% in passenger traffic, serving about 3.3 million passengers for the first time in its 87-year history. The airport has added several new flight routes with tourism and leisure trips to East Tennessee fueling much of the growth. The airport offers nonstop flights to 32 destinations and averages 130 flights a day.

NOLENSVILLE

Nolensville is the fastest growing city in Tennessee and one of the top 10 fastest-growing cities in the country, according to new research from Storage Cafe. Nolensville has seen 163% growth in population from 2010 to 2023, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. Nolensville was the tenth-fastest growing city in the country with seven of the fastest growing cities in the country being located in Texas and the other two in Virginia and Florida. Nolensville's population growth has also contributed to rising home values with the average Nolensville home price at \$808,000.

OAK RIDGE

BWXT Enrichment Operations, LLC, a subsidiary of BWX Technologies, Inc., will establish a facility for the manufacturing of centrifuge assemblies in Oak Ridge near Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL). As part of the project, BWXT plans to create at least 60 new jobs and invest at least \$45 million in a new facility. Additionally, the company announced today the purchase of 96.53 acres in Oak Ridge, where this facility will be located. That site is part of BWXT's long-term plans to support fuel production for the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) defense program mission. BWXT employs more than 1,140 people in Tennessee, principally at two locations: Nuclear Fuel Services in Erwin and its recently acquired Jonesborough facility.

OAK RIDGE

The American Chemical Society has honored the K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant in Oak Ridge for its pivotal role in World War II and the development of the nuclear age. K-25 was once a secret site that housed the start of the Manhattan Project, and by March 1945, it was online and enriching uranium to be processed at Y-12. Dorothy Phillips, the president of the American Chemical Society, said recognizing the facility's role in isolating the uranium isotope marked a "major difference." The facility is one of nearly 90 nationwide that has been recognized as a national historic chemical landmark.

PARKERS CROSSROADS

The city of Parkers Crossroads has received \$7,500 from the Tennessee Wars Commission Grant Fund to perform a geological survey to locate the graves of Confederate soldiers buried following the Battle of Parkers Crossroads on Dec. 31, 1862. About 368 acres of the former battlefield have been preserved by the American Battlefield Trust and the local Parker's Crossroads Battlefield Association. Other projects receiving funding through the Tennessee Wars Commission Grant fund include \$12,000 for the James K. Polk Memorial Association in Columbia to create an exhibit on the Mexican-American War, \$45,000 for an archaeological survey by the Friends of Salem Cemetery in Madison County, and \$50,000 for Grainger County to guide development and interpretation of Breastworks Island as part of the historic Battle of Bean Station site.

PORTLAND

Troax Group officials announced the company will establish its first Aspen Guard manufacturing facility in Tennessee, relocating operations from the Greater Chicago area to Portland. As part of the project, Troax Group will create 120 new jobs and invest nearly \$23 million to support wire mesh panel production operations for its Troax and Folding Guard brands. Founded in 1955 in Sweden, Troax Group is a global leader in protective mesh panel solutions that safeguard people, property, and processes.

Greenback breaks ground on sewer system



The city of Greenback has broken ground on a new sewer system, which will install 64 new low-pressure pumps and sewer lines. The new system will improve drainage during severe weather and allow the expansion of local businesses. Pictured from left to right: Chad Johnson, TASS Distribution Manager; Billy Pickle, Loudon County Road Superintendent; Buddy Bradsaw, Loudon County Mayor; Dion Shults, TASS General Manager; Bill Satterfield, Loudon County Commission; Nichole Smoak, Ardura Engineering; Tina Baker, Greenback Communications; Ryan Blake, Ardura Engineering; Linda Black, Greenback Commissioner; Derrik Doehler, Greenback Alderman; Dewayne Burchfield, Greenback Mayor; and Mark Clinton, TASS Superintendent.

Johnson City unveils Storybook Trail on Tweetsie Trail



Johnson City Parks and Recreation held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to unveil the Tweetsie Storybook Trail. The trail, located along a 400-foot stretch near the 4.2-mile marker of the Tweetsie. Children who attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony received a copy of the book "The Courage of the Little Hummingbird" by Leah Henderson, which is the first book on the trail. The Tweetsie Storybook Trail is made possible thanks to the generosity of Henry and Flora Joy. The Tweetsie Trail is a rails-to-trails project traversing the former East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad right-of-way between Johnson City and Elizabethton. A gradual tread of packed rock, the 9.6-mile trail provides opportunities for walking, running, and biking in a beautiful, natural setting.

McMinnville breaks ground on water plant upgrade



City officials in McMinnville broke ground on the first major upgrade to the city's water treatment plant in 64 years. The McMinnville Board of Mayor and Aldermen approved a \$15,626,000 bid to overhaul the facility, originally built in 1961. Funding for the project comes from \$6 million in loans, more than \$7.5 million in grand funding and more than \$3 million in water department reserves. A completely new facility will be placed behind the current treatment plant, containing five new filters, controls, office space, pipe gallery, and a state-of-the-art treatment room. The new facility will replace the previous manual controls with computerized ones with manual backups. The new facility will be able to process 5 million gallons of water a day and keep seven in storage, well above the 1.4 to 3.04 million currently processed. From left to right, Michael Anderson, Nathaniel Green, Water Department Director Ricky Morton, City Administrator Nolan Ming, City Aldermen Sally Brock and Keri Morton.



Handle With Care brings together police, schools to help children in crisis

By KATE COIL TT&C Assistant Editor

Local schools and law enforcement are partnering to help vulnerable children in a program sponsored by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI).

The Handle with Care program is a simple model that alerts schools that intervention might be necessary for children who have witnessed incidents involving police.

Evangeline Watanabe, state-wide Handle with Care Coordinator, said the original program was created in West Virginia as a way to connect stakeholders to better serve children who had witnessed police intervention. Launched by the TBI in 2016, the program is slowly growing with a goal of having law enforcement and school systems partnering together for the program in all 95 counties.

The way the program works is simple: law enforcement who responded to a scene where children are present send an email to the school district with the name, school, and grade of child witnesses. The message: "Handle (child's name) with care."

The Cookeville Police Department is one of several across the state that participates in the program and recently received an award from TBI for their involvement. Tara Bates, victim services coordinator with the Cookeville Police Department, said school officials have been grateful for the contact.

"Our job is primarily to identify children who are present during any sort of law enforcement involvement, especially where it might be scary for a child," Bates said. "The school system provides the intervention. There might be behavioral responses to what the child experiences that the schools need to anticipate. We have heard from school representatives that they find it immensely helpful to know that something has happened to these kids."

This alerts school officials that this child may need extra resources when they return to school. In addition to providing counseling and other services, some schools take a little extra time to make vulnerable children feel special.

"One of the things our schools do when they get a Handle with Care notification is they make extra effort to get that child a special lunch that day from a restaurant rather than just the cafeteria," Bates said.

Watanabe said students are six times more likely to receive mental health intervention and additional resources through their schools than at home or through other means.

"A child may have a parent die of an overdose and have to be at school the next morning," Watanabe said. "Similarly, police also have to move on to the next call, and they may feel powerless over the situation that child is in. The school will have more direct resources and can help streamline intervention. Getting the educators on the same page with a shared language do wires don't get crossed."

A recent national survey revealed that 60% of American children have been exposed to violence, crime, or abuse, and 40% were the direct victims of two or more violent acts. This exposure to violence can not only impact a child's ability to focus in school and learn but also increase their own risk of truancy, suspension, expulsion, dropping out of school, and incarceration.

Watanabe said the Handle with Care alert doesn't replace law enforcement also reaching out to children's services if the child is a victim in the incident. The purpose is more for schools to be on alert that certain students may be vulnerable, more likely to act up, or need additional resources because of what is happening at home.

"We had a situation in West Tennessee where two kids were home when one parent was arrested," Watanabe said. "They went to school and their other parent was arrested during the school day. The officer remembered the children, and as a result, the department of children's services officer was able to step in before those children were put on a bus at school to go home. That prevented them from further traumatization."

Bates said often these children do not have positive experiences with law enforcement.

"In some of these situations, there is a perception of law enforcement as scary," she said. "This is an opportunity for an officer to help a child feel safe. We recognize that the schools do a fantastic job of helping kids get the assistance they need. School



The Cookeville Police Department was recently recognized with an Appreciation Award from TBI for their involvement with the Handle With Care program. The program helps law enforcement alert schools that children may need special attention after law enforcement intervention where they were present.



Law enforcement sends a simple message to schools - "Handle (child's name) with care." - after children are present at a scene. This gives schools a heads up that the child night need mental health intervention or exhibit behavioral issues.

is also something that is pretty steady in a child's life."

For officers, Bates said the program can also give officers a sense that they offered some help in a difficult situation.

"You respond to certain houses, and you know there is more to the story," Bates said. "You know there is a piece that you are not seeing or are not being made aware of. You know help is needed in that home. It is some-

thing that can be done when it doesn't feel like anything else can be done. It can be hard to leave a scene when everything about the interaction made you sad."

While school officials don't get details beyond the "handle with care," message, Watanabe said school resource officers may reach out to their law enforcement partners to get more information to better serve the child once they get the notification.

For those school systems or law enforcement agencies that are not already participating in the program, Watanabe encouraged them to reach out. Handle With Care also offers trainings on how officers and school officials can best serve children.

"We need to support these kids from the bottom up and top down," she said. "This program helps make sure those kids are taken care of."

Morristown's brownfield redevelopment touts success of new TDEC grant program

By KATE COIL

The contaminated site of a former rubber company in Morristown has become the first success story of the state's <u>Brownfield Redevelopment Area Grant (BRAG) program</u>.

Vacant for nearly a decade, the 9-acre Plumley Rubber site is now the home of R&S Logistics and is also benefiting the Hamblen County 3rd Judicial Drug Court. Morristown Chamber of Commerce President and Morristown Industrial Board Secretary Marshall Ramsey said the grant fund made possible an innovative local project that is both restoring an environmentally hazardous site to the tax rolls and giving community members the skills they need to return from addiction.

"Every community, no matter what size, has vacant buildings with issues like this," Ramsey said. "This program shows that TDEC is willing to help. I'm sure that the building is worth \$1.5 million, and most people aren't going to spend \$1.5 million to buy the building and then another \$500,000 fixing it. There are some buildings that remain abandoned because of those additional costs."

The rubber parts manufacturing plant was contaminated by trichloroethylene (TCE) vapors stemming from manufacturing activities in the 1960s and '70s. The level of contamination at the site meant that employees would only be legally allowed to work in the building for an hour a day, Ramsey said.

"Over time, they had some cracks in some drains – and this may have been before there were certain chemicals you couldn't put down the drain," Ramsey said. ""The Plumley family had done everything they were supposed to and had worked with TDEC. They just didn't want to finance the cleanup because they were in their 80s, and they wanted to donate the building to a nonprofit to get a tax write off."

The chamber of commerce and Morristown IDB identified the non-profit drug court as an ideal partner for the project.

"We knew they needed money, so we got the building donated to them," Ramsey said. "We had the industrial board do a PILOT for 0% savings. Usually, when you do a PILOT you do a tax savings, and the title to the property was then given to the IDB. With us holding the title, we were eligible for the grant program."

With the \$500,000 grant from the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) Division of Remediation, the Morristown IDB was able to work with the drug court, Canon & Canon, R&S Logistics, MTN-INC, and Land Science to remediate the property. A sub-slab ventilation system and chemical vapor barrier coating were used to mitigate the dangers on the site.

Ramsey said R&S Logistics has worked with the Morristown IDB and chamber before and has also relocated into former brownfield sites. Having a logistics company take the facility was a great fit to cater to the number of manufacturing operations in Morristown. With the remediation complete, they have officially moved into the site with the drug court as their landlord.

"The chamber is holding it under the pilot until the grant is all paid out," Ramsey said. "We are then handing it back to the drug court. Some of the recovery court people will also work at the facility, getting some skills and experience in logistics. The drug court is getting rent for a three-year term, and we believe at the end of that period, the company will buy the property. This way, the drug court is getting some recurring revenue."

Ramsey said the entire project would likely not have happened without funding from the BRAG program.



Officials cut the ribbon on the new R&S Logistics facility in Morristown, the first success story from TDEC's new BRAG program. The brownfield redevelopment will also benefit the local drug court.

"We definitely would not have been able to do this in this time frame," he said. "We probably wouldn't have been able to find a tenant either. Most people don't want to get handed a building they can't use. The grant really helped us find a tenant who was willing to work with it. If you are doing the right thing, TDEC is willing to work with you. They are less about penalizing you and more about helping you be successful in redevelopment, and we have had a lot of success in the past couple of years with these projects."

Morristown is eager to share the redevelopment success story with one chamber employee using it as the basis for her economic development certification capstone project.

"She wrote her paper on redeveloping brownfield sites, and how to turn that into non-traditional workforce development opportunities" Ramsey said. "As soon



R&S Logistics officials celebrate becoming the new tenant of the facility. and will be working with their landlord, the Hamblen County 3rd Judicial Drug Court, to help transition those in recovery back into active employment at the facility

as we presented, someone from the state economic development agency came up and asked us to do the presentation at the Governor's Conference this year. TDEC is also asked us to come speak at a few conferences."

Ramsey said Morristown officials are ready and willing to share their story with others also consider-

ing doing something similar in their own community.

"I would say think outside the box," he said. "Talk with partners like TDEC, TNECD, and TVA and come up with a plan. Your picture may paint differently than ours, but they can all work. If it's good for your community, it's good for the region and the state. That's the goal."



PEOPLE

Jim Campbell has been promoted as the new chief o f police for Clinton. Campbell has been acting as interim chief since Novem-



Jim Campbell

ber 2024. Campbell has three decades of law enforcement experience. He was appointed assistant chief in 2019. He joined the Clinton Police Department in 2003 and began his career in 1993.

Jerry DeBerry has been selected as the new chief of the Kingsport Fire Department, taking over from Scott Boyd who retired on



Jerry DeBerry

April 28 after 36 years with the department. DeBerry brings with him more than two decades of experience and leadership in fire service, having served with the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department since 2004. During his time in Atlanta, DeBerry has held multiple ranks including firefighter, lieutenant, captain, battalion chief, and most recently, special operations chief. DeBerry is expected to complete his master's degree in organizational leadership and emergency management in August. He also holds a bachelor's degree in fire service administration from Waldorf University, as well as an associate's degree in fire science from West Georgia Technical College.

Carolyn **Durham** has been selected as the new community development director for Springfield. Durham has more than a



Carolyn Durham

decade of experience in land development planning in the private sector with an extensive background in the land development process in all its phases. She earned her bachelor's degree in urban and regional planning from Michigan State University and achieved the designation of American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) in 2009. Additionally, she holds master's degrees from both Tennessee State University and Austin Peay State University.

Col. Darren Goods has been appointed as the new public safety advisor for the city of Memphis. Goods will report directly to the



Darren Goods

mayor and oversee both the Group Violence Intervention Program (GVIP) and the Joint Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (JONSE). He brings more than 35 years of law enforcement and juvenile justice experience, most recently having served as deputy commissioner of juvenile justice for the Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS). Before joining DCS in 2021, he dedicated more than three decades to the Memphis Police Department (MPD), rising to the rank of colonel and serving as commander of the Investigative Services Bureau before retiring in 2020. He is a proud veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps and graduate of the FBI National Academy.

Brian Goss, chief of the Brentwood Fire and Rescue Department, retired on May 11 after 42-years in the fire service. His ten-



Brian Goss

ure includes 17 years as assistant fire chief for Brentwood and 14 as chief. Goss began his career in 1983 as a paid-on-call firefighter in Bangor, Mich. In 1988, he joined the Grand Rapids Fire Department - the second-largest metropolitan fire department in Michigan

where he served for 20 years. During his tenure, Goss advanced through the ranks achieving the positions of lieutenant, captain, and battalion chief. In 2008, he retired from Grand Rapids and joined Brentwood Fire and Rescue. He holds a bachelor's in biology and chemistry from Spring Arbor University and is also a graduate of the University of North Carolina's Fire & Rescue Management Institute and the University of Tennessee's Public Administrator Program. Brentwood Assistant Fire Chief Brian Collins will serve as interim fire chief until a permanent chief is appointed.

Phyllis Hildreth has been selected as the first director of Nashville's newly established Office of Youth Safety, which



Phyllis Hildreth

will complement the work ongoing in the city to support young Nashvillians. As director, Hildreth will unite the efforts underway in the space of youth safety and programming. Most recently, Hildreth served as chief of staff at American Baptist College and academic director of the Institute for Conflict Management at Lipscomb University. She also served on Nashville's Community Oversight Board and Human Relations Commission, and she worked as chief counsel for administration for the Maryland Office of the Public Defender, as Deputy Secretary for the Maryland Department of Juvenile Justice, and as the first Managing Director of the Baltimore Juvenile Justice Center. She holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Harvard University, a law degree from University of Maryland, and a master's in conflict management from Lipscomb.

Shanon Irwin, chief of the Centerville Police Department, died March 19, 2025, after a battle with pancreatic and liver cancer at



Shannon Irwin

the age of 50. A veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps and Army National Guard, Irwin spent 27 years with the Centerville Police Department. He had served as chief of CPD since 2012.

Barrett Jones, former city manager for Columbia and Cookeville, died Tuesday, April 8, 2025, at the age of 92. A native of Sioux Falls.



Barrett Jones

N.D., Jones earned his bachelor's degree from the University of South Dakota and then a master's in governmental administration from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. He served in the U.S Army and was stationed in Verdun, France. In 1971, he was selected as the city manager of Columbia and served until 1986. He also served as the first city manager for the city of Cookeville from November 1988 until June 1990. Outside of Tennessee, he served in municipal positions in Missouri, Illinois, Kansas, and Arkansas. He was a member of the International City/ County Management Association, past president of the Tennessee City Management Association, and founding chairman of the Tennessee Municipal League Risk Management Pool (now Public Entity Partners).

TML participates in Mayors' Roundtable on Housing and Infrastructure



TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes and Deputy Director Chad Jenkins participated in a mayor's round table hosted this month by ThinkTennessee on housing and infrastructure. Above, Chad Jenkins (right) gives an overview of pending legislation that impact cities efforts to address housing

Local chiefs honored by Leadership Collierville

Collierville Fire Chief Paul Witt and the late Assistant Police Chief Jeff Abeln were both recently honored by Leadership Collierville.

One of the evening's highlights was the presentation of the H.R. Houston Community Leadership Award to Chief Paul Witt of the Collierville Fire Department. The award, named after longtime community leader Randy Houston, who was also in attendance at the event, recognizes an exceptional commitment to leadership and service in Collierville.

Chief Witt has served with the Collierville Fire Department for 25 years. He is currently the Chief of Operations and previously served as the Fire Marshal and Fire Inspector playing an integral role in fire safety prevention and education throughout the community.

This year also marked the debut of a new award: the Jeff Abeln Outstanding Alumni Award, created in memory of Assistant Police Chief Jeff Abeln and previous Leadership



From left to right, Ava Witt, Randy Houston, and Fire Chief Paul Witt

Collierville Board Chair.

The inaugural award honors an alumni's impactful service over the past year, and was presented to Laura Todd, who was recognized for her leadership in connecting Leadership Collierville alumni and leading a

dedicated committee that organized the successful 30th Anniversary Celebration. Todd's efforts emphasized the importance of honoring the past while empowering the next generation of leaders.

George Killebrew, former mayor of Milan, died April 6, 2025, after a brief illness. Killebrew served as mayor of Milan from

1998 to 2007.



George Killebrew

A native of Milan, Killebrew became the first mayor of the city to serve a four-year term instead of a two year-term when he was re-elected in 1990. During his tenure as mayor, the city built its safety complex, conducted repairs to local infrastructure, and focused on fiscal solvency.





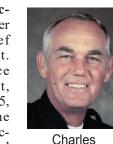
service. Under her leadership, the city has received the prestigious Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Award of Excellence in Finance Reporting for 10 consecutive years. Deputy Chief Financial Officer Christen Wilcox will help oversee Clarksville through the budgeting process for the upcoming fiscal year, after which Mayor Joe Pitts said the city will begin the search for the next financial director.

Kendall Mayfield has retired as chief of the McMinnville Fire Department after 40 years of service to the city. Mayfield served as chief for 10 years, appointed to the position in 2014, and pri-



with the department. He joined the McMinnville Fire Department in 1985 and was promoted to captain in 2005. In addition to his service in McMinnville, Mayfield also served with the Collins River Volunteer Fire Department.

Charles Mc-Crary, former police chief for the Mt. Juliet Police Department, died April 25, 2025, at the age of 87. Mc-Crary joined the Mt. Juliet



McCrary

Police Department in 1976 and became the second chief of police in the city's history. Prior to joining the department, he began his law enforcement career as a deputy with the Wilson County Sheriff's Department in 1973 and became the first officer in Wilson County to earn the certified law enforcement officer credential the following year. He was also a veteran of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division. Upon his retirement, he had 29 years of service in law enforcement.

Joe Rape has been selected as

the new chief of emergency services for the Collierville Fire Department. Rape has more than two decades of service and



Joe Rape

is the third generation in his family to serve as a firefighter in the local area. His grandfather founded the Forest Hill Volunteer Fire Department, and his father retired as division chief of operations from the Shelby County Fire Department. After completing training at the Texas A&M Fire School, Chief Rape began his career with the Horn Lake Fire Department before joining Collierville Fire and Rescue in 2001. Over the past 24 years, he has served in nearly every frontline role — from firefighter to lieutenant — and for the last 17 years was stationed at Fire House Number 5. He is also a member of Tennessee Task Force One, a federal Urban Search and Rescue team.

April Sanford has been selected as the new finance director for Springfield. Sandford brings years of experience in financial



April Sandford

management and a strong commitment to transparency and community growth. In her new role, she'll oversee the city's financial operations and work to ensure Springfield's continued fiscal health.

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

First session 114th TGA adjourns, adopts \$59.8 budget

BUDGET, from Page 1 portation.

Following the conclusion of the productive Special Session, the General Assembly quickly went to work to approve a final budget and adopt other legislative priorities. Lawmakers focused its attention on several areas outside of the confines of the budget and Special Session. The General Assembly considered several additional bills related to immigration and conducted a comprehensive rewrite of laws governing the sale of hemp, cannabis-based products, and cannabinoids. Legislators also redirected the sales tax on new and used tires to the state's Highway fund to help address urgently needed highway, street, and bridge projects.

A considerable focus was placed on public safety and criminal justice reform. Legislators advanced measures to hold offenders accountable, protect victims, and confront emerging threats.

Key legislation included establishing a domestic violence offender registry (Savanna's Law), advancing Marsy's Law to expand victim rights, and creating new offenses related to human trafficking and smuggling. Additional bills addressed growing concerns around hate crimes, drive-by shootings, and deepfake technology misuse, notably through the Preventing Deepfake Images Act.

Health and family welfare remained high on the legislature's agenda. Several measures were enacted to protect vulnerable populations, particularly children, and to improve access to essential services. These included bans on food dyes in schools, expanded prenatal screening, and protections for cancer patients and users of public health services. Legislators also strengthened protections for children and families by criminalizing AI-generated child exploitation materials, enhancing penalties for child abuse, strengthening penalties for exposing children to fentanyl, and increasing access to childcare and adoption services. The General Assembly also adopted new safeguards for mothers facing pregnancy complications and expanded safe haven laws and foster care protections.

Once again, the legislature contemplated closing political primaries but opted against it. However, legislation was adopted establishing primaries as the way party nominees are selected unless a local party has historically made such selections through a caucus process.

The General Assembly also prioritized the elimination of programs and practices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), adopting bills to end racebased selection for membership on state boards and eliminating programs and departments in state and local government and higher

education promoting DEI. Additional legislation prohibits colleges and universities from using race or national origin in determining admission or awarding of scholarships. It also prohibits local government and public universities from basing hiring decisions on DEI goals.

Finally, two constitutional amendments received final approval to advance to the 2026 ballot: one banning a state property tax and another related to bail reform, setting the stage for significant policy decisions by Tennessee voters in the near future.

Governor's Budget Proposal for Fiscal Year 2025-2026

Gov. Bill Lee's proposed FY 2025-2026 budget totaled \$59.5 billion, reflecting a nearly 2% decrease from the previous year's budget, yet included a significant 10% increase in state funding. The proposal dedicated \$1 billion in new recurring spending, prioritizing TennCare cost increases, K-12 education (including teacher pay raises), and state employee compensation. Additionally, \$2.4 billion in nonrecurring expenditures targeted major infrastructure and public safety projects, including a \$1 billion General Fund transfer to the Highway Fund, and substantial capital investments.

The governor's proposed budget for FY2026 included about \$1.0 billion in new recurring spending, including:

- \$281 million to fund inflationary cost increases, a routine change in the federal match rate, and other activities related to TennCare, the state's Medicaid program.
- \$207 million for public K-12 education, which includes funding for teacher pay increases, growth in the state's school funding formula, and other public-school initiatives.
- \$191 million for personnel-related costs for state employee salary and health insurance
- The governor's proposed budget also included \$2.4 billion in nonrecurring funds, includ-\$1.0 billion General Fund
- transfer to the Highway Fund for transportation projects. \$221 million for activities
- and projects related to public \$206 million for Capital Out-
- lay and other smaller capital projects and maintenance within agency budgets.

Adopted Budget

The General Assembly adopted a final \$59.8 billion budget on April 16, 2025, incorporating the governor's core priorities while making notable adjustments. Lawmakers cut approximately \$179 million from proposed expenditures—such as eliminating funding for a starter home revolving fund and reducing allocations for various projects—to reallocate funds toward disaster relief, healthcare, and community support.

Key additions included \$78 million for TennCare to aid rural hospitals, \$20 million in grants for volunteer fire departments, and \$20 million in additional relief for Hurricane Helene recovery. The legislature also maintained the governor's priority investments, such as \$1 billion for transportation infrastructure, over \$440 million in education support (including teacher bonuses and facility funding), and \$145.9 million for the newly established Education Freedom Scholarship program. The budget also bolstered the state's Rainy-Day Fund to a historic \$2.2 billion, reinforcing Tennessee's financial stability while advancing public services, healthcare access, and educational choice.

The final budget includes funding for a new office within the University of Tennessee's Institute for Public Service (UT-IPS) to assist local governments with planning needs—a priority initiative championed by TML and supported through collaborative discussions with Agriculture Commissioner Charlie Hatcher and other stakeholders. This office will provide technical assistance, training, and service coordination—especially benefiting small and rural communities—and builds on UT-IPS's established expertise through MTAS and CTAS in delivering statewide support to local governments.

FY 2025-26 Adopted Budget Highlights: **Major Investments Maintained:**

- \$1B for transportation infrastructure (Road Fund)
- \$62.7M for K-12 facilities and infrastructure
- \$244M for TISA education funding and teacher raises
- \$198.4M for teacher bonuses
- \$35.6M added to Rainy-Day Fund (total reserves: ~\$2.2B) \$25M for business recruitment and workforce development
- \$25M for Farmland Preservation
- \$2M recurring for a new local planning function at the Institute for Public Service

Expanding School Choice:

- \$145.9M for Education Freedom Scholarships (building on \$144.2M from 2024)
- \$77.2M for K-12 infrastructure funded by sports wagering

Disaster Relief for Hurricane Helene:

- \$26M for victims in Northeast Tennessee
- \$20M for local FEMA disaster match funds

Rural Hospital and Healthcare Support:

- \$78M from TennCare Shared Savings for uncompensated hospital care, especially in rural areas
- \$4M for capital projects at county health departments

Grant Pool for Critical Community Services

(\$42.5M, Nonrecurring):

- \$20M for volunteer fire departments
- \$5M for rescue squads
- \$5M for emergency medical services
- \$5M for senior centers
- \$5M for local museum capital improvements
- \$2M for courthouse restoration
- \$500K for Second Harvest Food Bank

85th TML Annual Conference, Aug 2-5

CONFERENCE, from Page 1 shaping the future of their commu-

Engage with dynamic keynote speakers, explore innovative solutions to emerging municipal issues, and dive into practical workshops that will empower your city to thrive (CMFO and Utility Board Training credits available). Build meaningful connections during evening receptions hosted by the City of Chattanooga and Public Entity Partners, Tennessee's trusted government risk management

And that's not all—our expansive exhibit hall showcases the top companies and services tailored to Tennessee's cities and towns, offering you valuable resources and partnerships to better serve your community.

More information about the conference agenda can be found TML's website at https://www. tml1.org/85th-annual-conference-expo

Conference registration will officially open this week, so be sure to watch your mailbox for how to

We can't wait to see you in Chattanooga!

Schedule At-A-Glance

Friday, August 1

9 am – 5:30 pm MTAS Elected Officials Academy

Saturday, August 2

9 am – 5 pm

MTAS Elected Officials Academy

Registration Open

4:30 pm (Set of 3) CMFO & Utility Board Training

Sunday, August 3

7:30 am **Golf Tournament**

7:30 - 9:30 am **BEMO Breakfast**

9 am – 5 pm

Registration

9:30 am – 3:30 pm Exhibit Hall Open

10:30 – 11:30 am

Workshops (Set of 3) 11:30 am - 1:30 pm

Lunch in Exhibit Hall L1:30 am - 1:30 pm

Women in Government Lunch

1:15 - 2:15 pm

Roundtable Discussions 2:30 - 3:45 pm

Opening General Session

4 -4:30 pm

District Meetings

Host City Reception

Monday, August 4

7:15 – 8 am

Breakfast 8 am – 3 pm

Exhibit Hall Open 8:30 – 9: 30 am

Workshops (Set of 3) 9:45 - 11:15 am

Second General Session

11:30 am -12 noon

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 Workshops (Set of 3)

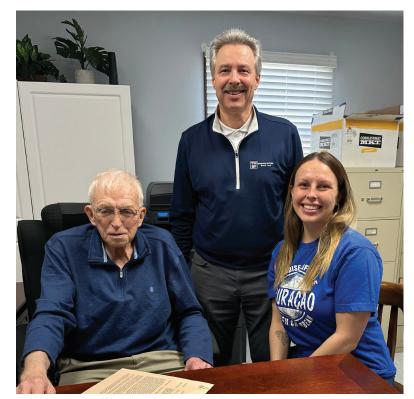
4 - 5 pm

Workshops (Set of 3)

6:30 -11 pm PEP Reception

Tuesday, August 5 8:00 - 10:30 am Awards Breakfast

No loan is too large or too small



The Town of Surgoinsville used the Tennessee Municipal Bond Fund's alternative loan program to issue a \$100,000 note to purchase a truck for the Public Works Department. This marks the first time the Town has ever used one of TMBF programs. Pictured are Mayor Merrell Graham and Recorder Megan Gentry with Steve Queener, TMBF Marketing Representative

See us for your special projects needs (615) 255-1561



The City of Savannah has used TMBF programs seven times. The first was in October 1995 and the latest was a \$1,300,000 public building authority loan to finance a LED street lighting project. Pictured L to R are TMBF Marketing Representative Justin Hanson, City Manager Blake Whalley, Mayor Robert Shutt, and City Recorder Daniell Phillips.



Hendersonville firefighters enhance boater safety at Old Hickory Lake

By KATE COIL TT&C Assistant Editor

As summer fun returns to Old Hickory Lake so will the Hendersonville Fire Department whose vessel Marine One and certified dive team work to ensure residents and visitors stay safe.

Hendersonville Fire Chief Scotty Bush said the fire boat and dive team were created following a tragedy on Old Hickory Lake 20 years ago. A Hendersonville High School student who had recently graduated, Emily Harding, 18, was celebrating out on the lake with friends when she was ejected from the boat.

"She was thrown off the boat and was run over," Bush said. "We didn't find her body until 11 days after the fact. It was very traumatic for her high school friends who saw her like that. We exhausted a lot of manpower and energy searching for her body. We sat on the shoreline with her family for those 11 days until we found her. Afterwards, we got together and said 'we need to do better.' We needed to give families closure, especially after seeing this family go through this for 11 days. We get a lot of activity on Old Hickory Lake, and there is no sense in us not being prepared for any emergency."

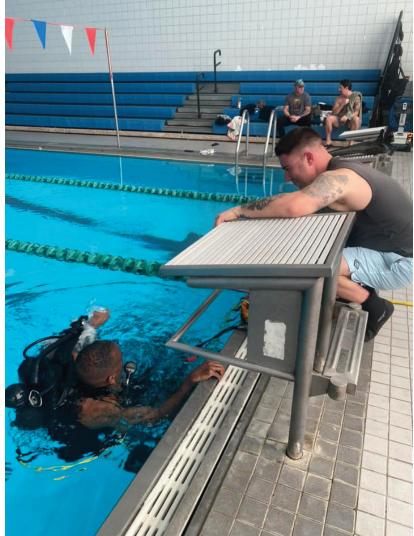
The department purchased the boat with grant funds as well as began organizing its dive team as a result. Since then, Hendersonville's Marine One has rendered aid numerous times.

"We have had two marina fires since we've gotten it," Bush said. "It has firefighting capabilities with it, which means it has a pump. It has saved astronomical amounts of money with its use against marina fires. It also helps get the message out that we are not a one-service only department. We want to offer better services to our community and the people who come here to enjoy the city by the lake."

Fire may seem like the least of concerns when boating out on the lake, so Bush said the department works to educate boaters on the risks and plan accordingly.

"We get boat fires, jet ski injuries, people who collide when waterskiing and they sustain neck injuries," he said. "Hendersonville has 26.2 miles of shoreline





Hendersonville Firefighters train as part of the department's dive team in a local pool. The team trains on recovering evidence, locating the bodies of drowning victims, and rescuing those in danger.

that we protect. A boat is a huge asset. We usually only go out when someone is in distress but on the big holidays, like Memorial Day and Fourth of July, we stay on the water. We let people know

Hendersonville Fire Department's Marine One patrols the waters of Old Hickory Lake, helping fight fires, performing rescue operations, and educating both locals and visitors about boater safety.

we are out, do some water safety and educate people on PFDs [portable flotation devices]. You need a PFD for everyone out on the water with you. We also remind people they need a fire extinguisher on their boat."

At present, the motors on Marine One are being replaced and the boat is being rewired. Once this and some general cleanup tasks are finished, Bush said Marine One will be back on the water.

"We are looking at updating our electronics if we have money left over," he said. "We have our SONAR, which is important in locating anyone who has drowned, locating objects or people. We have helped the police department in cases where they have had evidence thrown in the lake with our dive team."

In incidents where there has been a drowning, Bush said the dive team works with marine robots like those used by TWRA for recovery efforts.

"The dive team has been super instrumental in recovery and closure for families," Bush said. "I cannot tell you how many times families have thanked us for a speedy recovery. We sent the robot down and then the divers down, which is much safer than diving in a grid. Just to see the satisfaction on families' faces is worth a million dollars every time."

There are presently 13 members of the department's dive team, though Bush said the department hopes to get up to a full team of 18 members. On top of their regular firefighter training, divers go through numerous specialized trainings to make and stay on the team, including:

Basic recreational diving, like buddy breathing, buoyancy, motion control, navigation, and packing and unpacking gear

- Open water certification
- Deep diving
- Dry suits
- Search and recovery
- Boat diving
- Basic rescue diver certifications
- Public safety diver black water training
- Underwater sonar assisted searches
- searches
 Evidence recovery and chain
- of custodySelf-preservation techniques

The team also trains with

The team also trains with other local area rescue services, such as Metro Nashville's recovery robot and the Wilson County Emergency Management Agency, who also patrols part of Old Hickory Lake. Bush said the department is willing to connect with other departments or cities that either would like mutual aid or to learn more about how they can create similar programs.

"We are an agency that is willing to go an extra mile to provide a level of services to people in our community, whether they live here or just visiting," Bush said. To any department that is thinking about doing anything like this, please reach out. If you need our services, we certainly would be willing to come to your organization to help out. We would love to guide you on the do's and the don'ts, what to do to get started, and what can be done to curb some of those costs. We would be honored to take folks out on the boat, see all the usage of it, and understand more about what we do."

Spring elections held in 14 municipalities across state

ELECTION, from Page 1

ey for the five open alderman seats.

B. Pigue led the vote count with 188 followed by Runions with 180, J. Pigue with 175, Alley with 159, King with 156, Pledge with 122, Yancey with 117, Evans with 112, and Goode with 94. Alley and King will take the seats previously held by McDearman and Pender.

BRENTWOOD Prontwood b

Brentwood held its municipal election on May 6.

election on May 6.

Incumbent Rhea Little will be joined on the Brentwood City Commission by newcomers Janet Donahue and Kim Smithson Gawrys, who defeated incumbents Mayor Mark Gorman and Commissioner Allison Spear for their seats.

Little led the vote tally with 6,373 followed by Donahue at 6,180 votes, Gawrys at 5,899, Spears with 2,327, and Gorman with 2,066.

CHATTANOOGA

Chattanooga held a run-off election on April 8 for two city council seats.

Jenni Berz defeated challenger Christian Siler for the District 6 council seat, which was previously held by Berz's mother, the late Carol Berz. Jenni Berz earned 727 votes to Siler's 456.

In the District 8 race, incumbent Marvene Noel defeated fellow challenger Anna Golladay 507-251. Noel was appointed to the seat in 2022 and later won a special election for it.

DAYTON

Voters went to the polls in Dayton on April 16. Incumbent Hurley Marsh ran unopposed and as re-elected mayor with 392 complimentary votes.

Incumbent Bill C. Graham will be joined on the Dayton City Council by newcomer McKenzie Boling after defeating fellow challenger Bailey Hufstetler for the two open



council seats. Boling led the vote tally with 356 followed by Graham with 275 and Hufstetler with 112.

Boling will take the seat held by longtime Vice Mayor Steve Randolph, who chose not to seek re-election.

FRIENDSHIP

A municipal election was held in Friendship on May 3.

Incumbent Casey Burnett retained the mayoral seat over challenger Bailey Hutchinson with a vote of 88 for Burnett and 59 for Hutchinson.

In the race for the four open aldermen seats, incumbents Rickey Ange and Robert "Jackie" Perry will be joined by newcomers Jeremy DeWitt and Steve Ramsey, defeating incumbent Bob Garrett and challenger Corbyn Garrett. Incumbent John Marvin did not seek re-election to the board.

DeWitt led the vote count with 103 followed by Ange with 98, Ramsey with 87, Perry with 73, B. Garrett with 71, and C. Garrett with 34.

GADSDEN

A municipal election was held on May 3 in Gadsden.

Incumbent Randall S. Smith ran unopposed and was re-elected mayor with 38 complimentary

votes.

Incumbents Connie Robinson and Chris Burse will be joined on the Board of Aldermen by Kevin Reyes and Zachary Todd, defeating challenger Shelia Cole Dozier for the four open seats. Incumbents Josh Legions and Gary Mathis did not seek re-election to the board.

Todd led the vote count with 31 followed by Reyes with 29, Burse with 28, Robinson with 27, and Dozier with 16.

JACKSBORO

An election was held in Jacksboro on April 5.

Incumbent Shayne Green defeated challengers Verlin Hatfield and Matthew Housley to retain the mayoral seat in Jacksboro. Green earned 157 votes to Housely's 81 and Hatfield's 95.

Incumbent Alderman Roy Green will be joined on the Board of Aldermen by newcomer James E. Snodgrass. Green received 208 votes while Snodgrass received 210. The two ran unopposed for the two open seats on the board.

MAURY CITY

A municipal election was held for May 3 for Mayry City

on May 3 for Maury City.

Alderman Joseph Brian Cook
defeated incumbent Jeffrey Castellaw for the mayoral seat. Cook

earned 60 votes to Castellaw's 19.

Incumbents Bobby Wells, Lexie Mansfield, and Letha Johnson will be joined by William I. Jurnett and Dera Koonce Fowlkes on the board of aldermen as the five candidates ran for five open seats. Incumbents Erica Nance and Joseph Brian Cook did not seek re-election to their seats.

Wells led the vote count with 57, Mansfield with 56, Johnson and Jurnett with 53 each, and Fowlkes with 43.

PARKERS CROSSROADS

In the Parkers Crossroads election on May 3, incumbent commissioners Kenneth Kizer and Jamie Simonton ran unopposed and were re-elected to the two open seats.

RED BOILING SPRINGS

A municipal election was held in Red Boiling Springs on April 26.

Incumbent Kenneth Hollis ran unopposed and was re-elected mayor with 26 complimentary votes.

Three incumbent city council members also ran unopposed and were re-elected. George A. Mc-Crary received 22 complimentary votes followed by Helen Gregory with 18 and Trisha Grindstaff with 16.

SEVIERVILLE

Three incumbents ran unopposed and retained their positions after Sevierville's May 1 election.

Incumbent Robbie Fox was re-elected mayor while Mitch H. Rader and Joey Ohman were re-elected to the Seat 2 and Seat 4 Alderman positions respectively.

SNEEDVILLE

Sneedville held its municipal election on May 3.

Newcomer Tony Lee Seal defeated Alderman William Pat Riley for the mayoral seat in Sneedville. Incumbent Mayor Steve Harrison did not seek re-election. Seal received 127 votes to Riley's 83.

Incumbents Janet Collins and Michael S. Gibson will be joined on the Board of Aldermen by Janet Cose, Shayden P. Gibson, and Terry Collins, defeating incumbents Myshone Collins and newcomer Ryan Lawson for the five open alderman seats. Incumbent Kenny Reed did not seek re-election while Riley ran for the alderman seat.

J. Collins led the vote count with 171 followed by M. Gibson with 130, Cose with 117, S. Gibson with 103, T. Collins with 98, M. Collins with 96, and Lawson with 60.

SPRING HILL

A municipal election was held April 10 in Spring Hill.

Alderman Matt Fitterer unseated incumbent Jim Hagaman to take the Spring Hill Mayoral seat. Fitter also fended off challenges from Alderman John Canepari and newcomer Rick J. McCreadie in the race. Fitterer led the vote count with 1,717 followed by Hagaman with 1,318, Canepari with 255, and McCreadie with 193.

For the Ward 1 Alderman Race, newcomer Alex Jimenez defeated fellow newcomer Teri Mai 1,790 votes to 1,098 for the seat previously held by Jason Cox, who did not seek re-election.

In the Ward 2 race, newcomer Jaimee Davis unseated incumbent William Pomeroy, also defeating challenges from Greg Groninger and Scott Wernet. Davis earned 1,171 votes followed by Pomeroy with 1,077, Groninger with 509, and Wernert with 344.

Newcomer Erinn Hartwell defeated fellow challenger Diane Cochran for the Ward 3 seat previously held by Kevin Gavigan, who chose not to run again. Hartwell earned 1,593 votes to Cochran's 1,206.

Incumbent Trent Linville fended off a challenge from Kimberly Hughes to retain the Ward 4 seat. Linville earned 2,046 votes to Hughes' 1,008.

STATE BRIEFS

The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) announced a new campaign to reduce stigma and increase awareness of mental health resources for first responders. Research shows first responders suffer from mental health and substance use disorders at a rate higher than civilians, but they can be resistant to seek support for several reasons. The campaign features two public service announcements featuring real-life first responders. The Tennessee Public Safety Network, Putnam County Sheriff's Office, Lebanon Fire Department, and the Tennessee Tech University Department of Counseling & Psychology all contributed to the development of the campaign with personnel, experience, expertise, and facilities. Connect to the First Responder Mental Health campaign's webpage at this link on TN.gov: TN.gov/frmh

Tennessee's unemployment rate declined for the first time in nearly a year in March 2025. The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) reported a 3.6% unemployment rate in March, down one-tenth of a percentage point from February. The rate had stayed at 3.7% for the previous six months. Tennessee's unemployment rate is six-tenths of a percentage point below the national rate of 4.2%. The U.S. rate was 4.1% in February and 3.9% one year ago. Over the past year, Tennessee employers added 8,700 nonfarm jobs. The largest gains were in Government, followed by the Leisure and Hospitality sector and the Trade, Transportation, and Utilities sector. Between February and March, total nonfarm employment decreased by 1,300 jobs. The largest declines were in the Financial Activities sector. The Education and Health Services sector and the Manufacturing sector accounted for the next-largest declines. The state's March 2025 unemployment data is available here.

TDMHSAS has announced \$5.2 million in grant funds tohelp create safe, quality, affordable housing for people living with mental illness, recovering from substance use disorder, and re-entering communities from incarceration. The state awarded grants from the Creating Homes Initiative (CHI) to 12 non-profit agencies across the state. In total, the agencies committed to create 101 new beds with the funding. Since 2000, the Creating Homes Initiative has leveraged more than \$1.3 billion in federal, state, local, foundational, and other funding sources to create more than 36,000 housing opportunities. To find the Regional Housing Facilitator for your area or to learn more about the Creating Homes Initiative, visit this link on TN.gov: TN.gov/behavioral-health/chi

A recent study has shown Tennessee's rural hospitals may be losing labor and delivery services - even as the state rates second-worst in the country for maternal mortality rates. A new report from the Center for Health Care Quality and Payment Reform, a national health policy think tank, found five of the 24 rural hospitals. Decreasing birth rates as well as the fact that Medicaid pays for half the births in hospitals are contributing to this decision. Low payments from Medicaid do not cover the high cost of staffing these departments, which are already struggling to fill positions.

Safe Streets and Roads For All applications open

The fiscal year (FY) 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program is open. The deadline for applications is June 26, 2025, at 5 p.m. (EDT). For more information and applicant guidance, review the following.

Subscribe to email updates to be notified when additional information is available.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) established the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) competitive grant program with \$5 billion in appropriated funds over 5 years, 2022-2026. The SS4A program funds regional, local, and Tribal initiatives through grants to prevent roadway fatalities and serious injuries. Almost \$2 billion is still available for future funding rounds.

Learn more about eligible applicants for SS4A.

A comprehensive safety action plan (referred to as an "Action Plan") is a plan to prevent roadway fatalities and serious injuries in a locality or region or on Tribal land. Action Plans are the foundation of the SS4A grant

The SS4A program provides funding for two main types of grants: Planning and Demonstration Grants for Action Plans, including supplemental safety planning and/or safety demonstration activities, and Implementation Grants.

Learn more about these grant types in the brief descriptions below and see the following pages for more

- Eligible Uses of SS4A Funding Comprehensive Safety Action
- Planning and Demonstration

Implementation Grants

Planning and Demonstration Grants are used to develop, complete, or supplement an Action Plan.

Planning and Demonstration Grants also fund supplemental safety planning activities and safety demonstration activities in support of an Action Plan.

Implementation Grants

Implementation Grants are used to implement projects or strategies that are consistent with an existing Action Plan to address a roadway safety problem. Eligible projects and strategies can be infrastructural, behavioral, and/or operational activities.

Implementation Grants may also include supplemental safety planning and safety demonstration activities to inform an existing Action Plan, and project-level planning, design, and development activities.

Applicants must have an eligible Action Plan to apply for an Implementation Grant.

Potential applicants may submit their Action Plan(s) for pre-application review so that USDOT may affirm their eligibility to apply for an Implementation Grant.

BlueCross Healthy Places coming to three cities

The BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee Foundation has announced it is investing in three new BlueCross Healthy Place projects located in Erwin, Chattanooga, and Henning.

Established in 2018, the BlueCross Healthy Place program creates and revitalizes public spaces that encourage neighbors to come together, connect with one another and enjoy healthy activity. Since the program launched, its 23 open parks have received more than 3 million visits.

The 2025 investments total just over \$10 million and bring much-needed assets to communities across the state.

"Our goal with the BlueCross Healthy Place program has always been to bring people together, in communities of all sizes, all across our state," said Chelsea Johnson, director of Community Relations for BlueCross. "Our 2025 investments will help to improve lives in each one of these communities, and we're looking forward to working with our partners to make these spaces a reality."

Erwin's Fishery Park

The town of Erwin in Northeast Tennessee was devastated by Hurricane Helene in September 2024. The BlueCross Foundation is investing \$7.2 million in the BlueCross Healthy Place at Fishery Park to support the community's efforts to rebuild. The new space will include:

- Improved baseball field
- Splash pad
- Play pockets
- Outdoor fitness equipment
- New basketball court Improved sand volleyball court
- New field
- Dog park
- Shelters and shade structures
- New sidewalk trail connectors

"My vision for Fishery Park began in 2019 with the goal of creating a vibrant, inclusive space where families, individuals and visitors could connect with nature, enjoy recreational opportunities and build community," said Tim Bailey, Erwin town recorder. "Despite the setbacks and challenges brought on by Hurricane Helene, the community has



One of the BlueCross BlueShield Healthy Places already located in Chattanooga. Erwin, Chattanooga, and Henning are the three cities new projects have been announced for in 2025.

remained committed to revitalizing this cherished space. With the Blue-Cross Healthy Place funding, we have the opportunity to fully realize the vision that began years ago, creating a space that not only recovers from adversity but thrives as a hub for health, wellness and community connection."

Chattanooga Airport

The BlueCross Healthy Place at the Chattanooga Airport will benefit air travelers, as well as residents of the city's Shepherd, Brainerd, Brainerd Hills and Woodmore neighborhoods. The BlueCross Foundation is investing \$1.44 million in the project, which will include:

- Signature aviation-themed play area
- Lawn/observation area
- Community pavilions
- Bike racks
- Parking lot
- Benches and picnic tables
- Landscaping

"Restoring a dedicated observation area at the Chattanooga Airport is deeply meaningful to us—it honors a beloved tradition and brings back a long-missed connection between our community and the magic of aviation," said April Cameron, Chattanooga Airport president and CEO. "This new space will give families, students and aviation enthusiasts a front-row seat to the excitement of flight, while providing a peaceful place to gather."

Henning Park

The town of Henning in West Tennessee is expected to undergo significant expansion over the next several years, and the BlueCross Healthy Place at Henning Park will provide the area with a community space to accommodate its growth. The BlueCross Foundation is investing \$1.44 million in the project, and features will include:

- Inclusive play areas for ages 2-5 and 5-12
- Adult fitness equipment
- Community pavilion
- Sidewalk
- Landscaping

"This investment by the Blue-Cross Foundation will benefit the residents of Henning by providing a healthy outdoor space and serve as a catalyst for the town's revitalization," said Isa Reeb, consultant with West TN Planning. "As we engaged the community for the town's master plan, we saw both the need and the opportunity for parks and youth facilities to help bring Main Street back to its former glory."

To date, the BlueCross Foundation has invested \$70 million in 28 Blue-Cross Healthy Place projects across the state. For more on the BlueCross Healthy Place program, see BlueCrossHealthyPlacesTN.com.

Tennessee March revenue \$33.3M less than estimated

Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson announced that revenues for March were \$1.6 billion, which is \$33.3 million less than the budgeted estimates and \$69.3 million less than March of last year.

General fund revenues were \$35.4 million less than the March estimate, and the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$2.1 million more than the estimates.

On an accrual basis, March is the eighth month in the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

"March tax collections were slightly lower than projected estimates," Bryson said. "Sales tax receipts, which reflect February's consumer activity, were likely impacted by adverse weather conditions. Corporate tax collections came in slightly below target but remained largely in line with expectations. All other tax categories, taken together, met projections.

"Although we fell short of our monthly target, year-to-date revenues remain just below forecast. We will continue to closely monitor economic indicators and revenue trends to maintain fiscal stability."

On a year-to-date basis, August through March, total tax revenues are 0.08% less than the budget estimate, or \$10.5 million less than expectations. When compared to this same period last year, total tax revenues have decreased by \$17 million or 0.13%.

General fund revenues are 0.24% less than the year-to-date budgeted estimate, or \$27.1 million. Likewise, year-to-date general fund collections compared to this same period last year have increased 0.30% or \$33.2 million.

Individual tax performance compared to March 2025 Budgeted Estimates:

- Sales Taxes: Below estimate by 3.59% or \$39.7 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Below estimate by 1.01% or \$2.8 million
- Fuel Taxes: Above estimate by 10.39% or \$9.1 million
- All other taxes: Above esti-
- mate by 0.07% or \$0.1 million Year-to-date performance compared to Budgeted Estimates:
- Sales Taxes: Above estimate by 0.90% or \$85.2 million

& Excise): Below estimate by 9.65% or \$182.1 million

Corporate Taxes (Franchise

- Fuel Taxes: Above estimate by 0.96% or \$8.1 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 6.42% or \$78.3 million
- Individual tax performance compared to March 2024:
- Sales Taxes: Down 2.73% or \$29.9 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Down 13.90% or \$44.0 million Fuel Taxes: Up 5.07% or \$4.6
- million
- All other taxes: Equal to last

compared to August 2023 through March 2024: Sales Taxes: Up 4.61% or

Year-to-date tax performance

- \$423.2 million Corporate Taxes (Franchise
- & Excise): Down 22.09% or \$483.3 million Fuel Taxes: Up 1.46% or \$12.2
- million
- All other taxes: Up 2.44% or \$30.9 million
- To see the full report, click

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This Month In Congress:

What's at stake for Local Governments

By Irma Esparza Diggs NLC Staff

The White House and the Congressional Majority have used the first 100 days of the New Administration to advance the Trump/Vance agenda on federal spending. Four major proposals aimed at federal tax policies and spending programs could result in significant change to the federal-local partnership and other shared responsibilities that currently exist between federal, state and local governments. Taken together, the four legislative efforts: Budget Reconciliation, the new Tax Bill, a Spending Recissions bill and Appropriations for FY2026 offer a new vision for partnerships that could reduce regulatory costs for local governments, but at the expense of direct federal funding for local priorities.

In a letter to Congress accompanying the President's FY2026 Budget Proposal, OMB Director Russell Vought revealed that many of changes being sought stem from a "rigorous, line-by-line review of FY 2025 spending, which was found to be laden with spending contrary to the needs of ordinary working Americans and tilted toward funding niche non-governmental organizations and institutions of higher education committed to radical gender and climate ideologies antithetical to the American way of life".

On local governments specifically, the letter states, 'We also considered, for each program, whether the governmental service provided could be provided better by State or local governments (if provided at all). Just as the Federal Government has intruded on matters best left to American families, it has intruded on matters best left to the levels of government closest to the people, who understand and respect the needs and desires of their communities far better than the Federal Government ever could."

Budget Reconciliation

Budget reconciliation is a process used by Congress to make legislation easier to pass

Consumer confidence fell

for the fifth straight month

to its lowest rate since the

pandemic. Economic officials

said the consumer confidence

index fell 7.9 points in April to

86, its lowest rate since May

2020 with nearly one-third of

consumers expecting hiring

to slow to the same rate it was

during the Great Recession.

A survey by the Associated

Press-NORC Center found

that anxiety over the impact

of tariffs is taking the heaviest

toll on consumer confidence

NATIONAL BRIEFS

in the Senate. This is a political vehicle that only requires a simple majority, rather than 60 votes, to

pass in the Senate. In March, Congress passed a Continuing Resolution that eliminated the possibility for a government shutdown until October 1. While most annual grant programs that support local government with direct funding continue to receive the same funding levels approved in FY24, it still cut \$13 billion in domestic spending from the previous fiscal year. House committees are in the process of marking up the FY25 Budget Reconciliation Bill and offset decisions they make during this process will help clear the way to meet the needs of other upcoming packages outlined below.

NLC sent a request to Congress to consider municipal government perspectives on reconciliation directives within the FY25 Budget and the ensuring extension of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. As Congress continues to debate the priorities during committee markup, potentially delaying their own deadline to bring this to a floor vote in both chambers by the end of May, local leaders should review the letter and share the impact of these priorities on municipal operations with their Congressional delegation.

The Tax bill is a portion of the one large fiscal package (which incorporates Budget Reconciliation) that includes tax cuts and new funding for border security, among other priorities. Any changes to federal tax and spending directly targeting local government revenue or financing mechanisms have an outsized impact on the overall fiscal capacity of municipal governments. As the House considers this portion of the bill and offsets that will be necessary to achieve them, local leaders should review the potential expenditures that may be considered in our letter, including ways to incentivize housing supply, flexibility for water infrastructure and municipal financing mechanisms like SALT and municipal bonds and be prepared to educate their Congressional delegation on the impact of these priorities on municipal operations.

Recissions Package

The Recissions package is a Congressional effort to codify the federal funding freeze that the

with many expecting prices to

rise. About half of Americans are

also anticipating a recession as a

result of tariff policy. Short-term

expectations for income, business

conditions, and the job market also

plunged 12.5 points to 54.4, the

lowest level in 13 years. Any level

lower than 80 typically signals a

The U.S. job market added

177,000 jobs in April – a slow-

down from March's 185,000

gains but higher than most econ-

omists predicted. The Bureau of

recession ahead.

Administration imposed through a series of Executive Orders which are currently in enforcement limbo and facing legal actions. Congressional Republicans have been waiting for a formal package from both the President and administration officials which they expect will cancel \$9.3 billion already approved funds, mostly related to foreign aid initiative and public broadcasting. While the scope of programs to permanently claw back is narrower from Congress, the final package that the White House is expected to deliver may be much wider and include grants that impact nutrition programs and grants authorized by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). This has the potential to permanently disrupt municipal projects that are in motion. The package is also expected to be met with hurdles as Congressional officials across both parties do not support cutting funding for all the programs that may be targeted in the package the Administration provides. NLC will continue to monitor the details of the package when released and mobilize local officials to take action if there is an immediate threat

President's Blueprint for FY26

to key programs.

On May 2, the White House Office of Management and Budget released the President's FY26 Skinny Budget which asks Congress to cut \$163B in non-defense spending. The proposed cuts impact specific programs critical to improving infrastructure in American cities, specifically housing and climate resilience related grants. The proposal cuts \$26.7 billion in state rental assistance block grants, part of what the administration calls for a push for states to create their own rental programs and build more affordable housing. The proposal also cancels more than \$15 billion in IIJA funds earmarked for renewable energy and carbon dioxide removal programs. This budget blueprint is expected to face significant pushback ahead of the September 30 deadline as top Congressional Republican and Democrat officials have already expressed concerns.

NLC will continue to closely monitor and engage with Congress on the details that emerge from negotiations across all the legislative vehicles addressed above.

Labor Statistics said unemploy-

ment remained unchanged at 4.2%,

which economists had predicted.

The labor market has been the

strongest part of the economy since

the pandemic, though major policy

shifts are already being reflected in

the market. The private education

and health care sector was the top

job creator in April with 70,000

jobs largely in the healthcare sec-

tor. Transportation and warehous-

ing posted the second biggest gain

with 29,000. However, the govern-

ment, retailers, and manufacturing

sectors all posted job losses.

TENNESSEE FESTIVALS

May 16-17: Cross Plains

Kilgore Station Bluegrass A traditional bluegrass festival with food and fun for the whole family.

May 16-17: Sevierville

Bloomin' BBQ Music and Food Fes-A weekend of fun for the whole family.

May 16-17: Wartburg

<u>Tennessee Mountain Laurel Festival</u> This free, family-friendly event welcomes everyone to celebrate the beauty of Wartburg.

May 17: Greeneville Greeneville Iris Festival Celebrating 30 years.

May 17: Morristown

Morristown Strawberry Festival Featuring crafters and businesses selling arts, crafts and more

May 17-18: Townsend

Smoky Mountain Scottish Festival and

Tennessee's oldest festival of Scottish, Irish and Celtic culture celebrates its 43rd year.

May 22-24: Adamsville

Sheriff Buford Pusser Festival Celebrating the life and legacy of Sheriff Buford Pusser

May 24-25: Brownsville

Exit 56 Blues Fest

Get ready for great music, great food, and a lot of fun.

June 1: Bristol *In the Pines*

The very best in country music and beyond. In The Pines is a one-day event in downtown Bristol.

June 3-7: Germantown

76th Annual Germantown Charity Horse Show

Expect to be amazed at the beautiful horses, skillful riders and fun crowds.

June 5-7: Paris <u>Tennessee River Jam</u>

The best party this side of the Tennessee River

June 6-7: Newport

Popcorn Sutton Jam

Honoring the life and legend of moon-

shiner Popcorn Sutton. June 6-7: Oak Ridge

Flatwater Tales Storytelling Festival

These Flatwater Tales performances help to bring our community together, introduce others to Oak Ridge, and support local economic activity.

June 7: Athens National Moofest

Celebrate all things dairy with deli-

cious food, live music, and fun activities for the whole family.

June 7: Red Boiling Springs Folk Medicine Festival

A celebration of tradition and heritage.

June 7-8: Lenoir City Lenoir City Arts and Crafts Festival

The 62nd Annual Lenoir City Arts & Crafts Festival is set to take place in the stunning Lenoir City Park.

June 12-14: Manchester Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival

A magical world of music and friend-



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

Tourism vital to Northeast Tennessee's Helene recovery

By KATE COIL TT&C Assistant Editor

Officials in Northeast Tennessee say that continued visitation to the area will aid in recovery from Hurricane Helene.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Hikers on the Appalachian Trail, campers in state parks, and kayakers and rafters in rivers like the Nolichucky and French Broad provide a **key economic engine** for the region.

Amanda Delp, executive director of the Unicoi County Chamber of Commerce, noted that Erwin's outdoor recreation industry took a major hit because of Helene. Two rafting outfitters, cabins, campgrounds, and riverside lodgings were damaged.

"The Nolichucky River, one of our region's premier outdoor attractions, suffered extensive damage," Delp said. "Where the riverbank breached, severe destruction occurred, affecting river access points, surrounding infrastructure, and nearby businesses. Debris remains in portions of the river, creating hazardous conditions that have halted rafting operations for this season."

The flooding covered downtown Newport. When the waters receded, Newport Mayor Roland "Trey" Dykes mentioned the community faced new issues.

"We've had a pretty robust rafting industry, but basically the storm created a lot of damage that rerouted part of the river," Dykes said. "We also lost a bridge on the French Broad River that has created some issues. Interstate 40 was shut down for some time, rerouting traffic through downtown Newport, which created problems with semis and large vehicles."

Dykes stated that at least one rafting provider in Newport has had to halt business while it recovers. Delp added that rafting is not yet possible on the Nolichucky because the river changed course after the storm and there are still hazards in the water. Visitors can still take part in:

- Hiking
- Mountain biking
- Fishing

"Our goal is to ensure that visitors know that while some activities are temporarily unavailable, there are still plenty of opportunities to explore and enjoy our beautiful region," Delp said. The resilience of our tourism community is strong,



Blue Ridge Paddling in Erwin is one of the many tourism-related businesses directly hit by Hurricane Helene with damage to the Nolichucky River putting a halt to river tourism this year. As the weather warms, local leaders hope tourists will return to the region for other adventures.

and we are committed to rebuilding stronger than ever."

VOLUNTEER SPIRIT

One bright spot has been the number of volunteers helping to restore outdoor amenities. Dykes mentioned that volunteer efforts have been essential for restoration, especially with federal cuts affecting the Great Smoky Mountain National Park and national forests in the area.

"Volunteers have helped clear hiking trails in some areas. Cades Cove in the Smoky Mountains National Park had a little bit of damage," he said. "Not much gets done around there that isn't done by volunteers. The Tennessee Department of Forestry also had volunteers out to help replant trees and restore streamsides."

Delp explained that efforts are underway to restore crucial infra-

structure used by both locals and visitors.

"One of the biggest challenges has been the collapse of the Chestoa River Bridge, a critical crossing for Appalachian Trail hikers passing through Erwin," she said. "County officials have partnered with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and private rafting outfitters to establish a ferry system across the river. This ensures hikers can still traverse the trail without interruption. This collaboration highlights the strength and determination of our community to support both residents and visitors."

SALES TAX IMPACT

Normally, a lot of sales tax revenue comes from restaurants and gas stations along I-40. With the interstate closed due to damage, traffic was rerouted through down-



Flood waters cover much of downtown Newport in Hurricane Helene's aftermath.

town Newport.

Mayor Dykes reported a 13% decline in sales tax in the months following the storm. Even with more traffic through downtown Newport, motorists were not making stops locally.

Much of downtown Newport was flooded, and the city's wastewater facility was not operational after the storm. As a result, many restaurants and grocery stores were closed when traffic was rerouted.

However, sales tax numbers recovered in January and February. There is hope for continued recovery, but local residents remain the priority. Dykes stated that one of the largest employers in the Newport area has not yet returned to operation.

"We can't accommodate visitors until we have helped the people here who have lost loved ones and homes," he said. "If we take care of our folks, the rest will take care of itself."

While short-term dips are expected, Delp said Erwin also anticipates a sales tax rebound later in the year.

"We expect some fluctuations in economic activity, especially in hotel stays, gas stations, and restaurants, as visitors navigate post-flood conditions," she said. "However, Erwin's strong tourism appeal and the unwavering support of our community are key factors in driving economic recovery. Many businesses report that while there was an initial slowdown, visitors are still coming, and we expect numbers to stabilize as recovery efforts progress."

Delp emphasized that helping Erwin residents and businesses recover aligns with tourism recovery goals.

"These businesses were significantly impacted by the flood, but they are actively working to rebuild and adapt for the upcoming season," she said. "While challenges remain,

their resilience and commitment to the outdoor community are evident as they make repairs, adjust their offerings, and find ways to continue serving visitors."

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

To speed up tourism recovery, state officials are working with local leaders and businesses to provide resources and innovative advertising strategies.

"The state has been very helpful in that regard. Commissioner Eley has visited several times, working with storm-related recovery and helping brainstorm ways to promote tourism," Dykes said.

Delp stated that Erwin, the local chamber of commerce, and tourism businesses are working together to chart a way forward.

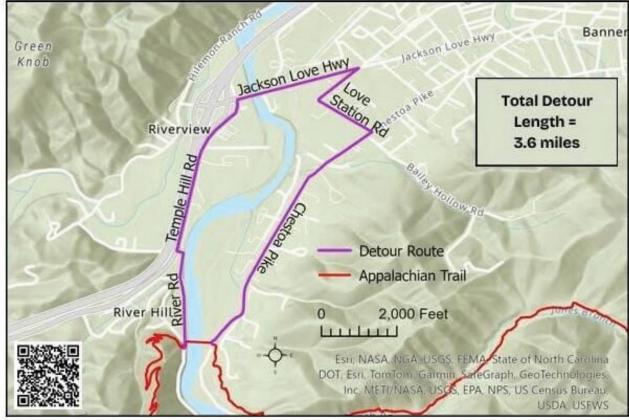
"Our businesses are finding ways to adapt, and we are committed to supporting them as they rebuild stronger than ever," she said. "Erwin is working alongside other regional tourism organizations to reinforce the message that Northeast Tennessee is open for visitors."

Social media and digital marketing are key focuses.

"We are implementing new marketing strategies to reassure potential visitors that Erwin is still a prime destination for outdoor recreation," she said. "Our efforts include targeted digital campaigns, updated visitor information emphasizing available activities, and increased collaboration with travel influencers and tourism partners to spread the word that the area remains open and welcoming."

The bottom line is that tourism and outdoor adventure are still thriving in the region.

"We are open for business," Dykes said. "We still have a little way to go to get all of our infrastructure repaired to where it was, but people shouldn't fear coming to stay in Newport."



Above: A ferry service and detours have been set up to replace the bridge, such as route here.

Below: Remains of the Chestoa Bridge in Erwin. The bridge helped Appalachian Trail hikers cross the river, but was washed away during the hurricane.

