



## Byrd Leaves a Legacy

There are few gifts in this world greater than a steady, dedicated partner — someone who shares your passion for success, remains loyal through every challenge, and understands that true partnership often means giving more than you receive.

Dr. Herb Byrd is one of those rare partners. On May 1, he announced his plans to retire this fall after more than 40 years of service to the people of Tennessee.

Throughout his career, Herb has devoted himself to helping others thrive. From his early days in UT's Agricultural Extension Service as a county agent and later an administrator, to his leadership as Vice President of the University's Institute of Public Service, Herb has consistently put service before self. His passion for helping others

grow is captured in one of his favorite reminders, "You know, you don't have to be sick to get better." To TML and to Tennessee's local government leaders, he has been an exceptional partner in every sense of the word.

Herb leaves behind a remarkable legacy of service to UT, to our state, and to its municipalities.

We extend our heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to Herb and his wife, Resa. May the years ahead be filled with trout fishing, making memories with grandchildren, and the joy that comes from a life well lived.

Thank you, Herb.

Anthony Haynes  
TML Executive Director

## Registration now open for TML Annual Conference

Registration is now open for the Tennessee Municipal League's [86th Annual Conference and Expo](#) at the MeadowView Conference Center in Kingsport July 9-12, 2026.

This premier event brings together municipal leaders from across the state to learn, collaborate, and strengthen their communities.

Attendees will have a chance to hear from dynamic keynote speakers, dive into topical workshops providing valuable information to empower their municipality; learn about a wide variety of services, products, and programs from exhibitors; connect with officials from across the state to tackle important issues; and explore the vibrant beauty and culture of Northeast Tennessee through off-site excursions.

Additionally, conference attendees will have the option to participate in several special events including [Race You to Conference](#) and the [Conference Golf Tournament](#). Held on July 9 at Bristol Motor Speedway, Race You to Conference includes an option to drive the world's fastest half-mile track from 4-6 p.m. All conference attendees are welcome to attend dinner at the Speedway from 6-8 p.m.

On July 11, participants in the Conference Golf Tournament will take to the green at Cattails at MeadowView Golf Course. Opened in 1998, Cattails is recognized as one of the top public golf courses in Tennessee.

Designed by Denis Griffiths, the course features Bermuda fairways and Bentgrass greens, with picturesque holes at the base of scenic Bays Mountain. Proceeds from the tournament will benefit the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee.

Early Bird Pricing is available only through June 1.

- TML Member Full Conference \$475
- Non-Member Full Conference \$675
- First Time Attendee from a Small City (population 5,000 or less) \$300
- Affiliate Full Conference \$300
- State or Federal Government Agency or Non-Profit Organization \$550
- Spouse Full Conference \$200
- 1-Day Ticket \$300

All registrations will be made through our new platform, [Engagifi](#). It is best to register on a desktop or laptop computer. For further questions or assistance, contact [Kelly McKinley](#) or [Corinne Gould](#).

## Jackson officials reflect on success of Love Your Block



The department's new Mobile Tool Shed contains items donated from local companies and allows residents to rent tools they may need for a home improvement project. Trejo said the service is extremely popular among young families who can't afford to contract our repairs but may not have the budget to purchase a tool they may only need once. (Photo by Jackson)

By KATE COIL

As the application period for a new round of grants opens, officials in Jackson are reflecting on how their participation in the [Love Your Block](#) grant program served as a catalyst to create a new city department, build community, and beautify and repair aging homes and neighborhoods.

Awarded through Bloomberg

Philanthropies and Johns Hopkins University Cities of Service, Love Your Block is a two-year civic engagement program that brings city leaders and residents together to strengthen neighborhoods, one block at a time. Jackson was one of eight cities selected for the 2022-23 cohort, receiving \$100,000 and aid from an AmeriCorps Vista member to establish the program.

See [LOVE](#) on Page 3

## Tennessee General Assembly adjourns

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

The second session of the 114th Tennessee General Assembly adjourned Thursday, April 23, 2026, with lawmakers ultimately passing a \$58.3 billion state budget.

The 2026-2027 Fiscal Year budget for Tennessee includes investments in healthcare, infrastructure, public safety, and education. The budget is slightly higher than \$57.9 billion budget proposed by Gov. Bill Lee during his final State of the State address in February.

TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes thanked lawmakers for their considerations of the needs of municipalities and municipal officials across the state during the session.

"TML marks Sine Die with appreciation for the collaboration and dedication shown this session in advancing issues important to municipalities across Tennessee," Haynes said. "We look forward to building on this progress and continuing to advocate for strong, vibrant communities statewide."

### SESSION SUCCESSES

Three key pieces of legislation that would have been detrimental to Tennessee's towns and cities were defeated this session.

The [Property Tax Cap](#) bill — also known as SB2064 (Watson)



The Tennessee State House celebrates the official adjournment sine die on April 23, 2026. (Photo by State Rep. Michele Reneau, R-Signal Mountain)

/ HB1873 (Zachary) - would have artificially limited how much total property tax revenue can grow each year regardless of a community's needs.

While appealing on the surface, the bill would have severely limited the main and most consistent funding source nearly every city and county relies on for important services and infrastructure including police and fire departments, street repair, schools, and more. city and county relies on for important services and infrastructure including police

and fire departments, street repair, schools, and more.

The [Automatic Compensation for Land Use Decisions](#) bill — also known as the Tennessee Private Property Vesting Rights of 2026 Act and SB1908 (Stevens) / HB1837 (Hicks) - would have required automatic compensation for land use decisions.

The bill would have treated any claimed drop in property value because of a restriction as an automatic taking, guaranteeing compensation. See [ADJOURNS](#) on Page 5

## Elections held in four municipalities

Spring elections were held in four municipalities this spring, including a highly publicized referendum on the role of the mayor in Germantown.

### GERMANTOWN

A special election was held in Germantown on May 5 on whether or not the charter should be amended to give the mayor a full-time role rather than part-time.

The measure received 5,097 votes against making it a full-time position — roughly 76% of the vote — while 1,570 residents voted in favor. A total of 6,667 voters participated in the election, of some 33,000 registered voters in Germantown.

The proposal was initially brought forth by former alderman John McCreery in 2022, citing significant changes to the city's population since its charter was set forth 50 years ago.

The Germantown Board of Mayor and Aldermen adopted a resolution allowing for the election in October 2024, which was later authorized by the Tennessee General Assembly. Had the referendum passed, the full-time mayoral position would have begun Jan. 1, 2027 with the winner of the November 2026 mayoral election. The mayor's term would have remained for the same but with a salary set by the



Board of Mayor and Aldermen.

### LAFAYETTE

Voters went to the polls in Lafayette for a municipal election on May 5.

City council incumbent David Kempf will be joined by newcomers Scott Gammons and Lynn Newberry after defeating challenger Peter Groesbeck for the three open seats on the council. Kempf led the vote count with 386, Gammons with 366, Newberry with 350, and Groesbeck and 338.

Gammons and Newberry will take the seats previously held by Steve Turner and Dale Hix, who did not seek re-election.

### LORETTO

A municipal election was held in Loretto on April 28.

Incumbent Steve McMasters ran unopposed for the mayoral seat and was re-elected with 83 complimentary votes.

Newcomer Louis Andy Etienne defeated fellow challenger Ridge Mattox for the open alderman seat with Etienne earning 53 votes to Mattox's 50. Etienne will take the seat previously held by John Pettus, who did not seek re-election.

### ROCKFORD

Rockford held a municipal election on May 5.

Incumbent Kenneth Arwood and challenger Jim Jamison were elected to the city council, defeating incumbent Matt Hester. Arwood led the vote tally with 98, followed by Jamison with 67, and Hester with 63.

## State officials forecast future of data, A.I. in aiding in disaster responses

By KATE COIL

As severe weather events across Tennessee increase, state officials are incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) and other technology into emergency responses and exploring new ways technology can aid in preparing for and recovering from future disasters.

When Winter Storm Fern struck Tennessee in January, the storm contributed to the death of 30 Tennesseans, cost hundreds of millions in damages, and led to disaster declarations in all 95 counties, which is very rare for a single natural disaster.

During the session "Mission Critical: The Role of IT in State-wide Disaster Response" at the Tennessee Digital Government Summit in Nashville, state officials from the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA), Tennessee Department of Health (TDH), and Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) discussed how technology aided in coordinating the disaster response and recovery. See [DISASTER](#) on Page 6



Open hospital beds, available water and food, whether electricity services are still operating, and locations of warming shelters are just some of the data state officials process during disaster response. (Photo by TEMA)

# NEWS ACROSS TENNESSEE



## ALGOOD

LEV (Light Electric Vehicles) Manufacturing officials will establish its first Tennessee facility in Algood to serve as the company's primary U.S. assembly, logistics, and fulfillment center. LEV Manufacturing, part of the Life EV Group, will create 288 jobs and invest \$7 million as the company acquires a 100,000 square-foot production and distribution facility at 2415 Burton Branch Road. The location will become a central hub for the distribution and new assembly of Rad Power Bikes products following Life EV Group's recent acquisition of Rad Power Bikes' assets. The new facility is expected to play a key role in supporting the company's multi-brand platform and a U.S.-based manufacturing strategy.

## CLEVELAND

The city of Cleveland has dedicated a new fire engine for its Fire Station No. 5 in the Candies Creek area. The new apparatus is a Pierce Enforcer equipped with a 515-horsepower Paccar engine and a 2,000-gallon-per-minute pump, enhancing the Fire Department's capacity to respond to emergencies and protect the community. The Cleveland City Council financed the purchase of the engine as part of fiscal investment in municipal public safety. Members of the department welcomed the engine in a traditional push-in ceremony, which dates back to when horse-drawn fire apparatus were manually pushed into stations in the early days of firefighting.

## COOKEVILLE

Cookeville officials celebrated the completion of the West Stevens Street Phase I project by reopening the street to traffic. The \$4 million project widened West Stevens Street from South Willow Avenue to West Jackson Street, added a center turn lane at South Willow, installed new storm sewer and underground utilities, and provided sidewalks and concrete entrance aprons on both sides. Street lighting was also upgraded. West Stevens Street is one of the main, continuous east-west routes through the city and carries significant traffic volumes.

## FAYETTEVILLE

Stella-Jones Corporation will open its first U.S. steel lattice tower manufacturing facility in Fayetteville. The new facility will create nearly 230 jobs and is part of a \$45 million investment. Expected to be fully operational by the end of 2027, the facility will help support growing demand from the utility industry across the U.S. Founded in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, in 1992, the company manufactures infrastructure products, which include treated wood utility poles, treated wood crossarms, and steel lattice towers, as well as railway ties and residential lumber in 45 manufacturing locations across North America.

## GERMANTOWN

Germantown's Public Art Program is launching Phase I of the Wolf River Cultural Greenway initiative, a multi-phase effort to integrate public art throughout the Greenway trail system. This phase includes two coordinated components: a series of large-scale murals at the Riverwood Pedestrian Tunnel and the installation of sculpture pads along the Greenway to support a future rotating sculpture exhibition. The mural project will serve as the primary visual focus of Phase I and will include eight mid-sized murals and smaller mural vignettes at tunnel entrances. Funding for Phase I is provided in part by the Tennessee Arts Commission and the Germantown Public Art Fund.

## JOHNSON CITY

Johnson City's Buffalo Mountain Park has moved one step closer to a state natural area designation. Staff from the state's Division of Natural Areas recently visited the site and confirmed its candidacy. The designation would place the park into a conservation easement. The city will then work alongside the state to develop land management and fire prevention plans for the area. This is part of the Johnson City Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan to support residents' desire to preserve the park for low-impact recreation. The designation is expected to take two years to complete and would make Buffalo Mountain Park the first state natural area in Washington County.

## KINGSPORT

Kingsport's Public Information and Communications Department received five awards from the local chapter of the Public Relations Society of America. The department received three Awards of Excellence for the Main Street Rebuild communications campaign, the Model City 101 program, and the This is Kingsport blog on Time Travel Toys. This is the first time the department has received Awards of Excellence. In addition, the department received two Awards of Quality for the Twilight Alive Concert Series promotion campaign and for Projects in Pictures in BMA Highlights. Finally, two submissions were finalists in the Best in Show award - also the first time the department has been a finalist.

## MILAN

The city of Milan has completed the transfer of the former Milan Army Ammunition Plant, also known as the Milan Arsenal, from the U.S. Army. The city purchased the site for \$4.2 million, much of which came from grant funding from the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD). This includes a recent \$241,769 master planning and sewer infrastructure design grant. The process to acquire the arsenal began 10 years ago when it was announced the 292-acre tract of the 22,541-acre property was going to be closed. Originally established in 1941, the site was placed on the Environmental Protection Agency's superfund list in 1987. City plans for the site include redevelopment for retail.

## NASHVILLE

Starbucks officials have given more details on the plan to expand its North American presence by locating a southeast corporate office in Nashville. The company announced it will invest \$100 million and will employ up to 2,000 people over the next several years to serve in a variety of corporate-related operations. The Nashville office will directly support continued coffeehouse expansion and rising customer demand, particularly in the southeastern U.S., while working closely with the company's global headquarters in Seattle.

## NORRIS

The city of Norris is expanding its recreation opportunities at the Norris Community Building. Officials have unveiled plans to turn two tennis courts and a disc golf-course at the community facility into a \$1 million sports complex, which will add four pickleball courts, a high school regulation basketball court, updated amenities, and improvements to the current tennis courts. The efforts have been buoyed by a \$350,000 grant the city received through the Local Parks and Recreation Fund in 2024 and an additional \$375,000 from the city's general fund. Officials said the improvements are the results of a master plan for parks and recreation and the goal to provide a community gathering space and improve local health outcomes.

## WINCHESTER

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency is working with the city of Winchester to improve access to Tims Ford Lake at Winchester City Park as part of the Bill Dance Signature Lake Program. A new 60-foot-wide boat ramp is already open for use, with renovations nearing completion on courtesy docks and bank armoring. Goals for the project include improving access for outdoor recreation and economic development. Winchester City Park offers walking/jogging trails, tennis courts, outdoor and indoor public pavilions, two handicapped accessible fishing piers, children's playgrounds, frisbee golf, and camping facilities. It also houses the Tims Ford Bass Club and a fully-equipped stage for outdoor performances.

## Dickson cuts ribbon on park renovation project



Officials with the city of Dickson cut the ribbon on the first phase of the J. Dan Buckner Park renovation project. The \$2.8 million project will include a new playground, pavilion, restrooms, two basketball courts, and two courts striped for tennis and pickleball with adjustable nets. Funding for the project includes a \$625,000 Local Parks and Recreation Fund grant from the Tennessee Department of Environmental and Conservation. (Photo by Dickson)

## New BlueCross Healthy Place opens in Kingsport



Officials with Kingsport and the BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee Foundation held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the new BlueCross Healthy Place at Riverwalk Park. The 5.6-acre park is located along the Holston River and provides a unique blend of natural beauty and recreational opportunities, as well as cultural and ecological features. The BlueCross Foundation provided \$6.7 million for the redevelopment of the park and an additional \$1.3 million for a maintenance fund. This is the second BlueCross Healthy Place established in Kingsport, following the BlueCross Healthy Place at the Kingsport Miracle League Complex, which opened in 2020. Features there include an accessible play area for younger children and a second for older children, adult fitness area, basketball hoop wall, community pavilions, kayak launch, new parking lot, pickleball courts, splash pad, storybook trail and little library, and walking trails. (Photo by Kingsport)

## New historic marker unveiled at Johnson City Senior Center



Officials with the Johnson City Parks and Recreation Department, municipal leaders, and local seniors gathered to unveil a new historical marker commemorating the first nationally accredited senior center in Tennessee. Founded in 1961, the original senior center has since expanded to the Memorial Park Community Center and led to the creation of the Johnson City Senior Services Division. It became Tennessee's first nationally accredited senior center by the National Council on Aging in 2000, a distinction that signifies a commitment to excellence and the highest level of service. Centers undergo reaccreditation every five years. There are approximately 300 accredited senior centers in the U.S. (Photo by Johnson City)

# WAUFORD

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

# Jackson officials reflect on success of Love Your Block

LOVE, from Page 1

One of the initial goals the city had for the grant program was to turn it into a sustainable force in the community, long after the initial funding was exhausting. Love Your Block was folded into Jackson's Neighborhood Services Department, a newly created city department that also offers resources to neighborhood associations, housing programs, and Keep Jackson Beautiful.

Elvia Trejo is director of the department, having joined the city staff during the second phase of the grant. She said participation in the program served as a catalyst for showing how small actions and small budgets can still have a big impact.

"The program showed us how much we can do with a smaller budget," Trejo said. "A lot of the time, cities don't want to take on a program like this because of how much it is going to cost them. Our budget is \$30,000 a year to [repair] around 12 homes. It taught us what we can do with \$2,000 per home and how to bring in more community to help. We have been gifted supplies from Black and Decker and Lowe's. While we were out in the community encouraging people to help themselves and volunteer, it also taught us there are other businesses wanting to help. They've donated plants, ladders, and paint."

Now administered in-house by the city, the Love Your Block program is still helping local homeowners make small improvements that may make the difference to keep a resident safely in their home.

"The idea is to stop problems at level one rather than wait until a house is unlivable," Trejo said. "A lot of our residents struggle with doors that won't close or windows that let the elements in. When we come in and fix that, it stops the domino effect. The program has evolved into the focus of keeping our residents safe, dry, and warm. We work on aesthetic issues as well."

Trejo said home repairs often have the consequence of fueling the desires of neighbors to "keep up with the Jones'."

"Even smaller scale things like planting flowers out front can have a big impact," she said. "We haven't been to a home repair yet where the neighbors didn't also start coming out and picking up trash outside, removing old things from their porch, and taking advantage of the Bulk 311 pickups we schedule. The neighbors will say 'Well, Miss Susie is getting her house painted. We definitely need to start cleaning up.' I like to personally drive around the streets where we have completed projects



AmeriCorps volunteers help make home repairs through Jackson's Love Your Block program. The city expanded an initial grant into a new Neighborhood Services Department, providing vital resources to beautify neighborhoods and ensure residents can remain in safe homes. (Photo by Jackson)

to see how our residents and their homes are doing. I can testify the litter has decreased dramatically. We had one street in East Jackson that was notorious for being covered in trash, and now the street is still clean even though we haven't had a crew out there in six months."

Love Your Block also helped Jackson officials identify gaps in citizen needs and create programs unique to their community. One of those is the mobile tool shed, a tool lending service.

"We have people rent out tools two or three times a week," Trejo said. "A lot of people can't afford to buy a pressure washer or a tool they may only need to use once. However, it can also be too expensive to hire a company. Our most popular tool is a pressure washer because a lot of our walkways have never been cleaned. When it rains, those unwashed walkways can get slippery, which can mean an elderly resident can slip and wind up in the hospital. Sometimes, a pressure washer or the tools needed to fix a porch railing can make a house safe."

The program has also been a hit with younger homeowners and families who want to do their own repairs or DIY projects.

"They make too much to qualify for our programs but not enough to hire someone," she said. "We see so many residents who go on YouTube to learn how to fix their own bathroom and just need to borrow these tools. Word has really gotten

**Learn more or apply for the Love Your Block program on the [Love Your Block website](#). Applications are due June 1, 2026.**

around."

Another program co-hosted by Jackson Mayor Scott Conger and the Neighborhood Services Division is Scott's Strolls. During these events, Mayor Conger and city department heads take a stroll down the block with neighbors to discuss local issues, share resources, and set future goals for the community.

"We walk with the residents, and they tell us the issues they are having on the streets whether that is paving or infrastructure," Trejo said. "It's like a town hall, but more modern. We get to know them, and they get to know each other. It's easy to say go to a website or call a number, but citizens don't always understand how to navigate that. If they can match a name to a face and a face to a title, they can share accurate information. You have to really get to know your community members and talk to them. A lot of folks think of government as something they see on TV or hear on the radio, but they should be able to access us."

The department also launched a lawn care assistance program, which provides free mowing assistance to residents in need, particu-

larly seniors and those with disabilities, through local volunteers. The program was the result of repeated codes violations and looking into why citizens needed help.

"The help with their lawn can mean they don't wind up in environmental court with more bills and more tickets," Trejo said. "I had a young woman who told us her husband had passed away six weeks ago, so it was the first time she was taking care of everything. She just needed help right then while she learned to manage everything."

The Neighborhood Services Department has also partnered with the Jackson Area Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependency (JACO) to host a community refrigerator. The full-sized fridges are open 24/7 with local restaurants donating catering orders that were never picked up or other food items, such as water bottles and sandwiches.

Trejo said the fridge is often patronized by students getting off at the nearby bus stop, young families, seniors, and the unhoused population. Sometimes, picking up a meal at the community fridge can also bridge a gap for a family or individual having to choose between buying food and paying rent or utilities.

"We welcome any resident into our office and ask what resources they need," she said. "We may not have all of those resources in house, but we can connect

them to other organizations in the community. That is our main goal at Neighborhood Services and something Love Your Block has taught me-- that even if we can't help you ourselves, we can be a bridge between resources."

By starting small, Trejo said the initial Love Your Block program has transformed into something bigger than many imagined.

"We kept dreaming a little bit bigger," she said. "It grew because we wanted to help people, and we learned new ways we could help people. We have amazing support from our council and mayor. We have more and more residents turning up to volunteer. We tell our residents this is their department."

One side effect of the program is that it is bringing Jackson residents into areas of the city they don't normally venture. Trejo said volunteers get a chance to connect with each other, particularly in a time when many people are losing connection in their own neighborhoods.

"We never want our residents to feel like the volunteers are at their home on a field trip," she said. "We don't want them to feel they are getting used. We prep our volunteers because we want them to know these are real people. This is real life and you may not know someone's struggle or story. We want our residents to feel safe. We also want to build the community aspect of it. Sometimes, people start talking and realize they know each other's relatives."

Trejo said residents – even those who have not received services through the program – said the face-to-face interaction between government and citizens is the best part of the program.

"Connecting human to human is valuable," she said. "They really feel like we care for them. We have become the first point of contact for government for many of them. Even on our projects, we tell our residents and homeowners they are the boss; they are telling the contractors what to do. If you see they are painting something the wrong color, you say something. This is your home. Volunteers go back to their homes, but residents have to live with whatever repairs we do. It makes people feel they are important and that they matter. At the end of the day, we are all Jacksonians and we want them to feel they matter."

Municipalities who wish to participate in the latest Love Your Block grant round must apply by **June 1, 2026**. Learn more about the program or submit your application on the [Love Your Block website](#).

## No loan is too large or too small



The city of Gallatin first used TMBF programs in 1987. This loan was a \$10,009,700 fixed-rate public building authority draw loan with the rate locked in for the term to finance various public works projects for the city. The lender is a local bank, Wilson Bank & Trust. From left to right: Daniel Sampson with Wilson Bank & Trust, Gallatin Mayor Paige Brown, and TMBF Marketing Representative Kevin Krushenski.



The town of Atoka has used the TMBF loan programs 10 times since December of 2006. The latest was a \$647,221 note issue for a new fire truck for the town and a \$3 million public building authority fixed-rate drawn loan for sewer system projects. From left to right: Atoka City Recorder Rachel Covarrubias, Mayor Bary Akin, and TMBF Marketing Representative Justin Hanson.



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## PEOPLE

**Craig Bennett** has been selected as the first town administrator for Caryville. The Caryville Board of Mayor and Aldermen voted in



Craig Bennett

April 2025 to create the town administrator position. Prior to coming to Caryville, Bennett served for more than three years as an operations officer with the U.S. Maritime Operations Center Training and Exercise Team in Norfolk, Va., one of several roles he held in his 35-year naval career. Bennett also spent more than three years as the city manager of Pelham, Ga. He holds a bachelor's degree from Purdue University, a master's in global leadership from the University of San Diego, and a master's in joint campaign planning and strategy from the National Defense University.

**Justin Bush** has been selected as major of operations for the Bristol Police Department. A 16-year veteran of the force, Bush has gained leadership experience serving as the department's captain of patrol and captain of support services. In his new role, Bush will oversee the Patrol and Criminal Investigations divisions. His career with the department began in 2010 as a patrol officer. He holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from East Tennessee State University and has completed several professional training and certification programs.



Justin Bush

**David Cantu** has been selected as the new fire code official for the town of Farragut. Cantu brings more than 20 years of experience in emergency services and public safety to the role. He comes to Farragut from Oak Ridge where he served with the Oak Ridge Fire Department for nearly five years, with time as a firefighter and fire inspector. He also spent 13 years as a firefighter with the Lodi, Calif. Fire Department. Cantu is a U.S. Army veteran.



David Cantu

**Leon Downey**, executive director of the Pigeon Forge Department of Tourism, is retiring after 38 years in the role. Since 1988, Downey has guided efforts to grow the city into one of the most popular tourism destinations in the nation and has welcomed numerous attractions, providing the city with more than \$2 billion in gross revenue in the past five years. Downey has a total of 43 years in the tourism industry, and before coming to Pigeon Forge served as executive director of the Oak Ridge Convention and Visitors Bureau, tourism development manager for the Knoxville Convention and Visitors Bureau, and marketing manager for the Blount County Chamber of Commerce and Smoky Mountains Visitors Bureau. He is also the past chairman of the Southeast Tourism Society, Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Council, and the Better Business Bureau of Greater East Tennessee. A veteran of the U.S. Army, Downey holds a bachelor's degree in communications from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.



Leon Downey

**Jonathan Jenkins** has been selected as the new assistant fire chief for the Franklin Fire Department (FFD). A veteran of the department, Jenkins will take over the role from Assistant Chief Greg Baltimore, who retired in December. Jenkins most recently



Jonathan Jenkins

spent the past six years as a battalion chief for FFD. Jenkins joined the department in 2001 as a firefighter and has since held roles including engineer, lieutenant, and captain. Prior to coming to Franklin, he began his career in fire service with the Centerville Volunteer Fire Department where he began as a volunteer and eventually served as assistant chief.

**Teresa Keen** has retired after 49 years of service to the city of Portland. Keen began work at Portland City Hall in 1977 and is retiring from her current role as assistant to the mayor. During her tenure with the city, Keen said she saw much of the city's business go from handwritten to computerized and witnessed the population of Portland grow and change. In addition to being a valuable resource to her coworkers, Keen is a member of the Highland Rim Historical Society.



Teresa Keen

**Cameron O'Hanlon** has been selected as the first executive director of Clarksville's new Arts, Culture & Tourism (ACT) Authority. A native of San Antonio, Texas, O'Hanlon grew up in Northern California and has spent the past 13 years at the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts, also known as the Soraya, in Los Angeles. He rose through the ranks from usher to general manager, shepherding the organization through the pandemic. A performer and artist, O'Hanlon will run the ACT Authority, an independent entity and arm of the city, aimed at improving accessibility and growing new avenues for the arts in Clarksville. He holds a bachelor's degree in music, percussion, and performance from California State University, Northridge.



Cameron O'Hanlon

**Delaney Oldham** will serve as a new finance and accounting consultant for UT-MTAS, based in the Nashville office. Prior to her role with MTAS, Oldham served as a legislative auditor in the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury's Division of Local Audit. A certified county finance officer, Oldham holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from Cumberland University and a master's in business administration from Tennessee Tech.



Delaney Oldham

**Bob Rial** has been selected as the interim manager of Fairview. Rial will begin the role on a part-time basis until he finishes out his current term as Dickson County Mayor in November, at which point he will transition to full-time. Prior to being elected County Mayor in 2010, Rial served on the Dickson City Council from 2003 to 2010. Rial also served on the Tennessee Association of County Mayors board and the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. He has 27 years of finance and banking experience in the private sector. Rial holds a bachelor's degree in public administration from the University of Tennessee, Martin.



Bob Rial

**Chris Willyard** has been selected as the new fire marshal for the Hendersonville Fire Department. Willyard has served with the department for 16 years, joining after spending six years with the Hendersonville Police Department. In addition to serving as the fire marshal, he will continue to serve as the department's chaplain.



Chris Willyard

## Longtime Memphis State Rep. Hardaway dies

Longtime Memphis State Rep. G.A. Hardaway died on Friday, April 24, 2026, at the age of 71 after a brief illness.

A Democrat, Hardaway was initially elected to serve District 92 in March 2007, which became District 93 in January 2013. The district represents parts of South Memphis and the Orange Mound neighborhood.

Additionally, Hardaway served as the chairman of the Shelby County Legislative Democratic Caucus and was a former chairman of the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators.

TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes paid tribute to Hardaway's service.

"We join the many friends, colleagues, and constituents of State Rep. G.A. Hardaway in sharing our condolences and prayers for his family," Haynes said. "He was a staunch advocate for the people of Memphis and a steadfast public servant. His legacy lives on in all that he did to help us grow as a society."

A native of Meridian, Miss., Hardaway held a bachelor's degree in finance from DePaul University



State Rep. G.A. Hardaway, D-Memphis

and worked in real estate.

The Tennessee Democratic Party (TNDP) released a statement regarding his passing.

"For years, State Representative G.A. Hardaway served with integrity, fighting to ensure every Tennessean had a voice in their government," the statement read. "His legacy is defined not only by his leadership in the legislature, but by the way he showed up for his community each and every day. He led with heart, treated everyone with dignity, and never lost sight of who he was fighting for. We are sending our deepest condolences to

his loved ones, community, and the constituents of House District 93 during this terribly difficult time. His loss will be felt deeply across Tennessee, and his legacy will continue to inspire the work ahead."

House Speaker Cameron Sexton also expressed his condolences.

"State Rep. Hardaway was a highly respected leader and a dedicated community servant. He was a man of deep faith, always showed grace and never turned away from an opportunity to be someone's mentor or offer advice," Sexton said. "He left a lasting impression on all who knew him. We will truly miss him. My prayers are with his family and the entire Memphis community during this difficult time."

The Shelby County Commission appointed Hardaway's son, Willis Lincoln "T.J." Hardaway III, to hold the seat as an interim until the November election.

Presently, no candidates have qualified in either party for the District 93 seat, which is up for re-election in November. Leaders of both parties are still exploring options regarding the race.

## Byrd announces retirement from UT-IPS

Herb Byrd, vice president of the University of Tennessee Institute for Public Service (IPS), will retire Sept. 30 following 40 years of dedicated service to the University of Tennessee and the state.

TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes thanked Byrd for his work in public service, particularly with Tennessee's municipalities.

"On behalf of the Tennessee Municipal League family across the state, I want to extend our congratulations to UT Vice President Dr. Herb Byrd III on his upcoming retirement," Haynes said. "Many walk through the doors of UT, but Dr. Byrd will be among the top few who embodied perfection in public service and helping others. On a personal level, I have greatly benefited from having Herb as a friend and colleague for more than 20 years. We wish Herb and his wife, Resa, all the best in the years ahead."

A three-time UT alumnus, Byrd began his career with UT Extension, serving nearly three decades in communities across Tennessee as a 4-H agent in Monroe County, county director for



Dr. Herb Byrd III  
Vice President of UT-IPS

McMinn County, and leader in agricultural and resource development.

After returning to UT Extension's state office in 1998, he was responsible for recruitment, personnel, and civil rights and served as Extension's affirmative action and EEO officer. In addition, he directed the Extension Evaluation and Staff Development department. He was also the human resources officer for the Institute for Agriculture and served on the staff of the University of Tennessee's Leadership Institute from

1999-2019.

He later advanced to leadership roles within IPS and was named vice president in 2016 after serving in an interim capacity beginning in 2014.

During his tenure, Byrd played a key role in strengthening IPS's mission to deliver training and technical assistance that improve quality of life across Tennessee. His leadership helped expand the institute's reach and impact, including initiatives addressing critical challenges such as substance abuse and misuse.

"Herb's career reflects the very best of the University of Tennessee's land-grant mission," said UT System President Randy Boyd. "His leadership, commitment to service, and passion for helping others has had a lasting impact in communities across our state."

A national search for the next vice president of IPS will launch in August. The search will include stakeholder listening sessions to gather input from key partners. An interim vice president will be appointed to lead the institute during the transition.

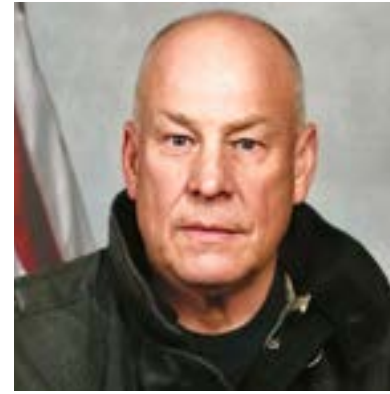
## Nashville firefighters added to National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Maryland

The National Fallen Firefighters Memorial added the names of two Nashville Fire Department firefighters during the [45th National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend](#).

Engineer Edward "Bubba" Tant and Firefighter Paramedic James "Jim" Young II were added to the memorial located in Emmitsburg, Md., and will join the name of 204 firefighters nationwide who have been similarly honored.

Tant was a 33-year member of the NFD and died Dec. 19, 2024, while Young, a 28-year member of NFD, died Dec. 14, 2024. Both died from occupation-related cancers.

The congressionally established National Fallen Firefighters Memorial, located on the campus of the National Emergency Train-



Edward Tant




James Young II

ing Center, serves as the nation's official monument honoring firefighters who have died in the line of duty.

Newly honored firefighters are added to the memorial each year during Memorial Weekend. Hosted by the [National Fallen Firefighters](#)

[Foundation](#), the annual Memorial Weekend brings hundreds of Fire Hero families, fire service leaders, government officials, and supporters together for ceremonies of remembrance, reflection, and national tribute.



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# Tennessee General Assembly adjourns sine die

ADJOURNS, from Page 1

to the owner. This approach contradicts our current legal system, where courts look at each case individually based on constitutional law and established precedent. The bill also would have opened the door to constant lawsuits and made it difficult for cities to manage zoning and growth.

The bill to create [Partisan Elections and Move City Elections](#) – also known as SB1630 (Hensley) / HB1497 (Cepicky) – would have made all local elections partisan and moved them to coincide with state and federal fall elections.

Concerns about this bill included the loss of essential local issues like public safety, streets, parks, and development in the noise of state and federal elections; the fact that voters chose local leaders on track records and community needs over party positions; and that partisan elections would change the tone of hometown elections, ultimately weakening the community-focused nature of local government.

Additionally, forcing every city and town to shift election dates would also break from long-standing practice, conflict with recent state studies, and reduce local control.

Another major success was the passage of a [TACIR study on public notices](#), or SB2450 (Powers) / HB2114 (Crawford). As most residents no longer receive news from print papers, requiring public notices in newspapers is expensive for taxpayers, slows down government work, and no longer meets the needs of citizenry where they are.

With the passage of the bill, the respected Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) will study whether printed newspapers are still the best outlet for governments to communicate public notices. The study will determine if online posting or other methods could provide clearer, faster, and more accessible transparency for the public

## BUDGET OVERVIEW

Of the \$58.3 billion approved by state lawmakers, \$30 billion comes from state general funds, \$19 billion from federal funding, and the remainder is paid by fees, tuitions, and bonds.

The FY 2026-2027 budget is a 9% decrease from the \$59.8 billion budget passed for FY 2025-2026, according to House Finance, Ways and Means Committee Chairman Gary Hicks, R-Rogersville, who presented it to the House.

The budget projects the state to see 2.35% in revenue growth – approximately \$450 million in recurring funds. Additionally, more than \$620 million non-recurring funds were incorporated into the budget along with \$42 million in unclaimed property revenues.

When the session reconvened in Nashville on Jan. 13, 2026, top priorities included Gov. Bill Lee's Education Freedom Act, with 20,000 private school scholarships approved last year, immigration, infrastructure improvements and funding, artificial intelligence, and the state's grocery tax.

Notably, lawmakers took \$282.4 million from the Lee administration's proposed budget and financed \$276.4 million in legislative priorities. One of the biggest line items proposed for the budget by lawmakers is a \$42 million non-recurring grant pool for emergency and community services.

The General Assembly ultimately funded Gov. Lee's major economic opportunity proposals, including \$20 million for the state's Rain Day Fund, \$8 million for the Tennessee Youth Employment Program, and \$25 million for the Tennessee Entertainment Commission, along with many of the other goals set forward in the State of the State.

Several projects proposed in Gov. Lee's budget received more funding than initially requested in the budget, including:

- \$81.2 million for commercial and general aviation projects (\$56.2 million initially proposed)
- \$88.6 million to create three new state parks (\$81.6 million proposed)
- \$43 million for quantum computing industry expansion and investment (\$20 million proposed)

Other requests received less funding than proposed, including

- \$400 million for transportation infrastructure (\$425 million



Gov. Bill Lee and members of the House and Senate GOP Caucuses hold a press conference following the April 23, 2026, adjournment (Photo by Gov. Bill Lee's Office)



Jan McNally, left, and Lt. Gov. Randy McNally, R-Oak Ridge, right, as McNally thanks his colleagues. (Photo by State Sen. Ken Yager, R-Kingston)

- proposed)
- \$20 million to for a Starter Home Revolving Loan program (\$30 million proposed)
- \$15 million for the Rural Development Fund (\$25 million proposed)
- \$3.25 million for Corrections Education Investment (\$3.5 million proposed)
- \$44.2 million for the Governor's Response and Recovery Fund (\$100 million proposed)
- \$50 million for Memphis public safety grants (\$80 million proposed)
- \$38.5 million for AI and government efficiency (\$50 million proposed)

Some topics brought up at the beginning of the session, such as a proposed cut to the state's 4% grocery tax, were not passed despite seeming to have some bipartisan support.

The FY26-27 budget is the final under Gov. Bill Lee's leadership.

"When I first became governor, I was hopeful about what we could accomplish in partnership with the General Assembly to serve Tennesseans," said Gov. Lee. "Over eight legislative sessions, we've passed strategic measures to invest in education, strengthen our workforce, improve infrastructure, and secure our state's position as a leader in next-generation nuclear energy. We've accomplished much together, and I'm deeply grateful to the members of the General Assembly who have worked alongside us to deliver real results for people across our state."

Lt. Gov. Randy McNally, R-Oak Ridge, also reflected on the passage of the last budget of his tenure as he has decided to not seek re-election.

"This budget reflects the steady, fiscally responsible approach we've taken over the past decade," McNally said. "We've kept spending under control while continuing to invest in those areas of paramount importance to our citizens, such as education, healthcare, and public safety. This discipline has resulted in structurally balanced budgets year after year, putting Tennessee in

a strong position to provide for the people of Tennessee not just today, but in the years to come. I appreciate the work of each of our members to keep us on this path."

House Speaker Cameron Sexton, R-Crossville, described the session as one of "the most consequential in Tennessee history."

"We took bold action to crack down on crime and illegal immigration, strengthened enforcement, and protected our communities," Sexton said. "We expanded education and healthcare freedom, breaking up monopolies and bringing real competition and choices for Tennesseans. Proud of the Tennessee House Republicans for keeping our state safe, strong, and leading the nation in conservative policy."

## SPECIAL SESSION

Gov. Lee recalled the Tennessee General Assembly for a special session on redistricting beginning May 5, 2026 and lasting until May 7, 2026. Lawmakers had until May 8, 2026 to redraw the map, which was the deadline for election commissions to prepare for the August federal primaries.

The new [U.S. Congressional District map](#) for Tennessee was signed into law by Gov. Lee after passing the General Assembly. The Tennessee State House voted 64-25-3 to pass the bill with State Reps. Michele Reneau, R-Signal Mountain; Ron Travis, R-Dayton; and Greg Vital, R-Harrison; all voting "present but not voting." The State Senate voted 25-5 in favor of the bill with State Sen. Richard Briggs, R-Knoxville, and Becky Massey, R-Knoxville, absent from the session.

President Donald Trump and U.S. Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tennessee – who is also presently running for governor – both called for redistricting after the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in [Louisiana v. Callais](#).

The 6-3 ruling held that a section of the Voting Rights Act that requires southern states to draw majority-minority U.S. House districts to ensure black voters are able to choose representatives was "an unconstitutional racial gery-



House Speaker Cameron Sexton, R-Crossville, gavels out the session. (Photo by Speaker Sexton's Office)

## FY 2026-27 Highlights

- **\$20 million** investment in Tennessee's Rainy Day Fund, bringing Tennessee reserves to more than \$2.2 billion, the largest in state history
- **\$8 million** to expand the Tennessee Youth Employment Program
- **\$25 million** further investment in the Tennessee Entertainment Commission
- **\$30 million** to support Tennessee zoos

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOUSING

- **\$400 million** for transportation projects
- **\$165 million** for rest areas and welcome center redevelopment
- **\$20 million** to Tennessee Housing Development Agency for workforce housing development
- **\$15 million** further investment in the Rural Development Fund
- **\$1.5 million** to bring more nonstop international flights to Tennessee
- **\$40 million** for bridge reconstruction project in Clarksville to support Korea Zinc
- **\$81.2 million** for aviation infrastructure

## COMMUNITY & EMERGENCY SERVICES

- **\$42 million** in nonrecurring grant pool for local emergency and community services, including:
  - \* **\$20 million** for volunteer fire departments
  - \* **\$5 million each** for emergency medical services, volunteer rescue squads, local museums, and senior centers
  - \* **\$1.5 million** for local fairs
  - \* **\$500,000** for courthouse renovations

## HEALTHCARE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

- **\$205 million** in Shared Savings to support healthcare initiatives, including:
  - \* **\$18 million** for the Pathway to Independence Program
  - \* **\$125 million** for the Rural Health Transformation Program
  - \* **\$20.5 million** to account for a growing number of Rural Health Clinics receiving cost-based reimbursement rates
- **\$44.2 million** for natural disaster recovery
- **\$50 million** for Memphis-based public safety grants

## CONSERVATION

- **\$86.6 million** to create a total of 14 new state parks
- **\$1.6 million** for the Subsurface Sewage Disposal Program, reducing waiting times for permitting services and oversight
- **\$1.1 million** to support further enhancement of Tennessee's electric grid

## INNOVATION

- **\$38.5 million** to support state adoption of artificial intelligence
- **\$25 million** further investment in the Nuclear Energy Fund
- **\$20 million** to complete the relocation of the North Data Center
- **\$43 million** to accelerate Tennessee's quantum computing industry

mander." In addition to Tennessee, Congressional Districts have been redrawn in California, Florida, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Utah. A voter referendum to

redraw lines in Virginia has been struck down by a state court.

The special session was the fifth called by Gov. Bill Lee during his eight years as governor.

# State officials forecast future of data, A.I. in aiding in disaster responses

DISASTER, from Page 1

## IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

Dr. Paul Peterson, director of TDH's Emergency Preparedness Program, said one of the first major concerns when any natural disaster strikes is the human cost. Power outages, like those caused by Fern, are felt acutely by those who rely on electricity-dependent medical devices and services.

"When we have those kinds of extended power outages, it puts all of us at risk," Peterson said. "There is a more traditional definition of an at-risk population, but dependent on the event and your own personal readiness, it can put you at risk. One of the things we focused on early was our health-care continuum. We had power outages across the state impacting long-time care facilities with generator failures. We had dialysis patients who could not get to their dialysis appointments – not because the center wasn't open but because public transportation wasn't available. Also, we had hospital surges where people were going to hospitals to charge their phones, warm up, and for a variety of things. We also had people on home-based oxygen who couldn't power up and had to go to warming shelters."

To serve those individuals, Peterson said the health and medical side of the disaster response – known as ESF-8 – works with partners to coordinate where medically fragile Tennesseans can best be served.

"An effective response is really based on updated situational awareness. That is generated based on testing the system, trust, and relationships. If we don't have those things, then we are struggling. We have a variety of teams of folks across the state who were engaged and used a lot of different tools."

While TDH uses Microsoft Teams chats day-to-day, a specific channel was created for disaster response information allowing information to be quickly disseminated statewide.

The healthcare resources tracking system allows TDH to know where beds are available for patients statewide, helping determine what hospitals were open, which had generator failure, and which did not have electricity.

This information allowed TDH to tell patients where they could go to receive services and also provided important details needed for the state to secure a federal disaster declaration.

By seeing what resources hospitals and emergency providers needed, Peterson said TDH was able to fill those gaps and prevent many hospitals from having to evacuate. Knowing where beds were available also helped find space for the 300 people who did have to be evacuated from other locations.

Discharge data from emergency departments across the state also helps aid in response. If an increase is seen in hospitalizations due to carbon monoxide, hypothermia, or falls, TDH can then create public messaging targeting those areas.

"We had a lot of different data inputs," Peterson said. "With all of those different things, we have to structure our response. I can't underscore the importance of us all sitting together at [the Tennessee State Emergency Operations Center] sharing resources back and forth across state agencies. It's critical. In these types of responses, speed is what it is all about."

## AFTER THE STORM

TEMA Chief of Staff Alex Pellom said Fern presented a unique challenge as the weather did not immediately warm up enough for damage assessments to begin, and instead was quickly followed by a second wave of storms.

"As buildings, facilities, and infrastructure are damaged, we have to go out and chronicle what they are, where they are, and levels of damage because that is the basis of how we make the decision whether the governor will request a disaster declaration," Pellom said. "Those disaster declarations are what brings aid to our government to replace roads and bridges, like those that were washed out by Hurricane Helene. The other part of the disaster declaration is the



The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency's operations center during Winter Storm Fern brought officials from several different state departments together to process incoming data and properly allocate resources. (Photo by TEMA)



State crews work to clear roadways following Winter Storm Fern. Knowing what roadways are open and where service is needed is essential for emergency responders, public works crews, and to ensure citizens can safely access services. This information can also help in securing a disaster declaration. (Photo by TEMA)



Information gathered by TEMA during Winter Storm Fern allowed them to know where supplies, such as potable water and food, needed to be sent as well as community resources local residents could be directed to. (Photo by TEMA)

individual assistance for people. There is utmost importance for us getting this done, getting it right, and getting it done quickly."

For decades, the process has required TEMA officials and employees to physically go to areas with maps, checklists, and paperwork to fill out to submit to the federal government.

TEMA then used GIS technology to enable local emergency management officials to go out in their own jurisdictions, take photos of damage, upload them to the statewide system, and add any data they have collected.

In turn, Pellom said all the information collected through the GIS database can inform future decisions beyond securing a declaration.

"If I can see that one house has major damage, I can then equate that damage to 75% of

the houses in that area," he said. "We can estimate that data in real time to expedite the declaration process. This is revolutionary in the way you do damage assessment. You can see where damage took place and reassign resources where they need to go. This gives us the situational awareness of what we are looking at to see what decisions we need to make."

Fern cut off some areas for weeks, so TEMA built a GIS dashboard that was open to the public. Residents could submit their own photos and fill out a simple questionnaire. Pellom said the dashboard served as a force multiplier, crowdsourcing important data.

"By giving the public the ability to do this, we don't have to wait. We know where people are affected. We may think one thing, but when a bunch of dots start

popping up, we can see where communities have been cut off. We can then reach out to first responders and community organizations who respond to disasters and push resources to these folks. This became a gamechanger. While it doesn't verify anything, it brings awareness and brings it quicker."

## FORECASTING THE FUTURE

TBI Assistant Director for Technology Richard Littlehale said the agency is available to TEMA whenever a disaster strikes. TBI has resources for taking in, organizing, distributing, and acting on information, such as hotlines and data analysts.

During Winter Storm Fern, TBI initially created an intake mechanism for residents reporting welfare concerns about family, friends, and neighbors and requesting check-ins. TBI also uses AI through a federal tool known as Virtual Command Center, which helps process information from calls and direct that information to the best agency to respond.

However, an insurance company incorrectly announced that TBI's missing persons hotline was helping to process missing public aid funds – also known as welfare checks. As a result, many people began calling the hotline for this purpose as well. Littlehale said this created a real problem.

"All of a sudden, our hotline – which is robust but not endless – was deluged with calls all at the same time," Littlehale said. "This was a microcosm of a real problem as we think about the future of AI. There are 911 centers right now that are using AI to triage life safety calls. You may think this is a risky way to use AI, but on the other hand, what are the life-safety implications of

hallucination, of a misroute call, or a call that doesn't get answered for 30 minutes? We have to have that conversation and look at it through clear eyes."

Littlehale said there needs to be balance between over-reliance on technology and refusing to explore how technology can provide crucial aid.

"We shouldn't embrace technology for its own sake but also not blind ourselves to the possibility," he said. "Very often, it is the most vulnerable people in our society who are going to eat that sandwich. If you are in the disaster response business, the decisions you make, how agile you are, and how quick you are has people's lives in the balance."

Looking toward the future, Littlehale said research is underway to determine how AI and technology can better serve first responders using cloud-based data.

"One of the things that is a fascinating field in AI is a model that provides an advised set of tasks to responders in the field," he said. "Imagine your goal is to make sure every first responder is doing what they can do with their bravery and expertise. How we can take that paperwork off them as much as possible and direct that they need to go to this place, and then this place, and then take care of themselves by having a snack and warming up. We can change from sitting around waiting to hear what you need to do to instead deliver the maximum amount of resources on target for the people who need them to most."

Littlehale said he thinks AI technology will also help more effectively ingest information submitted during major incidents ranging from Amber Alerts to traffic crashes to mass casualty events. That information can then be more quickly processed through AI to help responders save lives.

Petersen said he foresees AI being used to improve how private and public healthcare responders connect and share information, particularly as more is developed to preserve patient privacy.

Pellom said he hopes to see technology develop to expedite the damage assessment process.

"Recovery takes a long time, and every step we can take to make it quicker gets these rural economies going," Pellom said. "It gets people back on their feet and schools back in session. If I can fly over a damaged area and utilize the footage it finds, I have made damage assessment exponentially faster. We can have this data and these layers. What we need is to be able to process it quickly and effectively."

# Technology plays increasing role in how cities respond to, plan for major events

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

From natural disasters to major community gatherings, IT provides a critical backbone for how municipalities and emergency officials respond.

Digital infrastructure plays a critical role in telecommunications, resiliency, and operational management. Officials often need to coordinate with each other and with service providers to ensure they can meet public demand for crowd and traffic control and emergency response for planned events – such as a large outdoor concert or Fourth of July fireworks – as well as unplanned incidents – such as natural disasters or traffic congestion created by a crash.

Robert White serves as the transportation systems management and operations manager for the Nashville Department of Transportation (NDOT) as well as holds responsibilities with the city's information technology services department and special events. White said the city of Nashville hosts some 4,000 special events each year with the largest including the downtown Fourth of July concert, CMA Fest, and the Music City Grand Prix.

These events require NDOT to coordinate with police and emergency services to ensure that everyone remains safe. However, every Friday and Saturday night on Broadway in Nashville can also feel like a "special event."

"Every time a country music star decides to have a pop-up at his honkytonk and puts it social media, it is a special event," White said. "I have a staff member whose only job is to review special event applications in the mayor's office. When Post Malone was going to be opening his bar, he said he was going to have only a few local people doing performances, wasn't going to serve alcohol, and was only going to have 5,000 people. A week before the event, Gordon Ramsey announced he would be handing out alcohol at the event, and Post Malone announced the event would be free, and he would perform. That event went from 5,000 people to 75,000. Those types of challenges are what we have to deal with on a weekly basis."

## EMERGENCY RESPONSE

T-Mobile for Government Senior Manager Derek Usner often works with municipalities and local governments to handle digital infrastructure issues, such as cellular and digital communications. Usner said special events create a surge demand for physical and digital infrastructure.

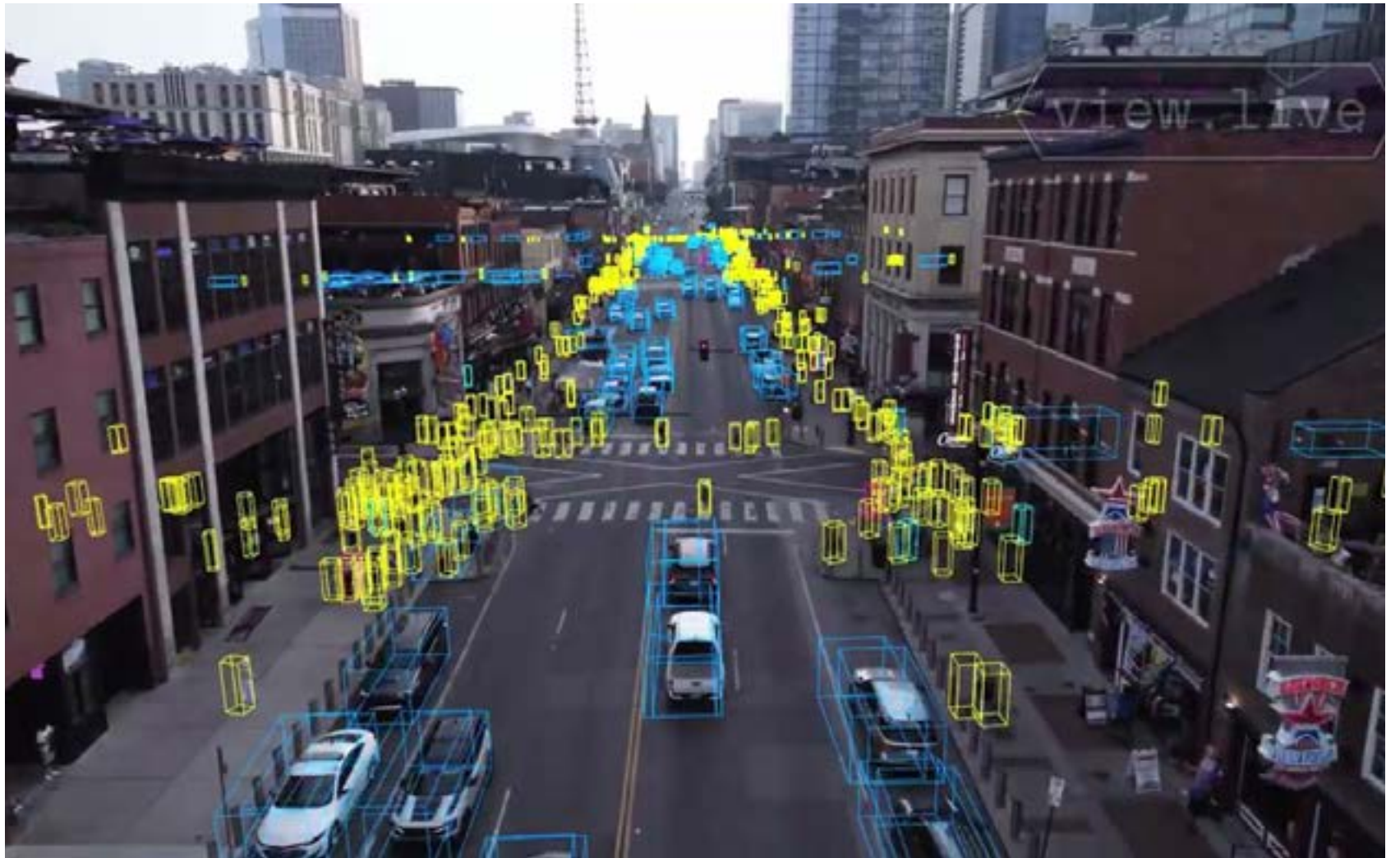
"Cellular is a finite resource; there are only a certain number of lanes on the [digital] highway," Usner said. "Our approach is to prioritize traffic for first responders. We want to make sure they have their own dedicated lanes on the highway. You can't build a cellular network that on a normal day has 5,000 people but can grow to have 75,000 per day. What we prioritize is early conversations with clients to determine when major events are coming up. That could mean we add an additional fiber circuit or power. I think it's important to give as much time and as much planning to your vendor, and ideally you can give them three to six months notice for a substantial event."

Usner said he works with TEMA and the various emergency management agencies in the state to identify needs and conduct table-top exercises to prepare. He also said it is important for officials to keep their providers and carriers informed about their needs as they grow and change.

"When it comes time to respond to a disaster, all carriers are in the same boat-- we want to help and keep communication open," he said.

White said Nashville also relies on fiber services for communication signals during emergency response.

"It is all about communication," he said. "Two thirds of Nashville runs on cellular and old copper. If it starts to rain, we know those signals will go down and we have to plan for it. We have to keep in contact with emergency management and all the providers. That's one of the reasons why we rely on fiber. We are also already starting to plan for the Fourth of July. You could put a cell tower



By partnering with Vanderbilt University, Nashville officials can monitor pedestrian and vehicle traffic on Broadway, giving them vital, real-time data to make decisions about emergency response and traffic patterns. (Photo by Vanderbilt University)

on every building downtown, and [with that many people downtown] it wouldn't be enough to allow communication."

Broadway will have a 20-foot center traffic lane that will remain open for fire and emergency vehicles. Last year, White said traffic blocked emergency access that prevented responders from quickly responding to individuals suffering from heatstroke and complications due to alcohol.

"You can't block off all roads and sidewalks," he said. "There has to be room to move around."

Usner said it is also important to reflect back on previous events to see how capacity held up, what type of support was needed for an event, and what can be done differently next time to prevent problems.

"We look at the past and try to protect the future," Usner said. "We will reposition assets around the country to support natural disasters."

## TRAFFIC FLOW

White said one of the biggest challenges that Nashville faces is that most of the city's large events occur in a roughly five-square-mile area known as the Downtown Loop. This area is home to Nissan Stadium, Bridgestone Arena, Country Music Hall of Fame, Ascend Amphitheatre, Broadway, Ryman Auditorium, Municipal Auditorium, Tennessee State Capital, and numerous corporate office buildings. It can be difficult to manage one gathering at any of these locations, and White said there have been weekends when most-- if not all-- of the city's big venues are hosting visitors.

Nashville has also worked with researchers at Vanderbilt University to install Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) infrastructure on Broadway. This allows White to keep track of the number of pedestrians and vehicles in the area to inform decisions on public safety and traffic flow. The fiber network also supports this system.

White said Nashville is also participating in Google's Project Green Light, a research initiative aimed at lowering traffic emissions using AI. The service enables officials to manually implement changes to traffic and pedestrian signals and reroute vehicle and foot traffic away from congested routes.

"It used to take three hours to flush traffic from Nissan Stadium when a game or concert would end," White said. "We started using the data to see what direction the traffic was going in. By changing the traffic signals to what we call a flush plan, we went from it taking three hours to 45 minutes."

Nashville also coordinates with the Tennessee Department of Transportation through Project Green Light to manage congested interstate traffic. Local police work with White to use this tool to help direct traffic away from areas where a crash has occurred so it can be cleared more efficiently.

## FUTURE PLANNING

Usner said his company is be-



Parking at one of several lots at the Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival near Manchester. The festival can draw 70,000 attendees to the city, which has a population of just over 12,000. Local first responders, such as the Manchester Police Department, often have to work with state officials to handle the increased traffic flow on roadways, respond to medical events, and keep lines of communication open in a remote area. (Photo by TDOT)



The streets of Hamburg, Germany, as viewed through Google's Project Green Light. The program allows traffic and emergency officials to manually reset traffic lights as well as redirect where Google Maps sends vehicle and foot traffic to keep roadways clear and citizens safe. (Photo by Google)

ginning to use AI and analytics to help guide its terrestrial networks to reroute capacity to where it is needed most during large events or disasters. He said they have been working with local emergency responders to pilot these programs.

With more development coming to Nashville's East Bank – including a new Titans Stadium – White said the city is already building contingency plans. The new stadium will seat fewer people, but the new construction of Google and Oracle facilities in the area will also reduce available parking. White said the city is working with the city's WeGo bus, shuttle, and train services, as well as rideshares and micromobility companies to plan ahead.

"What we don't want is that shark pattern where people keep circling the block looking for parking," White said. "Waze has a

function that alerts people to where parking is available, and so we are working with them on that. We are also working on digital signage that will direct people to those areas. It's going to be a challenge, because with all of the construction over there, we are going to lose 700 parking spaces."

Based on data collected from the John Siegenthaler Pedestrian Bridge, White said Google is helping the city direct pedestrians on routes home after concerts. The company is also working to build another pedestrian bridge that will connect Nashville's East Bank to the Germantown neighborhood.

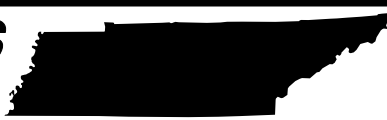
For events inside the stadium, Usner said carriers can use cellular, wifi, and Bluetooth technology to help organizers with traffic issues. Smart sensors can indicate which bathrooms or pathways to seats are being overused or under-used.

He said they can also alert staff that a bathroom may need cleaning because of how many people have gone into it.

Ultimately, Usner said thinking about and planning for all contingencies ensures that IT services can best serve officials, emergency responders, and the public.

"You can try to plan for everything, but there is always something there that you cannot predict," Usner said. "Preparation is key and as much time you can give to everyone supporting that event is critical to success. I have also lived through Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Helene. There is little you can do to prepare for something that catastrophic, but having as many contingency plans is essential. Things will happen and communications infrastructure becomes more critical. Having as many options as you can budget

## STATE BRIEFS



Federal grants are now available for municipalities looking to improve safety and accessibility around rail infrastructure. The Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program, administered by the Federal Railroad Administration has more \$2 billion available and a June 22, 2026, deadline. At least 25% of available funds are reserved specifically for projects in rural areas. Information on the full grant program and how to apply is available online.

Tennessee's February unemployment increased slightly over the previous month but remained below the national average. The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) recorded an unemployment rate of 3.6% in the state in February, up from a 3.5% recorded in January. The rate is also up from the 3.5% unemployment rate in March 2025. However, the state still remained below the national unemployment rate of 4.4%, which is also up one-tenth of a percentage point from the previous month. Over the past year, total nonfarm employment in the state decreased by 6,400 jobs with the largest declines in the trade, transportation, and utilities sector, followed by manufacturing and federal government. Between January and February 2026, nonfarm employment in the state decreased by 9,200 jobs with the biggest losses in private education and health services sector, followed by the trade, transportation, and utilities sector, and the leisure and hospitality sector. TDLWD has compiled a comprehensive analysis of the February 2026 unemployment data.

With commercial auto fleet managers increasingly interested in adopting medium- and heavy-duty EVs for freight transport, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation's (TDEC) Office of Energy Programs has released the Tennessee Freight Electrification Framework. This guide aims to support commercial fleets that wish to transition to all-electric vehicles. The framework is based on industry-leading research, conversations with stakeholders, and support from the National Association of State Energy Officials' Freight Electrification Advisory Group. According to the most recent data from the U.S.

Energy Information Administration, the transportation sector is the largest energy-consuming end-use sector in Tennessee, representing 46.1% of Tennessee's total energy consumption. For additional information on transportation electrification in Tennessee, visit the TDEC website.

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) has announced the availability of grant dollars to assist with stream clean-up projects during the 2026-27 fiscal year. Five grants, at a maximum of \$1,000 each, are available for each of TWRA's four regional Aquatic Habitat Protection regions (a total of \$5,000 per region). The funds will be obligated as grants; therefore, the grantee must have a nonprofit tax-exempt number. Applications can be made online. The application deadline for this program is June 30, 2026.

While seat belt usage is on the decline in Tennessee, it still exceeds the national rate. Results from the Tennessee Highway Safety Office annual roadside observational study determined a usage rate of 91.3% in 2025, a decrease of 0.9% over 2024 but still higher than the national rate of 90%. The 2025 rate is also the fourth-highest recorded annual seat belt usage rate and marks the seventh consecutive year of a rate exceeding 90%. Tennessee Highway Safety Office Director Buddy Lewis said seat belt usage reduces the risk of fatal injury in an auto accident by 50%.

The new 2026 Roadmap for Electric Vehicles (EVs) in Tennessee has been released, building on progress since the initial strategy was implemented in 2019. The updated guide incorporates recent industry data and lessons learned in project implementation to clarify priorities and guide action across Tennessee over the next 10 years. The plan is a statewide collaboration between the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation's (TDEC) Office of Energy Programs with partners in the Drive Electric Tennessee. The roadmap includes new and expanded goals for transportation electrification, including a goal to support the deployment of 750,000 light-duty EVs in Tennessee by 2035. For additional information on transportation electrification in Tennessee, visit the TDEC website at [tn.gov/environment/energy](http://tn.gov/environment/energy).

## Seven cities join Tennessee Downtowns

The Tennessee Downtowns program has selected seven municipalities among its latest cohort.

Dyer, Harriman, Henning, Medina, Moscow, Red Bank, and Rutledge are now among the 97 communities selected for the program.

Begun in 2010, Tennessee Downtowns is in its tenth round, aiding municipalities in the pursuit of the Main Street America approach to downtown revitalization.

Tennessee Deputy Gov. and Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner Stuart C. McWhorter said the program helps local communities revitalize traditional commercial districts, enhance community livability, spur job creation and maintain the historic character of downtown districts.

"Our downtown districts are vital to a community's economy," said Deputy Gov. McWhorter. "Since taking office, Gov. Bill Lee has remained committed to expanding opportunity across rural Tennessee because what happens in rural communities matters to all Tennesseans. I applaud the local leaders in these seven communities for taking the next step in applying for this program, which will in turn attract new investment and tourism in their downtowns."

The two-year program coaches selected communities and their steering committees through the steps of launching effective renewal efforts.

Tennessee Downtowns includes community training through the National Main Street Center's Four-Point Approach® and a \$20,000 innovation grant for a downtown improvement project.

"Congratulations to the com-



Harriman is one of the newest Tennessee Downtowns program members, joining Dyer, Henning, Medina, Moscow, Red Bank, and Rutledge. (Photo by TNECD)

munities we're proud to welcome into the Tennessee Downtowns program," said Tennessee Main Street Director Kim Parks. "We look forward to continuing to partner with these communities to make all of Tennessee a better place to live, work, and raise a family."

The newly selected communities all have downtown commercial districts established at least 50 years ago and demonstrated their readiness to organize efforts for downtown revitalization according to Main Street America principles.

The highly competitive selection process was based on historic commercial resources, economic and physical need, demonstrated local effort, overall

presentation, and probability of success.

Tennessee Downtowns communities that complete the program are eligible for additional downtown improvement grants, as well as Main Street designation.

There are currently 49 nationally accredited Main Street communities in Tennessee, 14 of which successfully completed the Tennessee Downtowns program prior to their national accreditation.

Each application was supported by the community's senator and representatives in the Tennessee General Assembly.

## Comptroller's office unveils municipal fiscal metrics

The Tennessee Comptroller's Office has expanded its online fiscal health metrics to now include financial metrics for Tennessee's cities, providing a more complete picture of local government finances across the state.

The dashboard, available at [tncot.cc/fiscalmetrics](http://tncot.cc/fiscalmetrics), has historically provided fiscal health infographics for Tennessee counties.

"This addition allows us to better evaluate and monitor the financial condition of local govern-

ments statewide," Comptroller Jason Mumpower said. "Strong local governments are essential to the overall financial well-being of Tennessee."

With this latest update, the Comptroller's Office has added financial metric infographics for municipalities that submitted their fiscal year 2025 audit reports by March 31, 2026.

The fiscal health metrics use audited financial data, approved budgets, and property assessment

information to evaluate performance based on key indicators, including cash on hand compared to annual expenditures and debt levels relative to property values or income levels.

The inclusion of city-level data builds on several years of county reporting and offers a more comprehensive statewide view of local government fiscal health.

## Tennessee March 2026 revenues \$69.2M above estimates

Tennessee revenues exceeded budgeted estimates for the month of March.

The Department of Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson reported that total March tax revenues were \$1.7 billion, \$69.2 million more than the budgeted estimate and \$119.2 million more than March 2025. The total tax growth rate for the month was 7.46%.

General fund revenues were \$60.1 million more than the March estimate, while the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$9.1 million more than the estimates.

"March tax revenues grew at a steady pace, indicating resilient economic activity," Bryson said. "Growth in sales tax receipts, reflecting consumer activity from February, showed a strong

rebound following slower growth due to weather events earlier this year. Corporate tax revenues, or franchise and excise taxes, also rose significantly, while all other tax categories combined were higher than budgeted estimates. While we are pleased with overall tax growth this fiscal year, we will continue to monitor economic activity and revenue trends to maintain fiscal stability."

On a year-to-date basis, August through March, total tax revenues are 1.35% greater than the budget estimate, or \$187.8 million above expectations. When compared to this same period last year, total tax revenues have grown 4.95% or \$665.8 million.

General fund revenues are 1.37% greater than the year-to-date budgeted estimate, or \$158.9 million higher. Likewise, general

fund collections compared to this same period last year have increased 4.54% or \$510.2 million

### Individual tax performance compared to March 2026 Budgeted Estimates:

- Sales Taxes: Above estimate by 2.39% or \$26.3 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Above estimate by 11.87% or \$32.8 million
- Fuel Taxes: Above estimate by 4.11% or \$3.7 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 3.57% or \$6.4 million

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

- Sales Taxes: Above estimate by 1.39% or \$137.2 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Below estimate by

- 1.21% or \$23.2 million
- Fuel Taxes: Above estimate by 0.37% or \$3.1 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 5.34% or \$70.7 million

### Individual tax performance compared to March 2025:

- Sales Taxes: Up 5.92% or \$63.2 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Up 13.56% or \$37.0 million
- Fuel Taxes: Down 3.09% or \$3.0 million
- All other taxes: Up 13.61% or \$22.1 million

### Individual tax performance compared to August 2024 through March 2025:

- Sales Taxes: Up 4.02% or \$385.8 million

- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Up 10.96% or \$186.8 million
- Fuel Taxes: Down 0.47% or \$4.0 million
- All other taxes: Up 7.49% or \$97.2 million

The budgeted revenue estimates for 2025-2026 are based on the State Funding Board's consensus recommendation from November 25, 2024, which was adopted by the first session of the 114th General Assembly in April 2025.

These estimates also incorporate any revenue changes enacted during the 2025 General Assembly session. Monthly estimates for fiscal year 2025-2026 are available on the [state's website](http://state's website).

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## The DOJ Extended the Accessibility Deadline: What That Means and What Hasn't Changed

*Civic Plus*

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) issued an [Interim Final Rule \(IFR\)](#) under [Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), extending the DOJ deadline for web content and mobile application accessibility requirements by one year and giving local governments additional time to meet the requirements established under the 2024 rule.

### What the Extension Changes

The IFR does one thing: It delays the date when the specific [WCAG 2.1 Level AA](#) technical standard becomes mandatory as the technical standard for accessibility across websites and mobile applications that provide access to government services, programs, and activities.

The compliance date for public entities serving populations of 50,000 or more has been extended from April 24, 2026, to April 26, 2027.

The compliance date for public entities serving populations of fewer than 50,000, as well as special district governments, has been extended from April 26, 2027, to April 26, 2028.

### What the Extension Does Not Change

The IFR shifts the timeline for WCAG 2.1 Level AA to become the formal technical benchmark, but it does not change the expectation that digital services be accessible. It does not suspend or eliminate any existing ADA liability.

[According to the IFR](#), public entities have an ongoing responsibility to ensure their services, programs, and activities are accessible to individuals with disabilities, regardless of the WCAG 2.1 AA compliance dates.

Title II obligations remain in effect and are being enforced today. Accessibility starts now. It's part of how services are delivered every day and is not something to put off until a deadline.

### Accessibility Is Fundamental to Service Delivery

Local government websites are no longer static information hubs. Websites are essential service platforms. CivicPlus® completed a [National Web Accessibility Report](#) and found that 98% of local government leaders reported having either a department website or governmentwide website. Many offer digital services through their websites, including agendas, permits, public records, and emergency information.

Accessibility helps ensure every resident can access the information, services, and resources their government provides.

When these services are not accessible, residents encounter barriers to participation.

That is why accessibility is widely recognized as a core responsibility. The same research found that 84% of local officials say accessible websites foster public trust, and 83% believe ensuring accessibility is the government's responsibility.

### Resident Expectations Remain the Same

While the timeline has shifted, resident expectations have not. [According to CivicPlus resident research](#), 72% of residents use digital tools to engage with their local government, and 82% prefer online communication when accessing public information. Residents expect to find services, complete tasks, and access information online. There is also an expectation that those experiences are accessible to the entire community.

Accessibility is a core part of that expectation. Sixty-three percent of residents say accessibility features are highly important, and 59% believe making government websites accessible should be a priority.

At the same time, there is a clear gap between expectations and current experiences. Only 41% of residents describe their local government website as easy to navigate.

Importantly, 54% say a website reflects the quality of local leadership.

Accessibility is not just a technical requirement. It directly

shapes how residents perceive transparency, responsiveness, and trust.

### Accessibility Is an Ongoing Journey

Many local governments have already begun addressing accessibility, though they're at different stages.

Research from the CivicPlus [National Web Accessibility Report](#) found that fewer than 30% of local governments have implemented key accessibility actions, such as policies, training, or compliance assessments. Common barriers identified in the report include limited staff capacity, budget constraints, and lack of training and awareness.

CivicPlus research shows that 28% of local leaders have already established processes for residents to make accessibility requests and report issues, with another 39% either in the process of doing so or planning to by 2026.

As residents increasingly expect digital interactions with their government to be inclusive, accessible, and easy, meeting those expectations requires sustained effort. That includes addressing legacy content, strengthening governance practices, and embedding accessibility into day-to-day operations.

The extension reinforces an important principle: Accessibility is not a one-time fix. Accessibility is an ongoing journey. Websites evolve, new content is published, and services expand. Without consistent processes, accessibility gaps can reappear. With the right foundation in place, accessibility gets easier to sustain and build into your everyday work.

### How to Approach the Extension

The DOJ's extension creates space to approach WCAG 2.1 alignment more strategically and sustainably. The most effective response is not to pause accessibility efforts, but to keep going.

Organizations that continue moving forward now will be better positioned to meet community expectations and align with Title II accessibility requirements in a meaningful and timely way.



### May 22-24: Brownsville

[Exit 56 Blues Festival](#)

This free festival celebrates the rich blues music heritage of West Tennessee with live performances, and local culture.

### June 2-6: Ashland City

[Ashland City Summerfest](#)

Join us for a week of fun with a carnival, live music, food trucks, community vendors and more.

### June 4-6: Paris

[Tennessee River Jam](#)

River Jammers can expect a lively, welcoming atmosphere as downtown Paris comes alive with great food, music, and company.

### June 5-6: Oak Ridge

[Flatwater Tales Storytelling Festival](#)

Experience the magic of music and live storytelling with incredible voices.

### June 6: Athens

[National MooFest](#)

Stroll through downtown Athens for East Tennessee's favorite agriculture festival.

### June 6: Red Boiling Springs

[Folk Medicine Festival](#)

The Folk Medicine Festival is a celebration of folk life and medicine.

### June 6-7: Lenoir City

[Lenoir City Arts & Crafts Festival](#)

Celebrating 63 years, the festival includes a diverse array of items, from ceramics and glassware to metalwork, jewelry, baskets, and more.

### June 6-7: Sevierville

[Smallmouth King Bass Tournament](#)

Come join the fun and test your fishing skills in one of the South's premier smallmouth bass tournaments.

### June 12-13: Tellico Plains

[Tellico Trout Festival](#)

Gathering fishermen, river sports enthusiasts, and families to Tellico Plains for fun, education, and food.

### June 13: Cleveland

[Honeybee Festival](#)

A nonprofit community event supporting beekeeping and pollinator education.

### June 13: Pulaski

[SunDrop Festival](#)

Showcasing local and regional talent in music and arts while also incorporating elements that highlight the history, culture, and nature of Pulaski.

### June 13: Smyrna

[Simply Smyrna](#)

Smyrna's biggest street party with music, dance, food, and fun.

### June 20: Bell Buckle

[RC Cola & MoonPie Festival](#)

This wacky, fun for the whole family event celebrates the South's original fast food – an ice cold RC Cola and a fresh MoonPie.

### June 20: Monterey

[Watermelon Crawl](#)

Enjoy delicious watermelon slices, tasty food, vintage finds, and one-of-a-kind treasures spread across three streets.

## NATIONAL BRIEFS



Employers reported adding **115,000 new jobs nationwide in April, above the 65,000 jobs predicted by economists.** However, the unemployment rate remained at 4.3% and the April job gains were a decline from March's 185,000 jobs, according to the U.S. Labor Department. The disruption of global oil supplies from the war in Iran has not done much damage to the job market yet, and employers were bracing for a bigger impact from import taxes – also known as tariffs. The healthcare industry re-

ported the biggest job gains with 37,000, followed by warehousing at 30,000. However, manufacturers shed 2,000 jobs in April and 66,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost over the past year. Average hourly wages rose 0.2% from March and 3.6% from April though the number of people in the labor force dropped to 61.8%, the lowest since October 2021.

**Young Americans are pessimistic about local job conditions – even among their international peers.** A Gallup poll found only 43% of Americans aged 15-

34 feel it is a good time to find a job. Among Americans aged 55 and older, 64% believed it is a good time to find a job – a full 21% higher than young Americans. Globally, 48% of people 15-34 feel optimistic about their local job market. While there is generally a 10% difference in the positivity of job markets between the two age groups, America's gap between those exiting the workforce and those entering it or in the middle of their careers is particularly large.

For more than 30 years, Voya in partnership with the Tennessee Municipal League has provided retirement plan services to municipal employees all across the great state of Tennessee.

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