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# **Advocacy in Every Season**

is blessed with stunning natural beauty.

No matter which town or city you call home, this is the time of year when Tennessee is vibrant with changing leaves and crisp with a chill in the air.

It's a great reminder that we all share responsibility to take care of what we have been given for the short time we have on this earth.

We, as trusted leaders of municipalities, are called to be stewards of wonderful communities from East, to Middle, to West Tennessee.

An important part of that stewardship is advocacy.

Our neighborhoods flourish only when we insist that state and

Fall is the proof that our state federal officials do right by the citizens we serve.

> We owe this to our future generations.

> Now is the time to engage your officials, especially those who want to be our next Governor, on the best policies to strengthen our commu-

> Our next legislative session is less than two months away and we must advocate now.

> It's our responsibility this season, and every season yet to come.



Anthony Haynes TML Executive Director

# NLC report highlights municipal infrastructure priorities, tight budgets



Employees with Germantown replace water meters with more efficient varieties. Water and wastewater upgrades have been the top priorities for municipalities to fund as budgets tighten.

## By KATE COIL

With tightening local budgets and less state and federal grant money expected, municipalities across the country are changing how they prioritize and fund essential infrastructure projects.

The National League of Cities (NLC) has released their 2025 Municipal Infrastructure Conditions report, emphasizing the infrastructure barriers cities are facing and their strategies to overcome them.

NLC CEO and Executive Director Clarence Anthony said the report highlights how municipalities have adapted and been resourceful to address a changing landscape of infrastructure needs, often having to modernize infrastructure while tackling complex socioeconomic and environmental issues and regulations.

"The data reveals a dynamic interplay between the financial and procedural hurdles faced by municipalities and the innovative approaches employed to overcome them," Anthony said. "Rising costs, regulatory complexities and workforce shortages stand among the chief obstacles, but cities are meeting these matters headon with various funding solutions, such as borrowing from the market and tapping into local budgets and strategic planning."

Anthony noted the economic and policy landscapes had already begun to shift as data was collected in the early part of 2025.

'Given federal developments and evolving fiscal conditions, cities remain focused on their core infrastructure priorities, demonstrating remarkable resilience in the face of uncertainty," he said. "Their ongoing commitment to forward-thinking strategies shows their ability to navigate challenges while delivering essential services to communities."

## **SETTING PRIORITIES**

The NLC survey found that water, wastewater, and stormwater systems are the top priorities for municipalities (71%); followed by road and bridge repairs (63%); and sidewalk, trails, and bike infrastructure coming in third (46%). Other categories of priority included energy projects (28%), internet and broadband digital infrastructure

(23%), and public transit (15%).

"Notably, water systems and transportation emerged as major concerns when municipalities evaluated the infrastructure required to support housing production," the study indicated. "This underscores the interconnected nature of infrastructure planning, where essential services such as water access and mobility play a critical role in housing development and community sustainability."

Researchers said that transit was also seen as a higher priority when categorized alongside projects like roads, bridges, sidewalks, trails, and bike infrastructure but that many cities did not prioritize these projects because those transportation assets are often owned and managed by other levels of government.

Wade Morrell, CEO and executive director of the Tennessee Municipal Bond Fund (TMBF) said he often sees similar priorities in the projects local governments are seeking to finance through TMBF.

"This is mostly true for municipalities if we assume that the sidewalk/trail/bike infrastructure includes parks," Morrell said. "If those types of projects are exclusively multi-modal transportation infrastructure, then Tennessee will have fewer of those types. TMBF finances several public safety projects annually, such as police and fire stations and their vehicles. Tennessee counties almost exclusively borrow money for schools, jails, road and bridge improvements, and equipment for those types of projects."

In the past decade, Morrell said TMBF has closed approximately 450 loans valued at more than \$1.1 billion.

"Nearly 20% of TMBF's loans have been for public safety projects," he said. "Water and wastewater projects were a close second. Road improvements accounted for approximately 10%. The recent infrastructure report from the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) identified more than \$77 billion in needed projects over a 5-year period beginning July 2023. Transportation; utilities; education; and health, safety, and welfare projects comprise the largest cost."

Many officials cited in the NLC See NLC on Page 5

TABC outlines hemp law changes for city leaders

By KATE COIL

Following the Tennessee General Assembly's overhaul of the state's hemp regulations, officials are working to familiarize local leaders and law enforcement agencies in advance of the new law taking effect.

Russell F. Thomas, executive director of the Tennessee Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC), explained how the new law, Public Chapter 526, will impact the sale and distribution of hemp-derived cannabinoid (HDC) products, as well as well as new rules for licensing, regulation, and enforcement at TML's 85th Annual Conference in Chattanooga.

"If your city has questions or headaches about these products showing up in your local stores, you are not alone," Thomas said. "We in Tennessee over the past few years have been through a patchwork of laws, definitions, new products coming up every day, and enforcement gaps. I am here to tell you today that the landscape is changing in Tennes-



Hemp and marijuana both come from the cannabis plant. Thomas said tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) content determines whether something is classified as hemp or marijuana. The federal government has ruled that products with 0.3% or less THC are classified as hemp while anything above is marijuana.

"The big picture is that hemp is



Changes to Tennessee's hemp law have altered what hemp-based products can be sold, who can sell them, and switched licensing to control of the Tennessee Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC).



Russell F. Thomas TABC Executive Director

said to have less intoxicating effects than marijuana," Thomas said. "Once hemp became legal, chemists and manufacturers realized they could extract or make a wide range of compounds from that plant. All those

things made from that hemp plant are in that category of hemp-derived cannabinoids. That broad category includes things like Delta-8, Delta-10, THCa, and THCp. Cannabidiol (CBD) is a non-intoxicating substance you will find in a lot of wellness products that became popular when some of these restrictions loosened. Delta-9 THC is the primary compound in marijuana."

Thomas said changes in federal law, the evolution of the hemp industry, and scientific research led to the state revisiting its own laws surrounding hemp, particularly in the last decade. Many of these changes focused the use of hemp for industrial products, particularly with the passage of the federal 2018 Farm Bill and the resulting state legislation in 2019. See HEMP on Page 5

# Deadlines approaching for new ADA standards for municipal websites, apps, and social media

By KATE COIL

A new update to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is requiring governments and government-affiliated websites, mobile apps, and social media posts be accessible to all.

While many municipalities utilize web-based tools to provide services, programs, and activities to the public, not all of these sites have been adapted for the use of screen readers and other assistive technologies. A new update to Title II of the ADA aims to eliminate digital barriers that prevent disabled citizens from having access to information and ability to participate in civic life.

The new standards must be met by all municipal government, public school, public library, police and fire department, transit agency, parks and recreation and other government affiliated websites - even those managed through third parties. Government-affiliated mobile apps and social media platforms are also



Screen readers, like this one, are valuable tools for many people with disabilities to utilize the Internet. However, not all websites, mobile apps, or social media sites are set up in ways that facilitate assistive technology.

required to meet standards. The deadline for compliance is April 24, 2026, for all municipalities with populations of 50,000 residents or more, and April 24, 2027, for all municipalities with 49,999 or fewer residents.

Misha Dziubak, a certified

ADA coordinator who works in Knoxville's Disability Services Office and serves as a liaison with the Mayor's Council on Disability Issues (CODI), said the new web content accessibility guidelines See WEBSITES on Page 3

# Knoxville named most accessible, affordable city for disability community

By KATE COIL

As officials reflect on 35 years since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the city of Knoxville was recently named the nation's most accessible and affordable community for those with disabilities.

Knoxville earned the top spot in Trajector Medical's 2025 rankings. Trajector is a leading provider of medical evidence services for people with disabilities.

Misha Dziubak is a certified ADA coordinator, works in Knoxville's Disability Services Office, and serves as a liaison with the Mayor's Council on Disability Issues (CODI). She said officials in Knoxville are honored to have earned that distinction, but there is more work to be done.

"While we know there is always additional progress to be made, the progress we have made has already been noticed," Dziubak said. "We are of course, very proud of this, but that does not mean our work stops or slows down. Accessibility and affordability are top priorities for our Knoxville community and have been at the forefront of planning



Members of the Knoxville Mayor's Council on Disability Issues (CODI) during a day out in downtown. CODI works to ensure accessibility for all.

by city officials and the Disability Services Office for many years."

## **BUILDING ENGAGEMENT**

Connection and outreach are essential to building an accessible community.

"Community engagement is always of utmost importance," Dziubak said. "When announcing meetings, you have to give information on how to request available accommodations and specifically ask for feedback from the disability community. This will go a long way in making sure that what is most important to your community members is brought to the forefront. Generally, it is better to have a large group of people give feedback rather than a few people because they see things from different aspects and may think differently about issues or solutions than others at the table. It is especially important to involve people with disabilities in all public decision-making pro-See ADA on Page 3

# NEWS ACROSS TENNESSEE



#### **BAXTER**

Anatolia Cabinet and Millwork officials announced the company will create 56 jobs and invest \$9.6 million with its first Tennessee location in Baxter. The company's new facility will be the first and only cabinet and millwork factory statewide operating with an AI-integrated production system, marking an important milestone for advanced manufacturing in Tennessee.

#### COLUMBIA

Officials with the city of Columbia recently cut the ribbon on two new paddle craft access points along the Duck River, both located at the city's Riverwalk Park. The new access areas were funded through a \$200,000 State Tourism Enhancement grant and matching contributions from both the state and city. The access points are located near the Columbia Dam and under the Fifth Street Bridge, forming a convenient 30-minute river float trip through the city. In addition to providing family-friendly river access, officials hope this new method of connecting with the river will help visitors and residents learn the importance of preserving the Duck River's unique biodiversity.

#### **GERMANTOWN**

The city of Germantown has been awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for its annual comprehensive financial report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA). This marks the 43rd consecutive year the city has received the award, which is the highest form of recognition in governmental accounting and financial reporting. The award recognizes governments that go beyond basic reporting requirements to provide clear, detailed, and accessible financial information to the public. An impartial GFOA panel judged Germantown's report to meet the program's high standards, including a constructive "spirit of full disclosure" that helps residents better understand the city's financial story.

## JOHNSON CITY

Moody's Ratings announced Johnson City will retain a Moody's Aa2 general obligation unlimited tax (GOULT) rating. Aa2 is the third-highest longterm credit rating and is defined as being in the mid-range of the high-quality category and subject to very low credit risk. Moody's Ratings are accompanied by an outlook assignment, which was downgraded to "negative" in this assessment due to the payment of an outstanding lawsuit. Rebuilding the fund balance, increase in resident incomes, and increasing value per capita could lead to an upgraded outlook moving forward.

## KNOXVILLE

Aqua Membranes officials will expand its operations to Knoxville, the company's first location outside its headquarters in Albuquerque, N.M. Aqua Membranes will create 95 new jobs and invest \$6.6 million as the company constructs its newest facility in the Forks of the River Valley Industrial Park. Through the project, the company will significantly expand its manufacturing capacity, support large-scale customer contracts, and accelerate the adoption of its RO membrane technology across the globe. Founded in 2011, Aqua Membranes is a leader in global water treatment. The company has developed a cutting-edge solution that replaces traditional mesh feed channels in spiral wound membranes. By replacing the mesh spacer with their patented Printed Spacer Technology®, they achieve energy savings, increased flow, reduced cleaning frequency, and longer membrane life.

## KNOXVILLE

The country's largest <u>museum</u> dedicated to the women's suffrage <u>movement</u> will soon open its doors in Knoxville. The Suf-

frage Coalition is working with the team behind Pigeon Forge's Titanic Museum to create a new immersive museum experience in Knoxville featuring more than 1,000 artifacts telling the story of how women earned the right to vote. The museum will highlight the suffrage fight across America but also showcase how Tennessee and particularly East Tennessee played a major role in the passage of the 19th Amendment. The 9,000-square-foot museum on South Gay Street is expected to open in 2028. So far, the Suffrage Coalition has purchased the building for \$2 million and is working to raise an additional \$2.9 million to expand into a neighboring property, bringing the final museum footprint to approximately 25,000 square feet.

#### **MEMPHIS**

The city of Memphis has officially purchased the downtown Sheraton Hotel for \$22 million. The 600-room hotel is connected to the Renasant Convention Center by a skywalk and has been seen by many as a key to attracting more conventions to the city. However, many believe the 1978 hotel needs renovations and updates. This comes on the heels of the city purchasing and renovating the Renasant Convention Center for \$200 million in 2021. The proposed remodel of the Sheraton is expected to cost approximately \$250 million.

#### **MORRISTOWN**

Morristown has been recognized by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) to receive the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for its Fiscal Year 2026 Budget. The award represents a significant achievement by the city. It reflects the commitment of the governing body and staff to meet the highest principles of governmental budgeting. In order to receive the budget award, the city had to satisfy national guidelines for effective budget presentation. These guidelines are designed to assess how well an entity's budget serves as a policy document, a financial plan, an operations guide, and a communications device. This is the 15th consecutive time that the city of Morristown has received this award.

## ROGERSVILLE

Biederman officials announced the company is expanding its manufacturing presence by locating its first U.S. facility in Rogersville. The company will create 48 new jobs and invest \$4.4 million in the facility, which will be updated to increase capacity, expand product offerings, and enhance brand visibility while maintaining operational excellence and customer satisfaction. Founded in 1992, Biederman is a global grease cartridge manufacturer based in Ontario, Canada.

## STANTON

Officials with the town of Stanton, Haywood County, Ford, and the YCMA were on hand to break ground on a new YMCA childcare facility near Blue Oval City. Ford and the YMCA have partnered to provide more childcare options throughout West Tennessee as many of the areas around the new Blue Oval City facility in Stanton are considered childcare deserts, meaning there is a lack of access to care. The YMCA Child Development Center will be available for employees of Blue Oval City and the larger community, providing indoor and outdoor play spaces and learning environments. The 5-acre site was donated by the Wall family and is expected to open in 2026.

## Hendersonville dedicates bridge in honor of Oak Ridge Boys



State and local leaders came together in Hendersonville to dedicate a bridge in honor of longtime local residents and musicians the Oak Ridge Boys. The bridge along Highway 31 East in Hendersonville has been named after the band – comprised of members David Allen, Richard Sterban, Joe Bonsall and William Lee Golden – who also immortalized the city in song as well as proclaimed their love for it on various stages, including at the White House. The bridge is along the Johnny Cash Parkway and extends along Conway Twitty Lane, two other country music legends who called the area home.

# **Bolivar celebrates bicentennial**



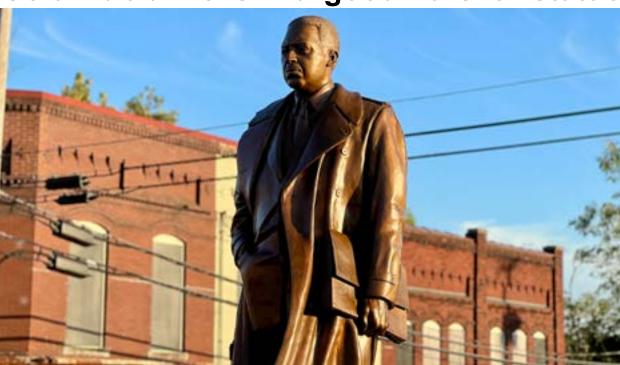
Officials with the city of Bolivar celebrated the city's bicentennial in October combined with the annual Bolivar BBQ Blowout and Music Festival. Events included a mayoral luncheon, pictured above, as well as the Miss Bolivar Bicentennial Pageant, a Memphis Barbecue Network-sanctioned contest, a blacktie gala, live music events, a community worship service, walking tour of historic homes, community birthday party, and mini "Hee Haw" performance at the downtown amphitheater.

# Mt. Juliet cuts ribbon on new police HQ



Officials with the city of Mt. Juliet have cut the ribbon on the first purpose-built headquarters building for the Mt. Juliet Police Department. The new building provides two community storm shelters, evidence processing space, K-9 kennels, and plenty of training and office space. The headquarters will also house an advanced communications center for both police and fire as well as real-time intelligence operations. Officers and staff will also have access to wellness areas, including a gym, showers, and quiet rooms.

# Columbia unveils Thurgood Marshall statue



A new statue honoring late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall's time in Columbia was unveiled downtown after more than two decades of effort. The statue completes a new roundabout project at the intersection of East 8th and South Main streets, also commemorating the 1945 Columbia Uprising. Long before his historic supreme court appointment, Marshall served the lawyer for several black men tried in Lawrenceburg and Columbia after the uprising. The statue was taken from a 1956 photograph of Marshall on the steps of the Maury County Courthouse in Columbia and completed by artist David Alan Clark. The ceremony also marked 58 years after Marshall was sworn in as the first black supreme court justice.

WAUFORD

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

# Knoxville named most accessible, affordable city for disability community

ADA, from Page 1 cesses because of this. A saying in the disability community is 'nothing about us without us,' and being able to self-represent just makes sense."

Knoxville created CODI six years before the ADA was signed in 1990 and has since utilized the advisory board to provide information and feedback on programs, events, and concerns in the disability community. This committee works closely with local organizations like the DisAbility Resource Center and AARP Age Friendly Communities Network. Both Dziubak and Knoxville ADA Coordinator Stephanie Cook also serve on the board of the Knoxville Area Employment Consortium, which helps identify resources, programming, employment training, and employment opportunities for individuals with

Knoxville's Office of Disability Services also connects with the community through events like Disability Mentoring Day each October.

"It encourages local youth with disabilities to join us at the city for a day," she said. "Each is assigned a city mentor, and they learn about the various departments and their functions within the city. We also, of course, provide accommodations for current and prospective employees when needed. Plus, we regularly host interns from other programs within the city and the FUTURES program at the University of Tennessee, and we participate in various transition fair events."

Additionally, Knoxville's Human Resources partners with organizations like the American Job Center, Vocational Rehabilitation, McNabb Center teams, Community Action Committee Knox Pride, Centro Hispano, Emerald Youth, Knoxville Leadership Foundation, and others to host and promote local job fairs. Dziubak said some of these events are specifically designed for certain communities, such as seniors or disabled veterans.

#### MEETING NEEDS

Providing infrastructure is one major role cities play in accessibility.

"Pedestrian travel paths in good repair help people access public transportation or use the sidewalk to go down the street to get food or medicine," she said. "Making sure to have curb cuts, connectivity, audible signals – these are all important for safety and easier travel."

To achieve this, Dziubak said city departments must work together. Recently, Knoxville's Engineering Department partnered with the Disability Office to replace 19,511 linear feet of sidewalk and 484 curb ramps or cuts around the city, focusing on



Representatives Knox County and Knoxville government, fire departments, and the disability community cut the ribbon on the new SAFE trailer, which equips first responders with mobility equipment to increase accessibility in emergency response and rescue.

areas near community centers and along primary transit routes.

Some of the infrastructure improvements the city makes are not always obvious to able-bodied citizens but are absolutely vital for other members of the community.

"Tactile wayfinding often goes unnoticed by those who don't need to use it but is integral to a pedestrian who is blind to navigate without needing to rely on the vision of someone else," Dziubak said. "Making sure there are detectable barriers when there are head-height protrusions of more than four inches not only helps those using a white cane to avoid walking into it, but it also helps to make sure others walk around the protrusion and stay safe. Door handles that can be operated with no tight grasp or twisting, secure and slip resistant front door mats, continuous handrails, tactile warnings at the tops of stairs, and easy-to-reach features such as soap and hand towels are all designed with accessibility in mind."

Exercise and recreation can improve outcomes for the disability community, but access to recreational opportunities is often limited. Additionally, the American College of Sports Medicine found 81% of individuals with a disability did not feel welcome in the fitness space, while a University of Texas at Arlington study found only 40% of disabled individuals reported having access to ways to be active. Dziubak said parks and recreation departments can help fill these gaps.

"Creating accessible play spaces for children with disabilities and outdoor areas for adults increases our community's physical health and provides an opportunity for increased social engagement," she said. "Our Parks Department now

offers adaptive sports, and they have acquired accessible hand bikes for use by those who may not be able to use a traditional pedal bicycle."

The city also works to ensure accessible and affordable housing is available. Dziubak said the Housing and Neighborhood Development Department has worked on strategies to build and encourage private-sector builders to consider projects aimed at seniors and the disability community.

#### **EMERGENCY SERVICES**

In recent years, more attention has been paid to how emergency services interact with the disability community – from residents who are nonverbal to those who may have special needs or considerations during emergencies.

Dziubak said both the city and Knox County ADA offices collaborate with the Knox County Health Department, American Red Cross, and other organizations to draft and implement a Securing Accessibility for Emergencies (SAFE) team emergency response plan addressing evacuation issues.

The ADA office also works with the Knoxville Police Department to train new recruits and answer questions. Additionally, the office provides each officer with a laminated communication card to help with those who are hard of hearing.

"We provide training to all of our police recruits on both the requirements of the ADA along with proper etiquette when interacting with people with disabilities," Dziubak said. "Each recruit class has at least four hours of interactive training on the ADA and engaging with people with disabilities. During the etiquette training portion, trainers provide an in-person opportunity

for recruits to engage with and ask questions specific to a person's disability, typically a visual, hearing, or mobility disability."

#### AGING RESIDENTS

Nearly one in seven Americans live with some type of disability with that number expected to grow as the population ages. Accessibility and affordability can provide the biggest challenges to these Americans, including high housing costs amid low wages, federal regulations limiting income for those on Social Security, and difficulty accessing needs like wheelchair-friendly rentals, accessible buildings, special education teachers, job opportunities, and Medicare services.

To meet growing accessibility needs as citizens age, CODI's partnership with AARP's Age-Friendly Communities Network led to the creation of an advisory board to design an action plan for accessibility and aging. Most people cite the ability to "age in place" as a significant concern.

"We tend to gain various disabilities as we age," Dziubak said. "Because so many develop disabilities later in life, and most people want to stay in their homes as they age, they tend to look for places with affordable housing, a good standard of living, opportunities where social and civic engagement are available, and where buildings, pedestrian paths, and parks also have a high level of accessibility. With Knoxville having so much to offer in regard to these domains, while having entertainment and dining options, beautiful views of mountains and rivers, a rich history, art museums, and a vibrant downtown area, it really does seem like an ideal place to retire."

BENEFITS FOR ALL

In the 35 years since the passage of the ADA, many of the improvements and changes made in the wake of the act have benefited the wider community.

"Improvements in accessibility often become mainstream," Dziubak said. "Some examples of this are audio books, text messages, and closed captioning or subtitles. Progress in technology seems to be driven by a perceived need; in these cases, it was better accessibility for people with disabilities. However, once technology is created to fill the specific need, it can take on a life of its own, and as it becomes incorporated into daily life, it is applied to other technology or built upon and expanded into new technology."

Designing with the ADA in mind provides greater access for everyone.

"Automatic doors benefit those without disabilities who may have their hands full with items, as they can open the door by pressing the button with an elbow," she said. "Being able to change font size on websites or simply providing a larger font on publications eases eye strain and makes materials easier to read. Detectable warnings at crosswalks can not only alert someone with a visual disability, but also someone who may be bending down to tie their child's shoe."

Dziubak said it is also important to remember how ability may change over an individual's lifetime.

"Becoming a person with a disability is the only minority group a person can join at any time throughout their life, and as we age, we tend to gain limitations in vision, hearing, and mobility," she said. "When we incorporate increased accessibility into our plans, we help support the needs of all residents, especially as they age."

Reflecting on the past 35 years, Dziubak said how we view disability access and accommodation changed, along with how everyone engages in the world around them.

"As cities have worked to bring our communities into compliance with the ADA and provide increased access for people with disabilities, we have learned how to do it better, more effectively and efficiently, while adjusting to new technology and requirements," she said. "Instead of retrofitting accessible options, like everyone needed to do when the ADA was new, we're able to build in accessibility from the start. Instead of simply coming into compliance with the bare minimum ADA accessibility requirements more people are taking the spirit of the ADA into account to ensure everyone is accommodated."

## Deadlines approaching for new ADA standards for municipal websites, apps, and social media

WEBSITES, from Page 1 are aimed at improving access for those with hearing, visual, motor, or cognitive disabilities.

"Any website can be difficult to navigate if the information is not perceivable, operable, understandable, or robust," Dziubak said. "Civic participation from community members is always of utmost importance. It is imperative that every member of the community who wishes to do so can access public notices and other pertinent information, read minutes from public meetings, connect with all of our departments, and access forms."

Dziubak said more citizens than ever are relying on government websites, mobile apps, and social media channels.

"The importance of access to online information and materials was highlighted during the pandemic when more people chose to interact this way than ever before," she said. "Many community members still prefer to interact with the city online, and we have continued to provide the access needed for people to engage with us online or in person."

## COMMON ISSUES

Websites can inadvertently limit access, depending on the needs of the individual or what assistive technology they are using. Screen readers are one of the most common tools in use.

"All information presented on websites should be created with a focus on being utilized by assistive technology such as screen readers," Dziubak said. "Text to audio seems to be one of the most widely used assistive technologies for accessing written information for a wide variety of people with disabilities. However, screen readers can get 'stuck' when accessing information if there are pop-ups, or forms are cre-

Alternative Text for Images & Non-Text Content

Captions and Transcripts

Captions and Audio Accessibility

Video and Audio Accessibility

Readable Text

Color Contrast

Alternative Navigation

Regular Updates

Alternative Navigation

Regular Updates

Key items to keep in mind when checking a municipal website, mobile app, or social media post for ADA compliance.

ated improperly, or due to improper HTML structure."

Sounds and visuals, like video content, can create obstacles.

"Common website barriers for those with hearing disabilities include audio only alerts that do not include a visually comparable alert, background audio that cannot be turned off or down, and video or audio without captioning," Dziubak said. "For those with visual disabilities, barriers can include missing alt text on photographs or graphics, low color contrast, fixed font sizes that cannot be enlarged and non-descriptive 'click here' links."

Menus, clickable buttons, and other design issues can also pose problems.

"For those with motor-based disabilities, anything that requires precise mouse usage can make giving or accessing information difficult," Dziubak said. "Small clickable areas, drag and drop, inconsistent keyboard navigation can all impede easy access. Long and complex information, pages with no clear focus or headings, and flashing or moving elements can make navi-

gation hard for those with cognitive disabilities."

Kevin Benson, senior business development executive of VC3, said there are also special considerations for any forms that are accessed online

"For forms, the system should identify errors clearly and offer suggestions for correction," he said. "Many government websites have downloadable PDFs, forms, and documents. These should also meet ADA standards. PDFs should be properly tagged with headings, tables, and alt text for images so that they can be read by screen readers. Forms should be navigable with a keyboard and provide clear instructions and error messages when necessary."

Social media posts are another area where municipalities must be mindful.

"Social media platforms have their own accessibility features, but government agencies and organizations are still responsible for making their content accessible," Benson said. "This includes adding alt text to images or using automatic image and background colors to make
posts legible
for people
with visual
impairments,
using easyto-read fonts,
and ensuring links are
clearly labeled."

descriptions

(where possi-

ble) for users

who rely on

screen read-

ers, ensuring

high contrast

between text

aren't legally required to comply with the update:

- Archived web content (if unchanged and for reference only)
- Preexisting electronic documents (e.g., old PDFs)
- Third-party posts not under government control
- Password-protected individualized documents
- Social media posts made before the compliance date

Benson recommends reviewing the <u>ADA Fact Sheet</u> on digital content and using tools to help determine accessibility and areas for improvement, including the <u>WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool</u> and <u>WebAIM Contrast Checker</u> to ensure your site's meets accessibil-

## BRINGING IN STAKEHOLDERS

ity standards.

To ensure their own compliance, Dziubak said the city of Knox-ville is bringing together staff with experts in the field.

"Being able to access government websites is crucial, as is making sure we are fully in compliance. That's why our city communication and law departments have been collaborating to ensure understanding of and compliance with the new guidelines that will go into effect," she said. "They have been meeting with vendors to view demonstrations on how ADA accessibility would be improved for the city, how they would ensure all current materials meet standards, and creation of a new website focused on increased accessibility for the city."

Benson said anyone who posts content also needs to be trained on the new guidelines.

"Content creators — whether they are uploading documents, posting news updates, publishing images, or managing social media — play a key role in maintaining ADA compliance," he said. "Because of this, it's essential to provide ongoing training and build awareness of best practices."

Dziubak also suggests soliciting feedback from the community, both as a way to ensure municipal websites and apps can be used by all and to start other conversations about community accessibility needs.

"Actively ask for feedback from community members of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds on those online resources," she said. "This can be done many ways, such as having a voluntary disability advisory council available to engage with local disability agencies to find volunteers from the community, and of course, welcoming feedback through phone calls, emails, and public meetings. When the local disability community is involved and many different types of disabilities are represented, accessibility issues can be addressed at the start."



# PEOPLE

Mike Adams has been selected as the new deputy chief of police for the Johnson City Police Department (JCPD) following the



Mike Adams

retirement of Deputy Chief Scott Jenkins. Adams has spent 24 years with JCPD, most recently serving as captain of the Criminal Investigations Division. He has held numerous roles during his career including field training officer, director of the 1st Judicial District Drug Task Force, patrol sergeant, criminal investigations sergeant, special investigation squad sergeant, patrol lieutenant, patrol captain, and special operations commander. A Marine Corps veteran, he is also a graduate of the Southeastern Leadership Academy.

Steve Alexander has been appointed the new fire marshal of the Johnson City Fire Department (JCFD). Alexander

has spent 22



Steve Alexander

years with JCPD, beginning as a firefighter as well as serving as a driver/engineer, lieutenant, district chief, and most recently as interim fire marshal since September. Prior to joining the department, he served as an avionics technician in the U.S. Navy. As fire marshal, Alexander will oversee the JCFD's Fire Prevention Division and its four fire prevention officers. The Division's tasks include fire codes enforcement, building inspections, fire investigations, and managing community risk reduction programs. He is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in public administration at Liberty University.

Russell Brackins, former mayor of Erwin, died Oct. 15, 2025, at the age of 96. A lifelong resident of Erwin and a graduate of Unicoi Coun-



Russell **Brackins** 

ty High School and East Tennessee State University, Brackins' career in government began with the Internal Revenue Service. He retired as a senior revenue officer and instructor after a 30-year career. He also maintained a military career during the same period, retiring as a lieutenant colonel after 30 years. Brackins also served 14 years as mayor of Erwin in addition to other elected offices, including county commissioner and school board chairman.

Josh Carr has been appointed chief of the Pigeon Forge Fire Department. Carr has 22 years of service in the department and



Josh Carr

has served as interim fire chief since July following the retirement of Chief Tony Watson. Carr began his career with the Pigeon Forge Fire Department as a volunteer then climbed the ranks to eventually become a battalion chief.

Tyler Chandler has been promoted to police chief of the Mt. Juliet Police Department (MJPD) following the ap-



Tyler Chandler

pointment of previous Chief Michael Mullins to the deputy city manager position. Chandler has most recently served as MJPD's deputy chief. Chandler participated in MJPD's cadet program at the age of 14. He then became a dispatcher and then police officer before rising through the ranks to deputy chief.

Greg Cox has been appointed mayor of Johnson City following the departure of Mayor John Hunter. Cox has been serving as the city's vice mayor. He will hold the mayoral seat until the next



**Greg Cox** 

election in December 2026. Cox is a real estate agent and owns two small businesses in Johnson City. He has also served on a variety of city boards. He holds a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering from the University of Tennessee Knoxville.

Brandon Gentry has been named the assistant fire chief for the Fayetteville Fire Department. Gentry most



**Brandon Gentry** 

recently served as a captain with the department. He moved up through the ranks as a volunteer firefighter, a full-time firefighter, engineer, and lieutenant. Gentry's career in firefighting began with the Lincoln County Volunteer Fire Department in 2005 before joining the Fayetteville Fire Department in 2008.

Mark Lindsey, an officer with the Mount Carmel Police Department, died Oct. 11, 2025, at the age of 51 following an un-



Mark Lindsey

expected medical emergency. Lindsay served for several years with the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office before joining the Mount Carmel Police Department as a patrol and field training officer. Lindsey is remembered for serving with honor, integrity, and unwavering commitment throughout his career.

Myron Lowery, former member and chairman of the Memphis City Council, died Sept. 28, 2025, at the age of 78. Lowery



Myron Lowery

served on the Memphis City Council from 1991 until 2009 and then as Memphis mayor pro tem in 2009. He most recently served as Memphis city court clerk from 2020 to 2024, making him the only elected official to serve in all three branches of the city's government. He is also the longest serving African-American member of the Memphis City Council. A graduate of LeMoyne-Owen College with a bachelor's degree in sociology, Lowery earned a master's degree in education from New York University and a master's in urban education from the University of Tennessee. Lowery was one of the first African-American journalists hired by Memphis' Channel 5, where he worked for 12 years. He also served as a board member of both the Tennessee Municipal League and National League of Cities.

K-9 Kilo has joined the Mount Carmel Police Department as their first K-9 unit on active duty. A specially trained police



K9 Kilo

dog, Kilo will assist in a wide range of law enforcement duties including narcotics detection, suspect tracking, and search-andrescue operations. His arrival marks a significant enhancement to the department's capabilities and reflects its ongoing commitment to public safety and modern policing. Kilo's addition to the Mount Carmel Police Department was made possible through a grant from the Jireh K-9 Training Academy in San Antonio, Texas.

Makenna McGowan has been selected as the new marketing coordinator for the city of Columbia's

# Fall elections held in four cities

Fall elections were held in four municipalities, including Franklin, Humboldt, Knoxville, and Selmer.

A sales tax referendum was also on the ballot in Knoxville, which was rejected by voters.

#### FRANKLIN

The city of Franklin held a municipal election on Oct. 28.

In the Ward 2 Alderman race, incumbent Matt Brown defeated challengers B.K. Muvvala and Erinn Watkins. Brown earned 1,502 votes with Watkins receiving 405, and Muvvala earned 52.

For the Ward 4 Alderman race, incumbent Patrick Baggett defeated challenger Rodney Taylor with Baggett earning 1,365 votes to Taylor's 629.

Two other incumbents ran unopposed and retained their seats. Bev Burger retained her Ward 1 seat with 293 complimentary votes while Jason Potts retained his Ward 3 seat with 500 complimentary votes.

#### HUMBOLDT

A municipal election was held in Humboldt on Nov. 5.

Newcomer Arthur Boykins defeated Alderman Shane Lynch and fellow newcomers Joshua Bivens and Yahweh Yahweh to take the mayoral seat previously held by Marvin Sikes. Boykin led the vote count with 959 followed by Lynch with 410, Bivens with 25, and Yahweh with 22.

In the Ward 1 Alderman race, incumbent Tammie L. Porter fended off challenger Ashley P. Brown with Porter earning 149 votes to Brown's 31. In the Ward 2 race, newcomer Nicolas D. Graves defeated Vice Mayor Leon McNeal to claim the seat with Graves earning 99 votes to McNeal's 85.

Newcomer Lee Cook defeated incumbent Julian Jones-Coleman



and newcomer Matt Brown to take the Ward 3 seat. Cook garnered 123 votes followed by Brown with 118 and Jones-Coleman with 74. Newcomer Julie Beck Crenshaw also defeated fellow challenger William "Bill" Roe 383 to 68 to take the Ward 4 seat previously held by Shane Lynch

Incumbent Monte Johnson defeated challenger Jonathan Powell to retain the Ward 5 alderman seat. Johnson earned 172 votes to Powell's 69.

#### KNOXVILLE

The city of Knoxville held its general election on Nov. 5. The city will have five new councilmembers due to term limits on those who currently hold those offices.

Newcomer Karyn Adams defeated fellow challenger Becky Jones with 1,993 votes to 948 to take the District 1 seat previously held by Vice Mayor Tommy Smith. In the District 2 race, Nathan Honeycutt defeated Melody Watts to take the seat formerly held by Andrew Roberto. Honeycutt earned 3,662 votes to Watts' 2,289.

For District 3, newcomer Doug Lloyd defeated challenger Frank Ramey to take the seat formerly held by Seema Singh. Lloyd earned 2,147 votes to Ramey's 1,928. In District 4, newcomer Matthew De-Bardelaben won with 3,530 votes to challenger Jeff Talman's 2,556,

taking the seat formerly held by Lauren Rider

Newcomer Denzel Grant earned 1,685 votes to defeat fellow challenger Stan Johnson, who earned 1,095. Grant will take the District 6 seat formerly held by Gwen McKenzie.

Voters also rejected a referendum to increase the sale tax from 2.25% to 2.75% with 15,284 voting against and 9,546 voting in favor of the measure.

A municipal election was held in Selmer on Nov. 5.

Newcomer John Smith defeated incumbent Sherry Inman and Alderman John Norris for the mayoral seat in Selmer. Smith earned 448 votes followed by Inman with 256, and Norris with 21.

Incumbent Johnny Roy Finlayson II and newcomer Felisha Porter ran unopposed for the two open alderman seats and were elected with 447 and 427 complimentary votes, respectively.

Newcomer Johnnie Kay Witt defeated fellow challengers Larry Tomaszewski and Elizabeth Woolbright for the two-year, unexpired alderman seat. Witt garnered 310 votes, followed by Tomaszewski with 227 votes and Woolbright with 137.

# Rhett Pratt rejoins TML legislative staff

Rhett Pratt has returned to the Tennessee Municipal League's staff as the senior director of government relations and membership engagement.

"We are thrilled to welcome Rhett back to our team," said TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes. "He knows and understands the issues that impact our cities and their leaders."

Pratt's first day was Nov. 3,

"I am ready to get to work for the Tennessee Municipal League, and I am excited about this opportunity and this organization," Pratt said. "It's an honor to serve the 345 towns and cities that make up our state, as we work together to strengthen our communities for a successful future."

Pratt previously served on the

the city's tourism brand, Visit Co-

lumbia, by building destination

awareness and inspiring travel to

Columbia. McGowan earned a

bachelor's degree and a master's

of business administration, both

from University of Tennessee

Southern, and has two years of

marketing experience, including

two years in the tourism industry.

served as East Ridge city manag-

er since January 2023, having first

returned as interim city manager

in November 2022. He previous-

ly served as city manager from

2016 until 2018. Miller's career

included city management and

government leadership positions

in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Flor-

ida, Illinois, Georgia, and Kansas.

He earned a master's of public

administration from the Universi-

ty of Pittsburgh and a bachelor's

degree from Ohio Northern Uni-

versity. Miller is a life member

of the International City/County

Makenna

McGowan

J. Scott Miller

Tourism and

Marketing

Department.

In her role,

she will assist

in developing

and imple-

menting mar-

keting strate-

gies designed

to strengthen

J. Scott Mill-

er, city man-

ager of East

Ridge, will

retire in Janu-

ary 2026 after

more than 45

years in pub-

lic service.

Miller has



Rhett Pratt

TML staff and has spent the past two years as senior legislative advisor to Senate Republican Caucus Chairman Ken Yager. He has more than a decade of experience working in and with members of the Tennessee General Assembly,

including previously serving as a legislative budget specialist in the Office of Legislative Budget Analysis.

He also worked as a committee research analyst for the Senate State and Local Government Committee under chairmen Sen. Steve Dickerson and Sen. Richard Briggs. His background includes time as a legislative assistant to Sen. Dickerson and interning in the Tennessee Secretary of State's

Pratt holds a bachelor's degree

in political science and a master's in public policy and administration, both from the University of Tennessee Knoxville. In 2022, he took part in the Council of State Governments South Staff Academy for Government Excellence.

Management Association.

ville. Pfalzer



Sean Pfalzer

has more than 15 years of experience in planning, infrastructure, management, and public service, most recently completing a municipal management fellowship through the University of Tennessee Institute of Public Service. He also worked as the Transportation Planning Manager and Capital Improvements Program Coordinator with the Greater Nashville Regional Council. He holds a bachelor's degree from Grinnell College and a master's of city planning from Boston University.





recently worked as a community disaster program specialist for the American Red Cross Heart of Tennessee chapter that covers much of Middle Tennessee. Prior to that, Powers retired as a captain and shift commander from the Madison Heights Fire Department in Michigan after a 25-year career in that department. Powers

will take over from retiring Sparta chief Kirk Young. Matt Slagle

has been selected to fill the vacant seat representing the Bristol City Council's east district following the



Matt Slagle

departure of former mayor Mark Hutton. His appointment to the city council will continue until the city's next election in November 2026. Slagle is a Bristol native who has served as a member of the Sullivan County Commission for the past three years. He has also served on the city's planning commission, beer board, and health and educational facilities board. He studied logistics and supply chain management at Tennessee Tech University and works as the president of Flextech Solutions, LLC.

**Don Stallions** has been selected as the new city manager of Townsend. Stallions previously worked as the



Don Stallions

director of general services for Blount County since 2014. Prior to that, he served as Blount County's HR director and risk manager from 2003 to 2014. He holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from East Tennessee State University.

# TABC outlines hemp law changes for city leaders

**HEMP**, from Page 1

Since then, however, a wide variety of HDC products were developed and are now on store shelves. The state created a licensing system for suppliers and retailers in 2023 that sets safety and labeling standards, under the purview of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA). There were also several lawsuits that contributed to some of the changes to the law in the most recent legislative session.

#### **NEW PROVISIONS**

One of the major changes in the law was transferring licensing, regulation, and enforcement over hemp products from TDA to TABC, effective Jan. 1, 2026.

'We are now going to have a regulatory authority that understands intoxicating products and how to keep them in check," Thomas said. "There will be fewer retailers after Jan. 1 than there are now. At present, these products are sold in a variety of convenience stores across the state. Unless they change their business model to 21 and up and get a retail license, they won't be able to sell these products. We think that will have the practical effect of cutting down on the number of places that sell these products. The more places there are to police, the harder they are to police."

The new law requires separate licensing for suppliers, wholesalers, and retailers of HDC products and prohibits the sale of products that exceed a THC concentration of 0.3% on a dry weight basis.

The new law also limits the sale of HDC products to:

- Businesses holding a TABC retail package store license and a hemp retail license;
- Businesses holding a TABC



Russell said one point of major concern addressed by the new law is hemp-based beverages. Similar to the popular cocktails-in-a-can, these products sometimes contain as much as 30 milligrams or more of THC, more than a dozen times the intoxicating content of a can of beer.

- on-premises consumption license and a hemp retail license;
- Other establishments that restrict entry to persons 21 years of age or older and hold a hemp retail license.
- Establishments that hold a valid supplier or wholesaler hemp license and obtain a retail license for the same location, provided all statutory and regulatory conditions are met.

As the new law takes effect in January, but previous licenses issued by the TDA do not expire until June 30, 2026, Thomas said there will be a transitional period for businesses that are already licensed.

To resolve debate over what products are legal in Tennessee, Thomas said the new law does specifically prohibit some products, including:

- Products containing Tetrahydrocannabinol acid (THCa) in a concentration exceeding 0.3% on a dry weight basis.
- All products containing Tetrahydrocannabiphorol (THCp) in any amount.
- Products that do not meet labeling requirements which include an ingredient list, batch number, mandatory warning statements, and a QR code linking to a valid Certificate of Analysis.

"Where it really comes into play with the THCa compound is that if you hold it in your hand or stick it in your mouth, it doesn't get you high, but with a small amount of heat it can," Thomas said. "People were buying it and rolling it into a joint, just like traditional marijuana, and when they lit it up, it was stronger than a joint you could buy on the street in the '60s and '70s.'

Thomas said that beverages are a fast-growing segment of the HDC market. However, not all hempbased beverages provide the same amount of THC.

"We know that one shot of vodka has more alcohol in it than one shot of beer because beer is lower in strength," he said. "The legislature looked at that and set some dosage limits. There are some studies that indicate only about 2.5 milligrams of THC in a drink is equivalent to the alcohol in a beer. They saw some of these drinks on the market that had 30 milligrams of THC or more."

Another concern is that many HDC products do not take effect as quickly as alcohol or other intoxi-

"There was a fear that someone would take one of these products with a super serving of THC and wouldn't feel it for a while," Thomas said. "So, they would take another one, and then another one, and then in 20 minutes they would be walking naked across the interstate."

#### WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

As many in the hemp industry are not satisfied with the new law, Thomas said he anticipates there will be litigation in the future.

"I think the legislature has gone a long way to resolve many issues via statute, but you can't stop somebody from running to the courthouse and filing a lawsuit," he said. "Don't be shocked if you see big headlines or think a court will side with them if you see someone has filed a lawsuit over this. A lot of those suits will probably be over THCa."

While it did not pass in the previous legislative session, Thomas expects the General Assembly to revive a bill that would allow local government to set certain limits on HCD product retailers. There is another piece of legislation that may be revisited that would allow municipalities to create hemp boards, similar to the beer boards that already exist.

Ultimately, Thomas is optimistic that Tennessee has a comprehensive system in place to regulate

"We have clearer rules for what products can be sold," Thomas said. "We have a consistent enforcement tool. When the system is up and running, it should mean we have fewer surprises for police and fewer lawsuits over this stuff. We are truly going to be in a much better place."

# NLC report highlights municipal infrastructure priorities, tight budgets

NLC, from Page 1 report said difficulties in securing funding and the complex nature of planning are reasons why public transit, broadband, and sidewalk or bike infrastructure projects are not higher priorities.

In contrast, the need to modernize aging systems (78%), build economic opportunities (49%), and advance long-term strategic plans (47%) were among the top reasons why municipal officials picked water and road infrastructure as more of a priority. Additionally, 41% of respondents referenced community resilience and disaster preparedness as an urgent concern.

Further breaking down economic reasons for prioritizing projects, leaders said stimulating local business growth and job creation (88%), promoting equitable economic opportunities (65%), and encouraging mixed-use development (54%) were top goals.

## **OVERCOMING CHALLENGES**

Funding was among the biggest hurdle to completing projects with municipal officials citing rising costs of project materials and labor (89%), insufficient capital budgets (84%), inadequate grant or loan availability (65%), and uncertainty in figure funding (63%) as major financial concerns. Additionally, 33.5% of respondents mentioned limits by their state on raising revenue locally as hindering their ability to finance

The most common sources of financing for infrastructure are municipal capital budgets (66%), grants (65%), and municipal bonds (47%). Grant programs like the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and Infra-

structure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA) were documented as helping municipalities complete overdue projects and modernize facilities.

"As state and federal governments reduce grant funding and even agency-supported projects, local governments are going to be asked to shoulder more of the responsibility," Morrell said. "This will require more creative partnerships and increased use of debt to fund necessary projects. JP Morgan is forecasting that local budget pressure and federal budget cuts will drive up municipal bond issuance by 10 to 15%."

The survey found there is \$4.2 trillion in outstanding municipal bonds and loans nationwide, with tax-exempt general obligation bonds being the most popular. Morrell said the state of Tennessee allows local governments to issue bonds, notes, and enter into loan agreements to finance projects.

"Within those categories, a local government can pledge its full faith and credit (general obligation), specific revenue sources, or a combination of revenue and general obligation (double barrel)," he said. "In addition, the state and federal governments offer loan programs. These options create a robust network of financing sources for Tennessee's local governments. More competition means lower cost for our cities and taxpayers. Since our creation in 1985, TMBF has closed 1,750 loans valued at more than \$5.1 billion. We have worked with 293 different cities and counties and saved taxpayers more than \$728 million in interest expense alone. We are grateful for all that our committed public officials do every day to make Tennessee a better place."



A street paving project underway in Morristown. Roads, bridges, as well as infrastructure for sidewalks, trails, and cycling lanes are among the second and third most prioritized municipal infrastructure projects nationwide.

However, if the tax-exempt status of these bonds were removed, municipalities would face significantly higher borrowing costs, potentially delaying or reducing the scope of infrastructure projects.

"If the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds is removed, then borrowing costs will be higher," Morrell said. "For example, according to Charles Schwab, the current 10-year yield on an A-rated corporate bond is 5.15% while the current 10-year yield on an A-rated tax-exempt municipal bond is 4.42%. This implies that an A-rated municipal government's new issue interest expense will increase by \$7,300 per million dollars outstanding, per year, if they are no longer tax exempt."

The loss of tax exemption could

also lead to decreased investor demand, further increasing interest rates, and limiting access to affordable financing. Ultimately, such a policy shift could strain municipal budgets, reduce public investment, and hinder long-term economic growth, or even potentially force

Morrell said some Tennessee cities are already finding other, creative ways of financing projects.

"A few Middle Tennessee communities are using forms of public-private partnerships with developers paying for certain improvements like roads, sidewalks, and water and wastewater infrastructure," he said. "In addition, cities are pursuing more grant funding and state appropriations in the face of

flat fuel tax revenues and inflation outpacing revenue growth."

Non-financial obstacles were also mentioned as top worries, including regulatory compliance and permitting issues (45%), staffing shortages and lack of skilled labor (42%), and political or bureaucratic impediments (35%).

## **MEASURING SUCCESS**

When it comes to measuring success, officials indicated achieving specific project goals or objectives (76%), improved community quality of life (73%), and public safety outcomes (67%) were their benchmarks. Only 58% said they considered completing projects on time and within budget a measurement of success.

To ensure capital investments are maintained, 87% of officials said they relied on in-house maintenance teams while 82% said they performed maintenance only if issues were reported. Regularly scheduled inspections and maintenance are undertaken by 80% of city officials, with 59% relying on geographic information systems (GIS) to track maintenance issues and 55% relying on private contractors.

"Municipal leaders see their infrastructure as a cornerstone of sustainable economic growth, with far-reaching implications for community well-being and resilience," the report stated. "Cities, towns, and villages must focus on setting clear priorities, overcoming barriers and implementing healthy management strategies to address their infrastructure needs effectively.'

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## STATE BRIEFS

The Tennessee Aquarium has celebrated the arrival of its 29 millionth guest during the museum's 33-year history. The guest in question was a member of the Lee family from Tupelo, Miss., which included mom and dad, Vince and Olivia, and sons Connor, 5, and Calvin, 3. In addition to seeing the Sand Tiger sharks and penguins, the family received a gift bundle that included free admission and a VIP pass to more than a dozen Chattanooga area attractions, gift cards to local restaurants, and Aquarium merchandise.

There are 1,256 centenarians living in Tennessee – putting approximately 1.82% of the state's population over the age of 100, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. There were only about 80,000 centenarians in the U.S. in 2020 – 0.02% of the population – but the milestone is becoming more common. Tennessee only ranks 42 out of the 50 states in terms of the number of centenarians with Hawaii taking the top spot.

Plans are underway to reintroduce the red-cockaded wood-pecker (RCW) to Tennessee. The RCW was once native to upland mature pine and oak-pine savannas in Tennessee, but disappeared from the landscape due to fire suppression, logging, and habitat fragmentation. The last known RCW in Tennessee was observed in 1994 in the Cherokee National Forest. The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency is partnering with the Tennessee Department of Environment and

Conservation and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service on the restoration project, which will begin at Savage Gulf State Park near Beersheba Springs.

Nine municipalities are among the local governments sharing nearly \$968,000 in Local Parks and Recreation Fund (LPRF) grants recently announced by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. The program awards state funding to match local government investments to create or update a Parks and Recreation Systemwide Plan. Grants of \$48,000 each were awarded to the municipalities of Bristol, Dayton, Decherd, Dresden, Etowah, Jefferson City, Milan, Morristown, and Sparta. Additionally, grants were awarded to Cannon, Crockett, Decatur, DeKalb, Dyer, Gibson, Grundy, Lauderdale, and Scott counties.

Tennessee's graduation rate for 2024-25 was 92.3%, breaking the state's previous record set in the 2023-24 school year of 92.1%. The Tennessee Department of Education said 1,892 more students graduated in the 2025 cohort compared to last year, for a total of 69,124 students graduating across the state. Additionally, 82 districts graduated 95% of their students on time while 69 districts improved their year-over-year graduation rates. For more information on graduation rates for individual districts and schools, please visit the department's Data Downloads web page.

# Three cities receive federal historic preservation grants

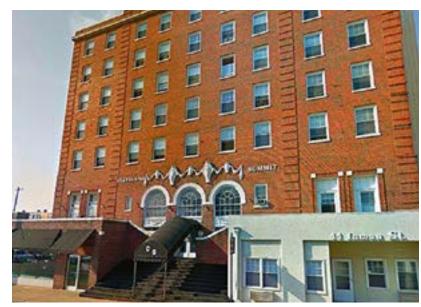
Three municipalities have received federal historic preservation grants through the Tennessee Historical Commission.

The office recently awarded 26 matching grants totaling more than \$1.1 million to non-profits, local governments, universities, and civic organizations across the state to support the preservation of historic and archaeological resources.

The city of Cleveland received \$75,000 for the restoration of the lobby of the 1927 Cherokee Hotel, a historic landmark presently being converted into municipal offices in the heart of downtown Cleveland.

The city of Elizabethton received \$60,000 for renovations to 36 windows at the Elizabethton-Carter County Public Library, which was formerly a U.S. Post office.

A \$54,000 grant was awarded to the city of Loudon to conduct a historic resource survey of the city.



The city of Cleveland will move into the seven story Cherokee Hotel building as its new municipal offices. Originally built in 1927, plans call to restore the lobby to its original 1920s appearance and return the hotel to its place as a civic center in the heart of Cleveland's historic downtown.

Additionally, grants were given to fund historic preservation specialist positions with the East Tennessee, First Tennessee, Northwest Tennessee, Southeast Tennessee, Southwest Tennessee, and Upper Cumberland Development Districts.

# Five cities to share in museum grants

Five cities will share in \$5 million in grants for capital maintenance and improvements to museums, historic sites, and preservation groups across Tennessee

The Tennessee State Museum has announced the recipients of grants from the 2025-26 Capital Maintenance and Improvements program from the state of Tennessee, as administered through the Museum.

Grants included \$70,000 for

Adams, \$24,000 for Brownsville, \$65,000 for Bulls Gap, \$22,977 for Covington, and \$99,655 for Jonesborough.

The funding comes from \$5 million the Tennessee General Assembly made available in the 2025-2026 Appropriations Act, "for the sole purpose of providing grants to museums with a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization or affiliated with a governmental entity for capital maintenance and improvements."

In the third year of the grant program, it remains a highly competitive process. In total, the Tennessee State Museum received 178 applications, totaling \$12,031,874 in requests. The Museum has made full or partial awards to 99 museums across the state, representing 45 counties. A complete list of 2025-26 grantees, counties and amounts is available at <a href="mailto:third:TNMuseum.org/">TNMuseum.org/</a>

# Tennessee September revenues \$20.6M above estimates

Tennessee revenues exceeded budgeted estimates for the month of September.

Department of Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson reported that total September tax revenues were \$2.2 billion, \$20.6 million more than the budgeted estimate and \$1.3 million more than September 2024.

The total tax growth rate for the month was 0.06%. General fund revenues were \$14.3 million more than the September estimate, while the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$6.3 million more than the estimates.

On an accrual basis, September is the second month in the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

"September's total tax collections surpassed our budgeted expectations for the month," Bryson said. "Sales tax revenues, which reflect August's taxable sales activity, were slightly above estimates and showed solid growth compared to the same period last year. However, corporate tax collections, or franchise and excise taxes, fell short of expectations. All other combined revenues exceeded estimates.

"We are encouraged that overall revenues are aligning with our projections, but we will continue to monitor collections and spending carefully to ensure the budget remains balanced."

On a year-to-date basis, August through September, total tax revenues are 0.96% greater than the budget estimate, or \$36.2 million above expectations. When compared to this same period last year, total tax revenues have grown 1.57% or \$59.0 million.

General fund revenues are

0.73% greater than the year-to-date budgeted estimate, or \$22.3 million higher. Likewise, general fund collections compared to this same period last year have increased 0.70% or \$21.4 million.

# Individual tax performance compared to September 2025 Budgeted Estimates:

- Sales Taxes: Above estimate by 1.90% or \$23.6 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Below estimate by 1.56% or \$10.3 million
- Fuel Taxes: Above estimate by 1.41% or \$1.6 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 3.38% or \$5.7 million

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

• Sales Taxes: Above estimate

- by 1.96% or \$49.1 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Below estimate by 3.78% or \$26.6 million
- Fuel Taxes: Above estimate by 2.12% or \$4.7 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 2.61% or \$8.9 million

# Individual tax performance compared to September 2024:

- Sales Taxes: Up 2.84% or \$34.9 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Down 5.83% or \$40.0 million
- Fuel Taxes: Up 2.46% or \$2.7 million
- All other taxes: Up 2.16% or \$3.7 million

Individual tax performance compared to August through September 2024:

- Sales Taxes: Up 4.01% or \$98.3 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Down 6.84% or \$49.7 million
- Fuel Taxes: Up 1.75% or \$3.9 million
- All other taxes: Up 1.87% or \$6.5 million

The budgeted revenue estimates for 2025–2026 are based on the State Funding Board's consensus recommendation from Nov. 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.

# No loan is too large or too small



The city of Dyer has used the TMBF loan programs six times since October 2018. The most recent was a \$412,408 note issued for various public works projects in October, 2025. The lender for the note was Security Bank and Trust Company, a local bank in the city. Seated: Dyer Mayor Chris Young, left and City Recorder Ashlee Starkey, right. Standing: TMBF Representative Justin Hanson.



The town of Jasper has used the TMBF loan programs eight times since December 1997. Recently, the town issued a \$163,067 water and sewer refunding bond through the fixed rate loan program with the lender being Citizens Tri-County Bank, a local bank in Jasper. Seated: Jasper Mayor Jason Turner, left, and Recorder Paula Turney, right. Standing: TMBF Representative Steve Queener.



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## What if I missed the Windows 10 end of life deadline?

If, with all the best intentions, you somehow never upgraded and replaced your Windows 10 devices by October 14, 2025, the day Microsoft ended support for Windows 10, then you might wonder what you can do now.

Hope is not lost! Here are some of the most common questions we've heard from clients and other organizations about Windows 10. With our answers, we provide you a path forward while reminding you about the risks of continuing to do nothing.

#### What does Windows 10 "end of life" really mean? I've heard that organizations can still use Windows 10 past Oct. 14, 2025.

When software or an application goes "end of life," it means the vendor will no longer provide updates, patches, and support. Updates are crucial to fix bugs and performance issues, patches take care of security vulnerabilities, and support means the vendor will help customers when unique issues arise.

After Oct. 14, 2025, Microsoft will end updates, patches, and support for Windows 10. Yes, Windows 10 will still work – but it's no longer safe to use within your organization. Think of it like deciding to start leaving doors and windows unlocked 24/7. It doesn't mean burglaries will occur immediately or nonstop – but it means the risk of a burglary is greatly increased.

What are the immediate risks of running Windows 10 past end of life?

Consumer prices rose 3%

in September – the highest

rate since January - with

consumer prices rising 0.3%

month-over-month. The rate

was slightly lower than the

3.1% initially predicted by

economists. The acceleration

of price increases in recent

months have coincided with

new tariffs. Economists said the

typical American household

had to spend \$208 more in Sep-

tember 2025 than in September

2024 to buy the same amount of

goods and services. Addition-

ally, households in September

2025 were paying \$1,043 for

the same goods and services

compared to the same time

period in 2021 when inflation

The Federal Reserve lowered

interest rates for the second

time this year in October, cut-

ting rates to a range between

3.75% and 4%, down from

the previous 4% to 4.25%.

began to rise.

NATIONAL BRIEFS



After October 14, 2025, the following risks will increase:

- Cyberattacks: Without vulnerabilities patched by Microsoft, your systems now become easy targets for hackers.
- Operational disruption: With no more bug fixes and performance enhancements from Microsoft, you're increasing the chance of frozen, crashed, and slow computers.
- Compatibility breakdowns: New applications, tools, and hardware may not work with Windows 10.

#### What are my short-term options if I missed the Oct. 14, 2025 deadline?

Even if you've missed the deadline, a few options may help you in the near term.

Upgrade any eligible devices (recommended): This is the best option, and you can do it ASAP with minimal cost and

This marks the lowest interest rates

in three years and the first time

since the 1930s that the Federal

Reserve has set monetary policy

while lacking an entire month of

government employment data due

to a government shutdown. The

central bankers admitted future rate

cuts may need to wait until there is

better clarity on employment data.

The U.S. manufacturing sector

shrank for the eighth month in

a row in October. Economists

said a lack of new orders and

increased times for suppliers to

deliver material - both fueled by

tariffs on imported goods - were

among the main causes of ongoing

contractions in the factory sector.

Some cited customers canceling

and reducing orders due to tariff

uncertainty, particularly among the

makers of chemical products. Other

groups hit particularly hard by tariff

policy include computer and elec-

tronics products, textile mills, wood

and chemical products, machinery,

electrical equipment, and applianc-

disruption. (Replacing a device is more time-consuming and costly.) If a device is eligible for an upgrade, think of the process like applying a very long Windows update. You'll need to assess your system requirements, check software and hardware compatibility, and plan your upgrade process - as it still involves some critical steps and IT coordination.

Pay for Microsoft Extended Security Updates (ESUs): Microsoft offers a paid extended support program for Windows 10 through 2028. While this might seem like a good shortcut, extended support isn't a long-term plan. You only receive the bare minimum security updates, which exposes you to operational performance issues and incompatibility with your future hardware and software investments.

#### How can I get help with Windows 10 upgrades?

If you work with an IT team or vendor, it's important to get a plan in place to reduce your risk ASAP. That plan should include:

- Assessing which devices are eligible for an upgrade versus a replacement.
- Migrating your files, applications, and settings with minimal disruption.
- Ensuring your information is kept secure during the transition.

If you don't work with an IT team or vendor, we can help. While you may have missed this deadline, we can help you create a long-term strategic plan that eliminates future scrambling when other end of life scenarios occur.

es and components manufacturers,

citing that the materials they need

are not possible to reshore at home.

Most Americans plan on staying

closer to home during this holiday

season with more planning travel

around Christmas than Thanks-

giving. The survey from travel site

Upgraded Points found 56% of

Americans plan to stay home for

the holidays this year with 34%

traveling to someone else's home

and 9% using the time for vacation.

Only about 28% of those planning

to travel for Thanksgiving plan to

go 50 miles or more away from

home while 34% of those taking

Christmas trips plan on traveling

the same distance. Roughly 1 in 10

travelers expect to travel more than

500 miles during the Christmas

season. Residents in Ohio, Con-

necticut, and Texas were the most

likely to hit the road for the holidays

while those in Nevada, Utah, and

Hawaii were the least likely. Iowa

and Washington were the top two

destinations for holiday travel.



#### Nov. 22: Clarksville

Christmas on the Cumberland Step into a winter wonderland along the scenic riverwalk, where twinkling lights, holiday cheer, and timeless traditions come to life.

## Nov. 26-30: Knoxville

Fantasy of Trees

East Tennessee Children's Hospital Fantasy of Trees is the hospital's largest fundraiser, attracting nearly 60,000 people during the week of Thanksgiving.

#### Nov. 26-30: Gatlinburg Festival of Trees

The proceeds from the 52nd Annual Gatlinburg Festival of Trees will Boys & Girls Club of the Smoky Mountains and the Gatlinburg Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

## Dec. 6: Kingsport

Christmas in the Country

Christmas in the Country at Exchange Place Living History Farm will feature fresh greenery, wreaths and roping, unique folk arts and handicrafts, and traditional holiday foods will be on sale.

#### Dec. 6: Normandy Normandy Christmas Marketplace

The annual Normandy Christmas Marketplace returns for its third year, featuring more than 50 vendors and food trucks.

#### Dec. 6, 13, & 20: Bell Buckle <u>Old Fashioned Christmas</u>

Enjoy sleigh rides with Santa,

carolers, a s'mores pit, and the look and feel of an Old Fashioned Christmas.

### Dec. 6: Goodlettsville Yulefest kicks off the holiday sea-

son with musicians, storytellers, and demonstrators in the cabins of historic Mansker's Station and in the Bowen House.

## Dec. 7: Collinwood

Christmas in the Wood The town of Collinwood invites

you to shop for gifts and enjoy great food at Christmas in the Wood, held at the Collinwood Recreation Building.

#### Dec. 13: Madisonville Christmas Festival on the Square

Join us for a true small town Christmas experience, just like in the Hallmark movies.

#### Dec. 13: Franklin 40th Annual Dickens of a Christ-

Dickens of a Christmas recreates

the time of Charles Dickens using historic downtown Franklin's charming architecture as the backdrop. A variety of musicians, dancers and Dickens characters will fill the streets.



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



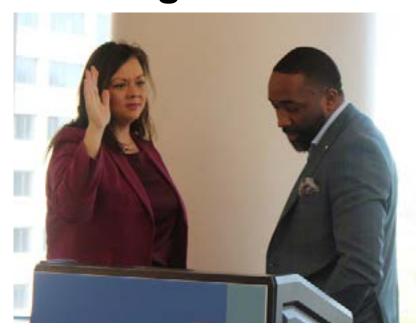
Anthony Haynes, Executive Director

Sponsorships & Conference Expo Kelly McKinley, Director of Digital Strategy Rhett Pratt, Senior Director of Government Relations and Membership Engagement

# TML Board of Directors holds fall meeting in Nashville



From left to right, TML 2nd Vice President and Lawrenceburg Mayor Blake Lay, UT Vice President of Public Service Dr. Herb Byrd III, TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes, and TML President and Bolivar Mayor Julian McTizic.



TCMA Vice President and Belle Meade City Manager Jennifer Moody, left, is sworn into the board by TML President and Bolivar Mayor Julian McTizic, right.



At-Large Director and Kingsport Mayor Paul Montgomery, left, and At-Large Director and Newport Mayor Roland "Trey" Dykes, right.



District 7 Director and Paris City Manager Kim Foster, left, and District 5 Director and Goodlettsville City Manager Tim Ellis, right.



District 2 Director and Morristown Mayor Gary Chesney, left, in discussion with District 3 Director and Red Bank Mayor Stefanie Dalton, right.



District 8 Director and Millington Alderwoman Bethany Huffman, left, and District 6 Director and Nolensville Vice Mayor Jessica Salamida, right.



Nashville Mayor Freddie O'Connell, left, and TCMA representative and Belle Meade City Manager Jennifer Moody, right.



At-Large Director and Newport Mayor Roland "Trey" Dykes, foreground, asks a question during the meeting as other board members look on.