

From the Desk
of the Executive Director



Collaboration in Action

Recently, TML wrapped up its annual District Meetings, bringing together more than 200 municipal officials in Morristown, Cleveland, Brentwood, and Jackson. Attendees received valuable updates from state officials, TML's Government Relations team, and our sponsors and partner organizations. Just as important, these meetings provided opportunities for municipal leaders to connect with one another, share ideas, and discuss the unique challenges facing communities across Tennessee.

We extend our sincere thanks to our hosts, **Walters State Community College, Lee University, the City of Brentwood, and the UT Institute of Agriculture**, for generously providing outstanding meeting facilities. We also appreciate the support of **Public Entity Partners, Servpro, Tim Leeper Roofing, and TLM Associates**, whose contributions helped make these events possible.

Attendees consistently shared how much they valued the information and insights provided by our

speakers. A special thank you goes to representatives from the **Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, the Comptroller's Office, the Tennessee State Data Center at UT, and TML's Government Relations** team for delivering informative and engaging presentations.

Held each fall, TML's District Meetings are an important way for municipal officials to stay informed on key issues, learn about emerging trends, and build relationships with peers from across the state. They also allow TML to bring relevant programming and resources directly to local leaders in their regions.

Thank you to everyone who attended and helped make this year's District Meetings such a success. We look forward to seeing you March 2 in Nashville for TML's Day on the Hill.

Anthony C. Haynes

Anthony Haynes
TML Executive Director

New wastewater plant vital to future growth for Chapel Hill

BY KATE COIL
TT&C Assistant Editor

After nearly 40 years, the town of Chapel Hill has a new wastewater treatment plant that protects the community's unique ecosystem and positions it for further growth.

Chapel Hill Utilities Director Donny Groves said the previous wastewater facility went into operation in 1988.

"It was a standard lagoon system, a biological, natural system," Groves said. "The state was offering a grant at the time for a small diameter gravity system that went into the lagoon. Over the years, the growth of the town meant the town was having to change limits and restrictions on the system."

As Chapel Hill has grown, Town Administrator Phillip Dye said the need for a new plant became more apparent. With that growth also came the introduction of more "solids" or items that shouldn't find their way into the system.

"Solid can be anything from waste to kids toys," Dye said. "You would be amazed about what gets flushed. Also, so-called flushable wipes are not flushable. They may go down the drain, but they shouldn't be flushed. [The new plant] will accept



The town of Chapel Hill was able to construct a \$16.975 million wastewater facility through the Tennessee Municipal Bond Fund's new 30-year fixed-rate loan program. The facility replaces a previous plant that began operating in 1988, offering more capacity and capabilities.

what the original plant didn't, and items that caused a lot of problems. The original plant often took gray water from septic tanks, while the new system takes it directly into the plant."

Another concern is that Chapel Hill's primary water source is the Duck River, the most biologically diverse river in North America and home to numerous endangered and rare species. It has also been frequently included on

the list of America's Most Endangered Rivers and, since 2024, the [Duck River Watershed Planning Partnership](#) has been working to balance water conservation, habitat protection, water loss management, and drought preparedness while maintaining responsible economic growth.

"Six or seven years ago – before either Phillip or I were here – the state *See CHAPEL HILL on Page 3*

Sycamore Institute invites TML Members to policy summit

The Sycamore Institute invites TML members to attend their upcoming public policy summit.

The [Sycamore Institute](#) is a nonpartisan public policy research center for Tennessee. Their mission is to provide clear, impartial insights and analysis that strengthen policy-making and civic life in Tennessee.

Sycamore's day-long policy summit will bring together policymakers, government officials, business and community leaders, and other stakeholders to examine the fiscal issues most likely to shape Tennessee over the next decade. Sessions will explore:

- National trends and looming pressures on state budgets
- Tennessee's economic outlook

ABOUT THE SUMMIT

Tennessee's Fiscal Future: Challenges and Opportunities for State & Local Government

Friday, Nov. 6
9 a.m.–3 p.m. CT
Nashville

[Register Here](#)

- Tennessee's state budget outlook and emerging fiscal challenges
- The fiscal outlook for Tennessee's cities and counties
- Disaster preparedness, recovery, and resilience as a growing state

Leveraging TNECD programs can transform communities



McMinnville is in the process of using two Brownfield Redevelopment Area Grants to add to its downtown space. (Photo by McMinnville)

By KATE COIL

With vision and dedication, cities across Tennessee have realized long-term projects that have been transformational to their community for placemaking and economic development.

Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD) Assistant Commissioner of Rural and Community Development Brooxie Carlton discussed how different ECD programs have helped support different municipal projects with examples from Elizabethton Assistant City Manager Logan Engle, former McMinnville City Administrator Nolan Ming, and Paris City Manager Kim Foster.

Carlton said ECD has more

than 30 different programs they offer with a large majority of grants going to local governments – though broadband providers, chambers of commerce, and economic development organizations can also benefit.

Most of ECD's programs fall into one of three major categories: infrastructure, community development, and building partnerships. Infrastructure grants range from building new parks to water and wastewater improvements to broadband expansion, financing new emergency vehicles, and developing and identifying sites for future industrial use. Community development programs include downtown revitalizations, historical preservation, and placemaking *See TNECD on Page 5*

Eastman official shares perspective on how municipalities can grow workforce, industry

By KATE COIL

As workforce needs continue to shift, municipal leaders learned how they can better support local employers from Adrian J. Holt, senior vice president and chief human resources officer at Eastman, during the TML Conference and Expo in Kingsport.

Holt highlighted how employers and government officials can collaborate to tackle major challenges faced in the public and private sectors.

"If you have lived and worked in different places, you learn two things: every community is unique and change does not wait for us to feel ready," Holt said. "There is a third thing I've learned that might matter most of all: the moment you stop learning is the moment you start failing. That single idea has shaped my career and has shaped Eastman for more than 100 years."

Founded by George Eastman as a subsidiary of Eastman Kodak in Kingsport in 1920, the Eastman Chemical Company was originally created to manufacture film, photographic paper, optical glass, gelatin, and other chemical products for use in film and cameras. Kingsport's reputation as the "Model City" comes from the architectural plan, known as a garden city, the company created for its workforce. Both the city and Eastman have grown and evolved



Eastman Senior Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer Adrian J. Holt shed light onto how municipalities can play an important role in evolving workforce needs.

together since.

"When Eastman spun off from Kodak in 1994, we had to do more than continue operations, as you can imagine" Holt said. "We had to define our own identity, establish our direction, and prove we could succeed on our own terms," he said. "We were

not simply preserving an inheritance. We were creating a future, not only for the company and our employees but for this entire community. That experience, that independence, and requirement on all of us shaped something really important in Eastman's *See EASTMAN on Page 6*

Charge into Fire Safety: Safe Charging Is a Superpower

By STEVE CROSS
MTAS Technical Consulting
Program Manager

We live in a world filled with rechargeable devices. Our phones, tablets, laptops, power tools, toys, e-bikes, scooters, and many other everyday products depend on batteries to keep us connected and moving. Lithium-ion batteries have made these devices smaller, lighter, and more powerful. They have also created a fire safety concern that we cannot ignore.

The National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) 2026 Fire Prevention Week theme, "Charge into Fire Safety™: Safe Charging Is a Superpower," reminds us that some simple decisions can make a big difference in preventing battery-related fires. Fire Prevention Week was observed October 4–10, 2026.

Lithium-ion batteries are generally safe when they are properly manufactured, used, and charged. However, batteries can become dangerous when they are damaged, defective, improperly charged, or exposed to excessive heat. When a battery goes into what is known as thermal runaway, it can release a large amount of energy very quickly.



Lithium-ion battery fires, as demonstrated in this controlled burn scenario from the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA), are becoming more commonplace in households across the country. (Photo by NFPA)

This can result in intense heat, fire, and dangerous gases.

We can start with the charger. Use the charger that came with the device whenever possible or use a replacement charger approved by the manufacturer. Do not use damaged charging cords or chargers that are not designed for your device. Saving a few dollars on an unapproved charger is not worth putting your home, business, or family at risk.

Pay attention to where you charge your devices. A charging device should be placed on a hard, flat surface where heat can escape. Charging a phone, laptop, or other device on a bed, couch, or pillow can trap heat around the battery. Keep charging devices away from curtains, blankets, furniture, and other combustible materials. Most importantly, never charge a device where it could *See FIRE on Page 3*

NEWS
ACROSS
TENNESSEE

COLUMBIA
The city of Columbia has received a \$272 million Water Infrastructure and Innovation Act (WIFIA) loan from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to expand drinking water capacity. The new WIFIA loan will help the city increase capacity and system reliability to deliver safe drinking water throughout the city and nearby rural communities. The project includes construction of a new raw water intake structure, transmission main, and improvements to the system’s existing water treatment plant. Through these upgrades the city will increase drinking water supply reliability for its customers and provide water to rural communities within the city’s service area. EPA’s WIFIA loan enables Columbia to meet increased demands due to population and economic growth while delivering for its communities and businesses.

CROSS PLAINS
The Cross Plains Fire Department has received a Class 6 Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification for inside the city limits and a 6X for areas outside the city limits. The ISO system ranks from 1 to 10 with 1 being the highest. That evaluation of a community’s local fire protection services helps insurance companies set property insurance rates. This new ranking makes an improvement from a 10 ranking, which the Cross Plains Fire Department held from 1994 until their most recent evaluation in 2022. The new evaluation reflects improvements in the fire department, as well as in emergency communications, community risk reduction, and other areas of fire protection.

GERMANTOWN
The Germantown Fire Department’s Hazardous Materials (HazMat) Response Team has earned the Type 2 certification, an accreditation that validates Germantown’s advanced technical expertise, specialized equipment capabilities, and operational readiness to deploy rapid mutual aid in direct support of Tennessee’s Homeland Security Districts. Only a few agencies across Tennessee have received this rigorous achievement, which requires proving team capabilities under demanding field conditions, including a practical evaluation conducted on a day when the heat index exceeded 100 degrees. Tennessee Emergency Management Agency Director Patrick Sheehan marked the historic achievement for the department at a recent Germantown Board of Mayor and Aldermen meeting.

JACKSON
ArtiCast Jackson will establish a Tennessee presence by moving into the facility formerly occupied by Pace Industries in Jackson. The company will invest \$10.3 million and create 100 jobs at the new facility to meet increasing demands from the aerospace, drone, defense, humanoid robotics, automotive, aftermarket, commercial truck, industrial, and agricultural industries. The company’s high-pressure die casting equipment includes machines with capacity up to 1,800 tons, strengthening its ability to

support a broad range of component sizes, production requirements, and customer programs. ArtiCast Jackson is a member of the Michigan-based ArtiFlex Manufacturing family of companies. ArtiFlex Manufacturing began as a joint venture in 2011 between Gerstenslager, a subsidiary of Worthington Industries, and International Tooling Solutions. Today, ArtiFlex Manufacturing employs more than 1,000 people across the globe.

LOUDON
A former funeral home will serve as the location of a new history museum in the city of Loudon. The former McGill-Karnes Funeral Home on Wharf Street was acquired by the Loudon Legacy Foundation as the new base of the Loudon Legacy Museum, which includes collections formerly on display by the city. The 1905 building will house these items and other area artifacts that preserve the history and story of Loudon. On the National Register of Historic Places, the museum has already begun collecting historic artifacts, photographs, documents, and family histories. A projected opening date is slated for next year.

OAK RIDGE
Samsung C&T is investing up to \$100 million in the Kairos Power nuclear plant currently under construction in Oak Ridge. Samsung will make direct investments and provide in-kind engineering services to build the Hermes 2 Demonstration Plant, subject to regulatory approval. Samsung will also provide expertise by joining the integrated engineering, procurement, and construction teams on the project as well as the future fluoride salt-cooled, high temperature reactor technology. Kairos broke ground on the plant in April, the first power-producing Generation IV reactor to gain construction permitting in the U.S.

SPRING HILL
Ultium Cells LLC, a joint venture of LG Energy Solution and General Motors (GM), will retool and diversify its Spring Hill battery cell manufacturing operations. Ultium Cells will invest \$1 billion in its Spring Hill facility, which is expected to be the first in the world to produce prismatic lithium manganese-rich (LMR) battery cells in mass production, a technology that offers energy density 33% greater than lithium iron phosphate (LFP) — the leading affordable battery chemistry — but at a comparable cost. Facility modifications will begin later this year and are expected to be completed in 2028. The announcement builds on a partnership between the two companies to develop prismatic battery cell technology and related chemistries and on GM’s long legacy of American ingenuity that’s produced innovations like the small-block V8 engine, OnStar connected vehicle services and hands-free Super Cruise. GM and LG initially pledged to create 1,300 jobs and an investment of more than \$2.3 billion in 2021, following this up with an expansion in 2022 that created another 400 jobs and invested a further \$275 million.

Comptroller announces three cities to receive Financial Excellence Award

Three Tennessee cities have been honored as inaugural recipients of the Comptroller’s Financial Excellence Award. Tennessee Comptroller Jason Mumpower announced **Goodlettsville**, **Nashville**, and the **Hendersonville** Utility District received the award for achievements in Fiscal Year 2025. The new award is the Comptroller’s Office’s highest recognition for financial excellence among Tennessee local governments. It celebrates cities, counties, metropolitan governments, and utilities that demonstrate a strong commitment to sound financial management, accountability, transparency, and fiscal responsibility. “These local governments are doing more than simply meeting requirements,” said Comptroller Jason Mumpower. “They have demonstrated a strong commitment to maintaining financial prac-

tices that will serve their citizens and customers well into the future.” The Financial Excellence Award measures achievement in five areas: budgeting, debt management, financial management, financial oversight and accountability, and financial reporting and transparency. Three other awards were given to the First Utility District of Knox County, Milcrofton Utility District, and West Knox Utility District. “Strong local governments are essential to a strong Tennessee, and sound financial management is at the heart of that success,” said Mumpower. “I congratulate these inaugural recipients for setting an example that other local governments across our state can follow.” More [about the Financial Excellence Award](#), including its requirements and application information, can be found on the Comptroller’s website.

Dickson officials break ground on new, consolidated municipal complex



Officials with the city of Dickson have broken ground on a new 44,204-square-foot city center that will replace their existing 71-year-old municipal building. The new facility will consolidate the city’s police department, courtroom, and city administrative offices into a single facility. The project will also enhance public infrastructure in downtown Dickson, including road and surrounding sidewalk improvements. Construction is expected to be complete in March 2028. (Photo by Connor Butts/Dickson Post)

New Tazewell officials break ground on new town hall, police department site



Officials with the town of New Tazewell broke ground for the new complex to house its town hall and police department. The new facility at 403 Main Street has been designed to resemble the former New Tazewell Train Depot. The depot was originally the centerpiece of the town when it was first established in the 1880s. From left to right: architect Josh Barnard, Summit Construction’s Jim Blevins, Alderman Carl Nichols, Alderman Jeff Lewis, Alderman Franklin Essary, Vice Mayor Charles DeBusk, Mayor Stan Leonard, Alderwoman Nita Louthan, architect Dan Brittan, and Summit Construction’s Tyler Trent. (Photo by Jay Compton/Claiborne Progress)

Chattanooga reopens Walnut Street Bridge



Officials in Chattanooga reopened Chattanooga’s historic Walnut Street Bridge after an 18-month, \$47 million renovation project. The project included 200,000 pounds of new steel, paint, a new deck, structural repairs, and LED lighting. Originally constructed in 1890, the Walnut Street Bridge connects Chattanooga’s North Shore neighborhood and downtown, spanning the Tennessee River. At 2,376 feet, it is one of the longest pedestrian bridges in the world and serves as a place for city festivals and events. Closed to cars in 1978, it was originally reopened for pedestrian use in the 1990s following a \$10 million renovation funded by private citizens. (Photo by Chattanooga)

Nolensville breaks ground on new park



Nolensville officials and residents held a ceremonial groundbreaking for the town’s new Chrismon-Brown Park at 1686 Sunset Road. Originally known as Sunset Park, the area was one of few recreation areas available to Black residents prior to integration. It was originally founded in 1909 and managed until 1929 by Ben and Mary Chrismon before Thomas and Jessie Brown purchased the park in 1965 and managed it until 1975. It was the first park to have a baseball diamond in Middle Tennessee accessible to Black players under segregation and included a nine-hole golf course, used to train by Ted Rhodes, one of the first professional Black golfers. Nolensville purchased the 20-acre parcel in July 2023 and will name the new park after the two families who provided the recreation space. It will include a multi-purpose sports field, basketball and tennis courts, public restrooms, a walking trail, and new headquarters of the Nolensville Police Department. (Photo by Kelly Mayor/Williamson Herald)

La Vergne police officer's prize benefits Tullahoma K-9

City of La Vergne

When La Vergne Police Lt. Eric Staats won the opportunity to provide a ballistic vest to a police K9, there was one problem: every K9 at the La Vergne Police Department already had one.

Staats won the vest last year while attending the International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference after being named LPD’s Supervisor of the Year. The prize, provided through Spike’s K9 Fund and Tyler Technologies, is not an off-the-shelf vest. Each vest is fitted and manufactured for the individual K9 that will wear it. Finding that K9 and getting a vest fitted took some time.

“Winning the vest was simply a matter of luck,” Staats said. “Being able to give it to a K9 team that needed it is what makes winning it meaningful.”

Staats reached out to Sgt. Lee Young, a K9 instructor with the Rutherford County Sheriff’s Office who trains with K9 teams throughout the region. Ultimately, that inquiry led to Monja, a 2.5-year-old Dutch shepherd and a then-recent addition to the Tullahoma Police Department.

Monja received the vest this summer and on Sept. 30 made the approximately hour-long trip to La Vergne with his human part-

ner, Sgt. Travis Dickson, to thank Staats in person and to show off how well he has adjusted to working in the custom-fitted vest. The roughly 60-pound dual-purpose K9, trained in apprehension and tracking as well as drug detection, also enjoyed a back scratch from Staats during his visit.

“It’s a big confidence boost to us, to my guys, knowing that if we do have to send him into a dangerous situation, he’s got that little bit of extra protection,” Dickson, who is also a night-shift supervisor, said. “Our community helped fund a vest for our other K9, but there’s no way we could have afforded this vest on our own.”

For Dickson, the importance of the vest is also personal. He noted that Monja’s vest is no different from the protective vest he and other officers wear.

“I have to put it on every day when I go to work. I’ve got a wife and a little kid I want to come home to every day,” Dickson said. “I want him to come home, too.”

And Monja does go home with Dickson at the end of each shift. Though Dickson only recently became his handler, he said his K9 partner is already family.

The connection between La Vergne and Tullahoma also goes beyond Staats’ decision



Tullahoma Police Department K9 Monja enjoys a back scratch from La Vergne Police Lt. Eric Staats, left, while showing off his custom-fitted ballistic vest Sept. 30. Monja and his handler, Sgt. Travis Dickson, visited the La Vergne Police Department so Staats could see the finished vest. (Photo by La Vergne Police Department)

to direct the vest to Tullahoma. K9 teams routinely train across jurisdictional lines. La Vergne and Tullahoma handlers have traveled to each other’s departments for training, and Dickson also identified Murfreesboro, Rutherford County, and Franklin

County among the agencies they train with.

He described the regional K9 community as tight-knit, with

handlers supporting one another -- the same network Staats relied on when he began looking for a dog that could use his prize.

Charge into Fire Safety: Safe Charging Is a Superpower

FIRE, from Page 1
block an exit.

Know the warning signs. A battery or device that becomes unusually hot, swells, leaks, gives off an unusual odor, makes popping or hissing sounds, or begins smoking may be experiencing a serious problem. Do not ignore these warning signs. Stop using the device and follow the manufacturer’s instructions for safely handling and disposing of the battery. Damaged lithium-ion batteries should never simply be placed in the household trash.

We also need to pay special attention to larger battery-powered devices such as e-bikes and scooters. These devices contain larger batteries and can release significant amounts of energy when something goes wrong. Charge them according to the manufacturer’s instructions and, when possible, keep them in a location that does not put an exit or escape route at risk.

As firefighters, we know that prevention is always better than response. A fire that never starts is

the best fire we will ever fight.

Fire Prevention Week gives all of us an opportunity to look around our homes, workplaces, schools, and communities and ask a simple question: Are we charging our devices safely? When at home, office, classroom, dormitory, hotel, etc., always have an escape plan that does not include an elevator should there be a fire or other emergency. Know two ways out of every room.

Use the right charger. Charge on a hard surface. Keep charging areas clear. Watch for warning signs. Most importantly, never ignore a battery that does not look or act as expected. Access many more safety tips at [Fire Prevention Week 2026 | Sparky School House](#)

Safe charging really can be a superpower. And like most fire prevention, it starts with making a few smart choices before there is a problem.

If you have questions or comments, please contact Steve at steven.cross@tennessee.edu.



Tullahoma Police Department K9 Monja wears his custom-fitted vest while resting in the shade during a visit to the La Vergne Police Department Sept. 30. The vest was won by La Vergne officer Lt. Eric Staats last year and donated to the 2½-year-old Dutch shepherd after learning all La Vergne K9s already had vests. (Photo by La Vergne Police Department)

New wastewater plant vital to future growth for Chapel Hill

CHAPEL HILL, from Page 1
came down on the town pretty hard,” Groves said. “Since we opened the plant, we have been put in good standing with TDEC. Everything is much better than it was.”

The Duck River also runs through Henry Horton State Park, which borders Chapel Hill and serves as a major draw for recreation and tourism dollars in the area.

“Henry Horton is redoing its entire lodge and is going to have more than 200 rooms,” Dye said. “They just had ribbon-cutting on that. We actually service that area for them. They pump all of their sewage into our system. We do get a few sales tax dollars from folks visiting the park. It goes into that one big pot and that really helps us pay for everything from wastewater to education.”

While there was a definite need for the plant, financing such a major project is often difficult for small towns with a limited tax base like Chapel Hill.

“We face a lot of the same challenges as a big city,” Dye said. “However, they usually have larger municipal departments and more employees. We tend to wear a lot of hats around here. I have been fortunate. We were able to get with the Tennessee Municipal Bond Fund (TMBF), which had just launched a new program for a 30-year loan. We were the first town in the state to take



The new wastewater plant more than doubles the capacity of the previous one, allowing Chapel Hill to grow and better serve customers, like Henry Horton State Park.

part in that new program, and it has worked like a charm.”

TMBF Executive Vice President and COO Kevin Krushenski said Chapel Hill received a \$16,975,000 loan through the program.

“We were very thankful for the

opportunity to work with Chapel Hill on this project and for their willingness to help TMBF launch our new long-term fixed rate loan program,” Krushenski said. “The town has such a dedicated and professional group of staff and leaders. One of the most

rewarding parts of our jobs is when you get to see loans turn into tangible assets. This wastewater plant is an asset that the Chapel Hill community can be proud of for generations.”

Dye said the ability to pay on the loan over time rather than all at once has also benefited the town.

“It’s allowed us to keep a lot of money in the bank,” Dye said. “The Bond Fund and Kevin Krushenski really helped us out, and we thank them for that. We were able to finance this in a way a town of our size can pay back.”

During initial planning stages, Dye said city officials toured similar facilities in Dresden and Trenton that helped them gain a bigger picture of how their own plant would work. After two years of planning and working with organizations like TMBF, Kentucky-based Stiff Contractors, and J.R. Wauford for engineering, the plant is now online and operational. Dye said the new plant serves 1,180 residential and commercial customers and about 10 customers who are outside the city limits.

The new plant has the ability to process more than double its current customer base, meaning there is plenty of room for Chapel Hill to grow in the future. A single basin at the new plant can process up to 330,000 gallons of wastewater a day, whereas the previous plant could

only process 170,000.

“There was no internet when the original plant was built, so there have been changes,” Groves said. “The new plant is still a biological, natural system but the new technology allows us to treat a lot more and get it through the system. It’s a mechanical plant, but it’s still a natural process. One thing this project is doing to allow us to do is continue to develop. We will be able to serve more residential and commercial.”

“We have doubled in size and we can steadily keep adding to this plant instead of just building a brand new sewer plant,” Groves said. “We have plenty of capacity to grow. Each basin we grow would add 100,000 gallons in capacity without adding much cost. The more customers we have, the less it costs to treat it.”

Dye said this major investment in Chapel Hill’s infrastructure will serve the city for years to come.

“I have learned so much in this process,” Dye said. “Going off what other cities have done helped us decide to go this way. We have also done a lot of upgrades in the city itself, putting in new infrastructure and replacing old pipes. A lot of those pipes were the same age as the plant because they were put in as one big project. We put in new lift stations to break down solids as they go through the city. We are trying to prepare for the future.”

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PEOPLE



Michele Betty, Germantown’s city clerk, has been named the 2026 Clerk of the Year by the Tennessee Association of Municipal Clerks and Records (TAMCAR). Betty was recognized for her 25 years of dedicated service to Germantown, during which she has served residents, city staff, and elected officials with distinction. Betty joined the city’s staff in January 2000 as an administrative assistant, advancing through several roles before becoming city clerk in 2016. She became a Tennessee certified clerk and recorder in 2018 and certified municipal clerk in 2020.

Earnest Jackson III has been appointed the new internal auditor for the city of Jackson. Jackson will report directly to Mayor Scott Conger, overseeing the city’s audit committee and conducting protective and constructive audits across all municipal departments,



Michele Betty

evaluating the adequacy of accounting systems, and examining internal controls to safeguard city assets and ensure operational efficiency. Jackson joins the city after more than 20 years of service in the U.S. Coast Guard before retiring as a senior chief petty officer. During his military career, he held leadership roles in financial management, procurement, logistics, and internal auditing. He also holds a bachelor’s degree in finance from the University of Arizona.

Mona Lawrence, former receptionist and administrative assistant for the Tennessee Municipal League, died Oct. 2, 2026, at the age of 77. Born in Cairo,



Earnest Jackson



Mona Lawrence

Ill., and raised in Bardwell, Ky., where her father served as mayor for 25 years, Lawrence earned an associate’s degree in secretarial science from Murray State University. She served as executive secretary to Paducah, Ky.’s mayor and city manager for five years in the 1970s before becoming a route sales representative and district sales manager for Frito-Lay. In the 1980s, she and her husband, Larry, were the directors of CareerCom College of Business in Knoxville and in the late 1980s and 1990s she worked for Thompson and Association’s convention planning division and Andersen News Co.-Treat Entertainment. Lawrence began her work at TML in 2001, retiring from the role in 2015 after 14 years of service.

Devon Parks has been selected as the new director of the West Tennessee Delta Heritage Center by Brownsville Mayor William D. “Bill” Rawls Jr. Parks has spent the past five years working at the cen-

ter, which welcomes visitors to the history and heritage of Brownsville, Haywood County, and West Tennessee. Parks has lived in Brownsville for 31 years, spending more than 13 years with the Tennessee Department of Transportation as a transportation technician. She then worked as a logistics and human resources assistant for CKS Packaging in Brownsville. Previous director of the center, Sonia Outlaw-Clark, will remain tourism director for Brownsville and serve as a volunteer and advisor with the center.



Devon Parks

Phil Ponder, former Nashville councilman and renowned local artist, died Oct. 1, 2026, at the age 93. A graduate of the University of Florida and U.S. Navy veteran, Ponder spent 30 years with Genes-



Phil Ponder

co before serving two terms on the Nashville Metro Council between 1995 and 2003. He also spent a decade as an aide to former U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper, D-Nashville, and 12 years on the Metro Planning Commission. Ponder is also known for producing watercolor paintings of Nashville beginning in 1982.

Amy Warner has been named the executive director of the Pigeon Forge Department of Tourism. Warner joined the Pigeon Forge Department of Tourism in May as interim director and brings with her more than 20 years of experience in local tourism, marketing, and hospitality. She spent nine years as a member of the Pigeon Forge Hospitality and Tourism Association and is a member of the state-level Tennessee Tourism Committee. In her role, she will work closely with local tourism partners, business leaders, and city leadership as well as oversee the city’s destination marketing and promotional efforts.



Amy Warner

Valk, Viar join staff of UT-MTAS

The University of Tennessee’s Municipal Technical Advisory Service (UT-MTAS) has welcomed two new employees.

Sarah Valk has joined MTAS as a legal consultant and will be based at the Johnson City office. She comes to MTAS from Kingsport where she served as assistant city attorney.

Prior to that, Valk worked for the firm of Smith & Davis LLP in Kingsport. She holds a bachelor’s degree in administration from Milligan College and graduated with her law degree from the UT College of Law.

Courtney Viar has also joined MTAS as a CMFO training instructor and a finance and accounting consultant based in Knoxville. Viar comes to MTAS from the Lenoir City Utilities Board where she served as director of finance and administrative operations.

She holds a bachelor’s degree in business management from Maryville College and a master’s degree in business administration from Lincoln Memorial University. Additionally, she holds both the certified municipal finance of-



Sarah Valk



Courtney Viar

ficer and certified county finance officer designations.



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The city of Red Bank has used TMBF programs 23 times since 1997. The latest is for a \$540,000 note issue to finance new equipment for the city. Sitting, from left to right: Red Bank Mayor Stefanie Dalton and City Recorder Tracey Perry. Standing, from left to right, Chief Financial Officer Kris Pickel and TMBF Marketing Representative Steve Queener.



The town of Atoka has used TMBF programs 10 times since 2006. The latest was for \$370,000 note issue to finance the acquisition of equipment for the town. Pictured from left to right: TMBF Marketing Representative Justin Hanson, Atoka Mayor Barry L. Akin, and Town Recorder Rachel Covarrubias.



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Leveraging TNECD programs can transform communities

TNECD, from Page 1 grants.

“All of these projects today are about placemaking, about making your community a place people want to live and visit. Most of the towns that make up Tennessee are very small towns and these programs can have big impact.”

Carlton said ECD works with municipalities in a variety of ways to source funding, technical assistance, and other aid for a variety of projects.

“I love when people call me and say, ‘Here is what I want to do. How can I do it?’” Carlton said. “Knowing what your project is makes it easier for us to help identify what steps need to be taken to get it done. It is a much easier way to develop a project than to see a grant is open and trying to come up with a project that will fit.”

GROWING MCMINNVILLE

Located between major cities Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga, former City Administrator Nolan Ming said McMinnville has a population of 14,000. It is known as the Nursey Capital of the World because hundreds of commercial nurseries are located there, providing millions of trees, shrubs, and flowers to lawn and garden centers, as well as landscaping companies across North America.

However, Ming said there were a few areas of the community that didn’t live up to the town’s overall reputation of beautification.

“We are a rural farm town that is heavily focused on grants to make things happen so we don’t have to raise taxes on our citizens,” he said. “If you have ever been to McMinnville, you know we have a beautiful downtown. We also have a beautiful river that is a bit further away from our downtown. Between the two, there are 100 acres of unused, post-industrial property. There is another area adjacent to a residential area in a different part of town that is about 30 acres of a former industrial site.”

Partnering with their local industrial development board, Ming said both properties were accepted by TNECD’s property evaluation program, and acceptance into that program helped show residents why the city was investing in these areas over others in the community.

“We have since acquired the Brownfield Redevelopment Area Grant (BRAG) through TDEC with \$400,000 to do two phased assessments on the larger industrial parcel adjacent to downtown,” Ming said. “We also received just over \$100,000 for the other property. When those assessments are done, the property owners are automatically enrolled in this voluntary assistance program through TDEC. They can then choose whether or not to remediate themselves. When that remediation is done, then we can secure grants to fund infrastructure proposed for each of those properties.”

The property adjacent to downtown is poised for commercial or retail expansion, which would almost triple the downtown retail district as well as connect it to the river. The second parcel is being developed into a children’s museum with a mixed-use retail and residential development being discussed.

“Ultimately, we have 130 acres of property added to our city without having to annex property,” Ming said. “This reactivates that unused property within our city limits to be useful for the community. There are a lot of different pieces and people to put together, but it’s been a good project so far.”

Ming said it is important to be ready for grants that come up, so incorporating those cycles into community and strategic planning is vital. Having clear goals, knowing what partners can help, and staying in communication with stakeholders are also vital.

REIMAGINING DOWNTOWN PARIS

While Paris is known for hosting the World’s Biggest Fish Fry and its Eiffel Tower Park, City Manager Kim Foster said Paris has also become known for its downtown due to a coordinated, multi-year renovation effort.

“We have made tremendous strides in our downtown,” she said. “For many years, we were like many communities with a downtown with empty storefronts. We struggled like everyone else



Begun as a way to liven up an underutilized area of downtown, Paris’ Back Alley Galleries project has become popular with locals and visitors. Artists transformed alleyways in downtown Paris into unique art projects that often reflect the history of Paris and the businesses that have called downtown home. The project began simply enough with adding pavers to the alleyways to ensure utility access was easier for public works employees, and ongoing art projects have created positive movement in downtown revitalization. (Photo by Tennessee Arts Commission)

did. We started on the path to revitalizing downtown with a city project. The alleys needed to be repaved, and our stormwater director suggested putting down pavers that could be easily removed because our water, sewer, utilities, cables, and everything like that is underground in those alleys. That way when something needs repair, you just remove the paver, do the work, and put it back.”

The pavers made the alleyways a more welcoming space, and the decision was made to see what else could be done to elevate the area.

“One of the grant programs we have been working with for more than 11 years now is Arts Build Communities, which the development districts administer,” Foster said. “They start off at around \$4,000 with a 50-50 match. Over the last 11 years, we have added 35 individual paintings and pieces of art in the alleys and on buildings. There are a lot that focus on local history. One year, we shifted from on-the-wall projects to dumpsters. We had three big, green, ugly dumpsters downtown. We painted those dumpsters, which started a whole movement. We have businesses that come to us now wanting dumpsters to paint.”

In 2016, the city applied for the Facade Improvement Grant program from ECD. With \$100,000 from the program, Foster said 13 businesses were able to replace windows, paint buildings, and make other improvements. Businesses had to provide a financial match to participate in the program.

While it took time and effort from city staff to reach out to local businesses, educate them, and gauge interest, Foster said the payoff on investment is great. Spending time and effort can get a lot done, even without a lot of money, she said.

“We have learned the best place to start is to get people involved, let them know they are part of the process, and you are doing this for them,” she said. “If you bring them in from the beginning, they tell you things you might not be aware of. They tell you little things that can make their life easier. If you go in and just start changing things, that can be earthshattering. Having those conversations first is important.”

After the first round, Foster said business owners who had not been part of the program also began improving their businesses to keep up. There was enough interest from local property and business owners that Paris applied again and received a second round of grants in 2021 with 49 applications for projects. A total of 17 have been funded, and Foster said Paris intends to apply for the upcoming round of the program.

Additionally, Foster said the Three Star Grant helped install speakers to play music in the downtown area while Historic Development Grants have helped several local businesses make improvements. “It’s all about quality of life, place, and community pride,” she said. “That’s what we’ve really created in our



The vertical marquee has again risen over the Bonnie Kate Theater in downtown Elizabethton, 100 years after the theater originally opened its doors as a silent movie house. Named for the wife of Tennessee’s first governor, the theater has been a staple of downtown Elizabethton and its transformation into a performing arts space has taken a decade so far. City officials have worked with TNECD to find grant programs suited to their goals for the theater, such as the marquee replacement. (Photo by Elizabethton)

downtown. Our project is an ongoing project, and we had to change mindsets that this wasn’t something that was going to happen overnight; it is a lot of things over time.”

RENOVATING THE BONNIE KATE

Elizabethton Assistant City Manager Logan Engle said the city has seen similar return-on-investment from its downtown.

“Elizabethton is a city of almost 15,000, but I like to think we punch a little bit above our weight because we’re the county seat,” Engle said. “Our county has about 56,000 people, and everyone from the county comes to visit our downtown. We a lot of recreation assets in our community with two rivers that meet near downtown. Every time we put money into our downtown, it seems to spur more money and the growth of our downtown.”

One of the most successful downtown improvement projects Elizabethton has undertaken is the restoration of the Bonnie Kate Theater. Originally opened in 1926, the Bonnie Kate Theater was named for Bonnie Kate Sherrill Sevier, wife of Tennessee’s first Governor John Sevier. Originally showing silent films, the theater also hosted radio programs, theatrical performances, and war bond drives before closing in 2012.

“It had fallen into great disrepair, was privately held, and 10 years ago the city acquired the

building, which was both good and bad,” Engle said. “Progress is sometimes painful. The first partnership that came out of that were community leaders who saw a need to save the Bonnie Kate in our historic downtown and advance the arts. The second partnership at the birth of this project was the East Tennessee Foundation. Private and public dollars helped the city acquire the building.”

The city purchased the theater in 2016 and, alongside the non-profit Friends of the Bonnie Kate, has worked to renovate the structure. The non-profit operates the theater through a lease agreement with the city.

“It has taken 10 years to get us where we are, and we are by no means finished,” Engle said. “These kinds of projects are incremental; they don’t happen overnight. They take time and investment, and we do a lot of other things in the city beyond these projects. We have to prioritize some things. The big piece beyond the city’s investment to spur this project further was the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant we received for renovations. We received the grant for it, and that meant we had to administer it. That began my involvement with the Bonnie Kate and working with our development district, our partners with TNECD, ARC, architects, and other groups.”

Engle said some of the major challenges for the project include the physical conversion of a space

intended for a single purpose into a multi-purpose venue, as well as the clash between the creative vision and financial realities of the project.

One of the most recent updates to the project was the lighting of a new marquee over the theater, the fourth in the Bonnie Kate’s history. A grant from the Tennessee Arts Commission paid for the new marquee. A second, vertical component was funded through a Downtown Improvement Grant.

“We’ve leveraged a lot of different pots of money to get this far in the project,” she said. “Even though the theater reopened following a year of active construction, people still weren’t aware it was open. People often say to me, ‘Boy, I can’t wait for the Bonnie Kate to show movies again.’ They’ve been showing them a year. Now that the marquee is up, people really recognize it as a usable theater space. We probably had 150 people out in the street for the marquee lighting, and we had a 106-year-old lady light it who was alive when it was first opened and spent her childhood there.”

Engle said one major lesson she has taken from the project is how reaching out to other communities who have done similar projects can ease the path forward.

“If you are doing any kind of project, talk to your friends and neighbors, colleagues you meet at conferences, and people who have already walked the road you’ve been on,” she said. “They can tell you what to do and what not to do.”

Eastman official shares perspective on how municipalities can grow workforce, industry

EASTMAN, from Page 1

culture. It gave us the confidence that we could adapt, reinvent, and keep moving forward, even when the path ahead was very uncertain.”

Now a multinational and independent corporation, the Eastman Chemical Company has remained integral to the city and citizens of Kingsport and is among the top 50 largest employers in the state.

“Today, Eastman has a much broader footprint than many realize,” Holt said. “We have customers, operations, and partnerships that reach well beyond this region to across the globe. Our roots are here in Tennessee and will always be here in Tennessee. That’s why that big site is called Tennessee Eastman and always has been.”

EMBRACING CHANGE

As a result of the changes Eastman has seen as a company and in Kingsport in the past century, Holt said he and the company have learned about resilience.

“Resilience is not abstract for us; it’s something Eastman has lived,” Holt said. “Resilience is not about standing still and hoping things settle or slow down. It’s about being willing to learn and evolve, often before you feel entirely comfortable doing so. In fact, often before you feel ready or that it’s even necessary to do so.”

Some of the biggest changes Holt has seen in the past several years have stemmed from labor shortages, intense competition for talent, and major shifts in what employees expect from their employers, particularly since the pandemic. Between late 2021 and 2022, Holt said Eastman could not hire enough people to keep pace with what the company needed. Just as that became manageable, he said artificial intelligence added a new dimension to the workforce.

At the same time, he said Eastman has been dealing with the changing nature of the chemical industry such as unpredictable global supply chains, increased energy costs, and demands from customers for more sustainable products and social responsibility. Geopolitical tensions have also disrupted key trade routes Eastman relies on, which means events far from Tennessee can deeply impact operations.

“With those challenges also come opportunities,” he said. “If we are agile and nimble, and if we can compete better here in Tennessee, we can push ourselves ahead of others. It changes not only what companies produce but how they produce. Attracting and retaining the kind of talent we are going to need to succeed at Eastman has meant evolving with the industry. We’ve had to invest in new technology, advancing more sustainable and circular solutions, modernizing our operations, and building a workforce with the technical, digital, and leadership skills to be successful in this new environment.”

EVOLVING WORKFORCE NEEDS

In recent years, Holt said there has been a dramatic change in corporate culture.

“When the ground is shifting both outside the company and inside the workforce, you find out very quickly whether your organization is able to adapt,” he said. “For us, that has put a premium on a few fundamentals: trust, clarity, flexibility, and continuous learning. There has to be a willingness to invest in people before the pressure is on.”



EPA’s Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator of the office of Land and Emergency Management Steven Cook and Regional Administrator Kevin McOmber recently visited Eastman Chemical Company in Kingsport to see a specialized process that breaks down plastic waste at the molecular level for reuse. This technology could help expand recycling solutions and reduce the amount of plastic sent to landfills. (Photo by Eastman)



Officials from Kingsport and the University of Tennessee (UT) cut the ribbon on the Kingsport Dental Clinic of the Appalachian Highlands. More than 470 patients have received low or no cost care at the clinic, made possible by the UT Health Science Center’s College of Dentistry in partnership with the Eastman Foundation and other local partners. The clinic both addresses a major need in the region and trains the dental professionals of the future. Holt said Kingsport officials like City Manager Chis McCartt, Mayor Paul Montgomery, and former Mayor Pat Shull took the lead on the project, which is an example of how cities can make investments that benefit industry. (Photo by UT)

Holt said the pandemic put an emphasis on these needs, particularly as city leaders pivoted to meet the needs of their communities.

“We, the employers, and you, the city leaders, had nowhere to run. We had to make sure everything carried on, and you did. COVID never really ended with a big day. I want to say to you ‘thank you’ on behalf of all the employers in Tennessee. I hope you recognize yourselves for the two years you put in without a day off. What mattered then was not pretending to have all the answers; it was being honest and visible, communicating clearly, telling the information we had at the time, and making it plain that safety and well-being came ahead of everything. Simple things matter enormously in those periods. Trust is a leadership asset in a company, and it’s a civic asset in a community. Once you’ve built it, people are willing to go through a great deal with you. Without it, even the smallest changes are hard.”

While the labor market is less frantic than it was during the pandemic, Holt said employee expectations have changed permanently. Employees are demanding more flexibility and more return investment from their employers and communities.

“They want to know that if they invest their time and energy in your

organization, your leadership, you are equally invested in their future. The workforce we need today is not the workforce we needed ten years ago, and it’s not the workforce we are going to need in ten years’ time. We need people who can learn, adapt, collaborate, and move with business as it involves. My job since 2020 has been sort of a chaos manager, as I’m sure it has been for you. The people who have been more successful are the ones who manage chaos and even really thrive in it. Here in Tennessee, we do it better than any state.”

Holt said skills potential matters as much as, if not more than, credentials. He said many of the resumes he receives today are clearly written by AI, and he has started conducting all interviews in-person to stop candidates from using AI tools to answer difficult questions.

He predicts apprenticeships, technical pathways, community college partnerships, internships, and reskilling programs are going to become more important for companies. He also said there needs to be a shift to allow people to grow into roles rather than hired directly for them.

Eastman works with Kingsport-area high school students, who make \$15 an hour working four hours a day at Eastman while

still attending school. Of those 119 students, 14 students have moved into full-time roles, eight into maintenance training and positions, and several have gone into internship programs.

“Key for me is that I don’t care if all 119 of those students come to Eastman or not,” he said. “If I’m building a flow of young people who are trained in modern technology and modern roles who are going to be employed for the next 20 to 40 years, I don’t mind if they go into any of the other businesses around here. I think the tide raises all boats. It is helping us build that talent locally, early, and address key shortages like machinists. The truth in a competitive market is that you rarely hire your way out of every problem. Sometimes you have to build the talent on your own.”

To grow the skill base and workforce companies like Eastman need, Holt said they must rely on partnerships with educators, civic leaders, local governments, chambers of commerce, and economic development organizations.

“Talent does not just follow jobs,” he said. “It follows opportunity and quality of place. On behalf of an employer, it’s the quality of place, confidence of opportunity, and growth of feeling you get about a place that brings people in, not just

in the jobs.”

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Holt is a new member of Building Regional Investment, Development, Growth, and Engagement (BRIDGE), a privately funded economic development organization dedicated to growing the regional economy of Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. The goal of the organization is to help communities on both sides of the border compete economically as a region rather than as individuals.

“Small communities in far corners of a state don’t always get the visibility they deserve. BRIDGE was created to help change that. We see that in the expansion at the Tri-Cities Airport, which allows people to fly to Washington, D.C. several times a day. It improves connectivity, grows business, and strengthens our attractions. It makes this region more competitive. Regional partnerships can align interests and create momentum. BRIDGE also shows the power of public-private partnerships. When business, government, education, and civic leaders come together around shared priorities, regions are more likely to grow.”

When potential employees are considering where to work, Holt said they aren’t just looking at companies but also at schools, housing, child-care, transportation, broadband, healthcare, and the community.

“We are so fortunate to work with community leaders who understand economic growth is not only about recruiting the next employer or announcing the next project,” he said. “It’s also about addressing the practical issues that shape where and how people build their lives.”

Holt credited Kingsport leaders including City Manager Chris McCartt, Mayor Paul Montgomery, and former Mayor Pat Shull for seeing an emerging need for dentists in rural Appalachia. Together, they worked to establish the University of Tennessee Teaching Dental Clinic in Kingsport, which now provides vital, free dental care to hundreds of underserved individuals in the region. Holt said his own son participated in the program, learning much more than just the dental industry.

Similarly, city leaders also worked to establish a childcare development center because a lack of childcare was limiting the ability of local companies to recruit. While these may seem like community initiatives, Holt said they are also important to the workforce.

“When local leaders step up to address challenges like childcare or affordable dental care, they are doing more than supporting local families. They are stretching the region’s ability to attract talent, support employers, and sustain growth over time. People have to feel that if they are going to invest and move here and settle here that cities across Tennessee are excited for them to come.”

Ultimately, Holt said he anticipates the communities and companies that will thrive in the future will understand the that talent, economic development, and placemaking are all important parts of the same conversation.

“The places that will thrive are the ones that will ask, with honesty, what do we need to do differently now, not because the past was wrong but because the future won’t wait for us. Resilience is not a trait you have or you don’t. It is a practice, and like any practice, the more you do it, the better you get at it. You built it in how you lead, hire, partner, invest, and how willing you are to adapt and learn.”

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STATE BRIEFS

Tennessee’s August unemployment rate held steady for a second month at 3.4%. Data from the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) indicates the rate for July and August is the lowest unemployment Tennessee has experienced this year, and is down one-tenth of a percentage point from August 2025. The national unemployment rate also remained steady at 4.1% in both July and August and is down from 4.3% in August 2025. The state saw an increase of 1,800 nonfarm jobs between July and August 2026 and the addition of 16,400 jobs year-over-year for August. The biggest month-over-month gains were in the leisure and hospitality, government, and construction sectors while the biggest year-over-year gains were in the healthcare and social assistance, administrative support and waste services, and the leisure and hospitality sector. Full analysis of the [August 2026 unemployment data](#) and analysis can be found on the TDLWD website.

Tennessee has a \$400 million gap in the cost of operating, maintaining, and improving its highways, according to a [recently released report](#) by the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR). The study conducted by TACIR found that either increasing taxes or borrowing money will be necessary if the state is to make up for a \$400 million funding gap. While the state needs \$3.6 billion for highways, it only generates \$3.2 billion with TACIR projecting the state will need to spend \$7.8 billion per year on roads by 2055. Suggestions for lessening the gap include increasing existing fuel taxes, implementing new taxes, or remove the state’s restriction on borrowing money for road projects, known as a “pay as you go” model. Another recent [state budget report](#) by the nonpartisan Sycamore Institute also found current state revenues are not keeping up with inflation, creating a “structural deficit.”

Enrollment at public community colleges and universities in Tennessee has increased for the fall 2026 semester with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission recording 228,352 students enrolled. This is a 1.3% gain – approximately 2,933 students – from last year’s numbers. First-time freshman enrollment increased by 3.9% to 41,310 students, while community colleges reported a 3.6% increase in first-time students. Community college enrollment increased by 1.9%

with Nashville State Community College recording the largest increase, while university enrollment jumped 1% with Tennessee State University seeing the largest overall increase.

The state of Tennessee has created a new Tennessee Music Advisory Council (TMAC). TMAC aims to build and sustain a community-led music advocacy organization that supports music professionals through economic opportunity, professional development, stronger networks, and accessible spaces while amplifying the region’s unique musical heritage through stakeholder input, partnerships, and tourism initiatives. Community leaders across seven primary regions have been selected for the council and will have completed or are in the process of completing a [comprehensive Music Ecosystem Feasibility Study](#).

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) has reported it set multiple high power records in September due to unseasonably high temperatures across the region. TVA said the powerful heat dome sent temperatures above 100 degrees, leading to homes, businesses, and industries consuming significantly more energy than usual to stay cool and operate. TVA delivered more than 30,000 megawatts of electricity. Previously, the only September day in TVA history that had reached more than 30,000 megawatts was Sept. 24, 2007. Additionally, TVA set 12 all-time power demand peaks for any fall or spring month, including a record 33,270 megawatts delivered on Sept. 3, 2026 – also the highest demand day of 2026 so far. TVA reports that the region may need between 11 to 32 gigawatts of additional generation capacity through 2040.

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture is accepting proposals for projects to address nonpoint source pollution and improve or protect water quality across Tennessee. The deadline to submit proposals is Dec. 1, 2026. Funding is available through the Tennessee Nonpoint Source Program and is supported by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under Section 319(h) of the Clean Water Act. Eligible applicants include local governments, interstate agencies, nonprofit organizations and institutions, colleges and universities, and state government agencies. For proposal requirements and application information, visit the [Nonpoint Source Grant Program webpage](#).

TML hosts Southern Municipal Conference Summit in Chattanooga



The Southern Municipal Conference held its annual summit at the Read House in Chattanooga. The summit includes tracks for executive directors, deputy directors, lobbyists, elected officials, IT professionals, and event planners. From left to right, TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes, Senior Director of Communications Corinne Gould, Director of Corporate Engagement and Member Benefits Kelly McKinley, and TML President and Cleveland Mayor Kevin Brooks.

TDEC seeks applications for new EV Fast Charge TN Network stations

Municipalities are eligible to apply for up to \$600,000 in funding through the [Volkswagen Diesel Settlement Environmental Mitigation Trust](#) to construct rapid recharging or DC fast charging infrastructure for electric vehicles.

The fourth round of grant funding is intended to continue

buildout of the Fast Charge TN Network. Charging infrastructure must be publicly accessible 24/7 and located within [identified infrastructure gap areas](#).

Applications and required documentation must be submitted electronically via the [TDEC Grants Management System](#).

Applications must be re-

ceived by Nov. 30, 2026, at 4 p.m. (Central). TDEC will announce awards after evaluating all complete, eligible submissions.

Before applying, applicants must view the [recorded application workshop](#), which outlines timelines, eligibility, reporting requirements, and other program terms.

Tennessee's August 2026 revenues \$54.6M above estimated amount

Tennessee revenues exceeded budgeted estimates for the month of August with Department of Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson reporting total August tax revenues were \$1.7 billion, \$54.6 million more than the budgeted estimate, and \$88.1 million more than August 2025.

The total tax growth rate for the month was 5.48%. General fund revenues were \$45.2 million more than the August estimate, while the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$9.4 million more than the estimates.

On an accrual basis, August is the first month in the 2026-2027 fiscal year.

“August tax collections surpassed our budgeted expectations for the month,” Bryson said. “Sales tax revenues, which reflect July’s

taxable sales activity, exceeded expectations and continued to show steady growth. Corporate tax revenues, reflected in franchise and excise tax collections, also performed well. While fuel tax revenues fell below expectations, all other tax categories combined met expectations and showed favorable growth.

“We are encouraged by the start of the new fiscal year and remain cautiously optimistic about continued growth. We will closely monitor economic activity to ensure that our monthly budget estimates are met.”

Individual tax performance compared to August 2026 Budgeted Estimates:

- Sales Taxes: Above estimate by 2.73% or \$35.5 million

- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Above estimate by 57.02% or \$24.1 million
- Fuel Taxes: Below estimates by 7.27% or \$8.2 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 1.74% or \$3.2 million

Individual tax performance compared to August 2025:

- Sales Taxes: Up 3.94% or \$50.7 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Up 118.46% or \$36.0 million
- Fuel Taxes: Down 7.28% or \$8.2 million
- All other taxes: Up 5.38% or \$9.5 million

Monthly estimates for fiscal year 2026–2027 are available on the state’s [website](#).

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Tennessee Municipal League holds district meetings

Municipal officials from across Tennessee gathered to listen and learn about current and upcoming issues at a slate of Tennessee Municipal League (TML) District meetings held statewide.

Districts 1 and 2 members met on Sept. 30 at Walters State Community College in Morristown. The meeting for District 3 was held at Lee University in Cleveland on Oct. 8. Members of Districts 4, 5, and 6 met at the Brentwood Public Library in Brentwood on Sept. 23. The Districts 7 and 8 meeting was held at the University of Tennessee's West TN AgResearch and Education Center in Jackson on Oct. 9.

Attendees heard from Tim Kuhn, Director of the Tennessee State Data Center and Senior Research Associate on population trends, Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development Assistant Commissioner of Community and Rural Development Brooxie Carlton and Deputy Assistant Commissioner of Community and Rural Development Rachel Selbe on upcoming programs and projects, Center for Local Planning Senior Division Planner Ambre Torbett on zoning issues, and Senior Financial Analysts Nate Fontenot and Lori Barnard, and Senior Financial Analyst Charlie Lester from the state Comptroller's Office.

Additionally, TML Deputy Executive Director Chad Jenkins led discussions on current and anticipated legislative issues for



Above: TML Deputy Executive Director Chad Jenkins gives a presentation to Districts 4, 5, and 6 members at the meeting in Brentwood.

Left: Members listen to presentations at the meeting for Districts 7 and 8 in Jackson.

municipalities.

Sponsors for the event included Public Entity Partners, TLM Associates, SERVPRO, and Tim Leeper Roofing.



TML President and Cleveland Mayor Kevin Brooks speaks at the District 3 meeting in Cleveland.



Above: Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development Deputy Assistant Commissioner of Rural and Community Development Rachel Selbe presents during the Districts 7 and 8 meeting in Jackson

Left: Members discuss issues during a breakout session at the Districts 1 and 2 meeting in Morristown.



Above: Members discuss community issues and ideas for solutions at the District 3 meeting in Cleveland.

Right: Center for Local Planning Senior Division Planner Ambre Torbett presents information on zoning issues at the Districts 1 and 2 meeting in Morristown.



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Governments’ institutional knowledge amnesia

They lose a lot when key long-term workers leave. Some are finding ways to limit that loss.

By KATHERINE BARRETT and RICHARD GREENER
Governing

As a growing number of state and local employees are heading toward retirement, the conversation generally focuses on how to retain them or how to recruit their replacements. Both are certainly important questions, but they leave out a critical issue that confronts governmental entities from coast to coast: the loss of institutional memory.

From our vantage point, covering state and local government for decades, it repeatedly comes as a surprise to us when we interview someone in a reasonably high position whose knowledge of what has gone on in earlier years is lacking.

Not long ago, for example, we were talking with an official in a big city who was proud of the fact that his office was — for the very first time — engaging in an initiative to bring performance management techniques to his community.

We pointed out that, even though he thought this was the first time his city was entering this territory, the truth lay elsewhere. In fact, decades ago we had publicly praised the city for great work in the identical realm. But after that effort was drastically diminished, the fact that it ever existed had been lost in the mists of time.

When memories are left to die as people leave government service, it’s a significant loss. There are many lessons that can be learned from successes of the past, as well as from failures. When an effort was put forth at some time in the past and it crumbled, it’s easy to make the same mistakes once again.

Though there may be various kinds of knowledge transfer that occur informally, according to [research done by MissionSquare](#) only 29% of the communities it covered in a survey, had “planning/documentation for institutional knowledge transfer.”

There are many issues that crop up when important information isn’t handed off. As

Shernica Ferguson, an evaluation specialist in public policy and administration at Jackson State University, [wrote in National Civic Review](#), “Without experienced staff who understand the historical logic behind existing protocols, new employees inherit a tangle of accumulated decisions that look arbitrary.”

It’s not easy to commit to the transmission of knowledge across work generations. For one thing, there are many factors involved in performing the tasks necessary to smoothly run a city, county or state. Some of them are written down in manuals or guides.

But many others aren’t ever really recognized in a formal way, and when people do their jobs well, they often utilize information that they’d never even think about passing along.

One solution here is to share that kind of instinctive information by encouraging newer employees to work alongside old hands. In that way they can pick up the knowledge they’re going to need some day.

There are, of course, other solutions, and we’re encouraged to see examples of governments that formally encourage information transfusion. For example, South Carolina’s Department of Administration publishes a “[Knowledge Management Guide](#).” It acknowledges the difficulties in this discipline — including lack of time and resources — and includes some relatively easy approaches for agencies.

One of the easiest of all, mentioned in the South Carolina guide, is simply telling stories. “While storytelling can easily be dismissed because it may sound silly, it is one of the most robust, and easiest to implement, knowledge sharing techniques there is. Imagine the depth of knowledge gained from having your employees share the lessons learned from a real-life scenario experienced by the storyteller.

Debriefing, case studies, after action reviews, whatever you want to call it, the knowledge gained and shared through storytelling is extensive. Employees may also find it easier to understand information presented in the form of a story rather than a bulleted list of facts.”

Meanwhile, New Jersey is using artificial intelligence to re-

tain important information. As we wrote in [a blog post](#) for the IBM Center for the Business of Government, New Jersey’s Department of Community Affairs has developed a program called “Ask Claudia.”

This is a tool that case managers have the option to use that replicates the knowledge of a real department employee named Claudia, who is close to retirement from state service and has accumulated a wealth of knowledge that can be used by others in the department.

As we wrote, “This generative AI tool accomplishes this through knowledge transfer input she has provided and through its ability to scan regulations and policies that help [Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program] employees in accurately answering questions that come from the public.”

South Carolina and New Jersey aren’t alone in emphasizing knowledge transfer, but it’s far from common. And that’s unfortunate.

We were particularly fond of a June 9 [blog post by Rick Barry](#), director of operations for satellite locations and admin services at NorthWest Arkansas Community College, who spelled out the sad series of steps involved when a department doesn’t adequately educate the next generation with the knowledge their predecessors had. Here they are:

- **The Departure:** A key veteran leaves suddenly, taking decades of “tacit knowledge” — the unwritten context of city operations — with them.
- **The Scramble:** Junior staff try to fill the gap but lack the “soft knowledge” (the why behind the what), leading to inconsistent decision-making.
- **The Service Lag:** Permit review times slow down and public complaints increase as projects stall.
- **Turnover Contagion:** The added stress and “operational drag” cause mid-career “bridge” employees to seek remote roles in the private sector.
- **Institutional Amnesia:** The department is now staffed entirely by new hires with no connection to the city’s historical policies or community relationships.

Oct. 22-24: Hendersonville
[Hendersonville PigFest](#)
This festival not only honors the rich tradition of southern barbecue but also brings the community together for a weekend filled with fun, food, and festivity.

Oct. 22: Sevierville
[Sevierville’s History and Haunts](#)
Stroll the streets of historic downtown Sevierville for a fun fall evening filled with family-friendly frights, guided tours, costume contests, games, vendors, and more.

Oct. 24: Goodlettsville
[GOODFest](#)
This much-loved annual celebration brings together thousands of attendees for an afternoon filled with family-friendly fun, local shopping, live entertainment, and festive fall activities.

Oct. 24: Humboldt
[Main Street Fall Festival](#)
This fun-filled day is free for attendees and includes food vendors, artisans, crafts booths, merchandise vendors, information booths, and more.

Oct. 24: Morristown
[50th Annual Mountain Makins Festival](#)
This Appalachian folk life festival celebrates the unique culture of the southern Appalachian Mountains.

Oct. 24: Smyrna
[Halloween in the Park](#)
Bring the whole family for an evening of spooky fun at Smyrna’s annual Halloween in the Park.

Oct. 24: Tellico Plains
[Cherochala Skyway Festival](#)
Celebrate mountain heritage with the Charles Hall Museum and Heritage Center.

Oct. 31: Sweetwater
[Historic Halloween in Sweetwater](#)
Get ready for an epic Halloween celebration packed with fun featuring a live DJ, tons of candy, inflatable attractions for kids, and trick-or-treat stations.

Nov. 14: Niota
[Niota Depot Holiday Bazaar](#)
Get ready for the holidays with a shopping extravaganza and a concessions stand.

NATIONAL BRIEFS

The U.S. economy grew at a 2.2% pace during the second quarter, down from a 2.5% pace in the first quarter of the year. Consumer spending, which accounts for about 70% of growth in gross domestic product, increased at a 3.8% pace, up from a 0.7% rate in the first quarter. However, imports dragged down second quarter growth, rising at a 12.6% rate. Investment in housing also grew by 2.8%, the first time it has grown since the end of 2024 due to high mortgage

rates. The AI boom has driven business investment, which rose by 9% in the second quarter.

American employers added 29,000 jobs in September as the unemployment rate ticked up, according to the U.S. Labor Department. Economists had predicted 90,000 jobs to be added in September, but factors like trade wars, ongoing inflation, high interest rates, and the conflict with Iran have continued to stymie the economy. The unemployment rate rose to 4.2%, above the

August rate of 4.1%. Hiring was also revised down to 133,000 for August. Consumer confidence also dropped to its lowest level in more than a decade with 28% of Americans expecting fewer jobs to be available within the next six months.

Four in 10 Americans have struggled to pay for medical care, transportation, housing, or food in the past year, according to a [new survey from the Pew Research Center](#). Of the 44% of Americans who said

they had trouble paying for a basic necessity, 28% said they had trouble paying for medical care for themselves or a family member, 22% said they could not afford daily transportation costs, 21% said they were unable to pay rent or a mortgage, and 20% said they were unable to afford food. Of all those surveyed, 70% said they had cut back on spending due to affordability with 54% saying they had forgone putting money into saving as a result of affordability issues.

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Ed Stewart,ChFC,CLU,CFS
Financial Advisor

Cleveland Mayor Kevin Brooks looks toward goals, challenges ahead as TML president

By KATE COIL
TT&C Assistant Editor

TML President and Cleveland Mayor Kevin Brooks began his career in Tennessee government in 2006 when he was first elected to the Tennessee House of Representatives. During his time at the General Assembly, he served on the Tennessee Workforce Development Board, as Assistant House Majority Leader, and vice chairman of the House Finance Ways and Means Committee.

In 2018, Brooks came home to Cleveland to serve as the city’s mayor, a role he has held ever since. During his mayoral career, he also served on the Tennessee Municipal League’s Board of Directors as second vice president from 2024-2025 and first vice president from 2025-2026 before taking on the role of president this year.

Brooks also represents municipal governments as vice chair of the Tennessee Advisory Council on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) since 2018.

Outside of his work in government, Brooks works in public relations and conference planning for the Cleveland-based Church of God in their Department of Communications. He is a member of the Religious Conference Management Association.

He has also been involved in numerous charity and community organizations including the Cleveland Rotary Club, the United Way of Bradley County, Main Street Cleveland, and the Cleveland City Schools Blue Ribbon Commission, to name a few.

Brooks and his wife, Kim, have two children.

TT&C: What first brought you to the city of Cleveland, and what made you decide to make Cleveland your home?

KB: I came to Cleveland, Tenn., to be a college freshman at 18-years-old literally 40 years ago this year. It was 1986. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that in 2026, I would have 20 years of public service. My wife and I grew up in the Atlanta-Metro area – in Marietta, Ga. - and all of my church friends came to Cleveland to go to Lee College, so I followed suit. I drove north to Cleveland, fell in love – almost love at first sight – and said this is where I want to stay, live, and raise my family. It took me a few years to convince Kim and her dad to let me bring her to Tennessee, and we are still the only Tennessee branch of our family on both sides.

TT&C: What first sparked your interest in politics? Were there any particular causes you wanted to advocate for?

KB: When I came to Lee, I was a history major because they didn’t have political science back then. I studied government, American history, especially the Constitution, and this Appalachian region we now call home. I used to give the downtown historic walking tours as a college student, and my advisor, Dr. William R. Snell, wrote the book *Cleveland the Beautiful*. Dr. Snell taught me all about Cleveland, gave me a hand-signed copy of his book, and one of the highlights of that tour was possibly getting a glimpse of the mayor – Mayor Tom Rowland – who went on to be the longest-serving mayor. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that 20 years later I would be the mayor people are looking for on those tours.

I can and do still give those tours. I learned that from U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp who gives tours of the nation’s Capitol. I used to give tours of the Tennessee Capitol like he gives tours at the Washington Capitol. I still like to give people a little bit of a glimpse of what I used to do. Our downtown is both beautiful and historically significant. I love to talk about it.

TT&C: You served in the Tennessee House of Representatives for more than a decade before running for mayor of Cleveland. What prompted you to leave the State House for the mayoral seat? What lessons from your work in the



Brooks and members of his family celebrate his inauguration as Cleveland’s mayor. (Photo by Mayor Kevin Brooks)



TML President and Cleveland Mayor Kevin Brooks

legislature did you take into the mayor’s office?

KB: I had served for 12 years, and the Legislature used to be in session from January to July or August when I first got there. Now it’s from January to April or May. You’re there a long time and you’re away from your family, your friends. It was Mayor Rowland’s idea. He said he thought he was ready to step down and I was ready to step up and come home. He first asked me if I would do that in 2016, and I said no. I regretted it every day of the next two years. I asked him in 2018 if I could please reconsider, come home, and run for mayor. And God bless that.

There are so many lessons from the State House. I think the greatest lesson is listening to your constituents. They are your boss. No one in the state capitol voted for you, I was reminded when I first got there. Your hometown that elected you is the center of the universe. My senator at the time [Dewayne] Bunch, now Judge Bunch and used to be Coach Bunch, would tell me, “God gave you two ears and only one mouth; you do the math.” That’s a very important lesson I brought home to Cleveland.

TT&C: What is a typical day as Cleveland’s mayor like for you?

KB: First of all, there is no average day in the life of a mayor. Every day is different, and I think that’s why it’s incredibly enjoyable. There is obviously day-to-day business of being mayor, but more importantly there is the role you have as chief listening officer. You are the ambassador of your city. You represent your city and your residents everywhere you go, which is why I love representing our city now as TML president all across the state.

TT&C: There are about a dozen municipalities in the U.S. named Cleveland. What, in your opinion, makes Cleveland, Tenn., the superior Cleveland?

KB: Our Cleveland is incredibly special because of its people. Our slogan for the city of Cleveland is “The City with Spirit,” and it continues to express itself as one



From left to right, former Cleveland Mayor Tom Rowland, former Bradley County Mayor Eddie Cartwright, Bradley County Mayor Gary Davis, and Cleveland Mayor Kevin Brooks at their monthly lunch meeting. (Photo by Kevin Brooks)

of the most charitable, caring, and concerned cities in the U.S. It’s such an honor to be a part of this place.

TT&C: What are some of the key accomplishments Cleveland has made under your tenure that you are most proud of?

KB: Leaving Cleveland better than I found it, and making Cleveland better than it was when I got here makes me proud. All of the successes and all the successful projects we have been able to complete are really built upon the foundation of financial stability. Getting our financial house in order was the key, critical action taken by the city council.

During the COVID era when cities were shutting down and businesses were shutting down, the city of Cleveland took it upon themselves to really do a deep dive with our finances, and refinance all of our debt. It’s not something that is a front page story, but we went from about 65% of variable debt – which means it goes up and down with the market – to now we are 95% fixed-rate. So, we know exactly what our monthly payments are and what our budgets are. It has made a tangible difference in the way we can invest in our infrastructure, public safety, and public education, and changed the way we do business.

TT&C: What is the most challenging thing about serving as mayor, and what is it about the job that makes it worthwhile?

KB: The No. 1 challenge is easy: time management. It’s hard to have enough hours in the day, especially when you’re in a part-time mayor’s role. Balancing your career, your family, and your faith, makes time management the struggle. But then you get a phone call or an email from a



Mayor Kevin Brooks took a ridealong with one of the city's public works crew to see their day-to-day operations keeping the city running and to celebrate National Public Works Week. (Photo by

widow or a veteran who is need of help and you are able to facilitate and navigate those challenges to a successful outcome. Then all of the time management challenges disappear because you realize, for such a time as this, I am called to serve. Some people believe they are elected to serve, but I believe I was called to serve, and that makes all the difference.

TT&C: What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing Tennessee municipalities?

KB: Local control. We are living in a day where we are being told what is best for us, without being allowed for our own selves, our own Manifest Destiny, to determine what is best for our cities and municipalities.

TT&C: What first prompted you to get involved with TML, and why has involvement with the League been important for

you?
KB: Obviously, TML is the voice of our cities and towns across Tennessee, the 345 municipalities that make up our great state. I wanted to have the voice of Cleveland at that table. The cities and towns of Tennessee are the tax and revenue generating engines of our state. Counties get all the credit; cities make all the money. It’s important that story is told.

TT&C: What do you hope to accomplish in your role as TML president?

KB: My goals for my service at TML is to be a part of the solution, not part of the problem. I want to take my more than decade of service in the General Assembly and help the cities and towns of Tennessee navigate the rapid changes in Nashville. I look forward to that challenge. I’m very grateful that I get this opportunity.