

From the Desk  
of the Executive Director



## A Return to In-District Meetings

As we enter the fall season, TML is returning to its “In-District” meetings. During the months of October and December, we will host consolidated TML district meetings in each Grand Division of the state.

Speakers will address a range of local, state, and federal topics that matter to towns and cities.

We hope these half-day sessions will afford more city officials and employees the opportunity to stay abreast of current and upcoming issues in locations and at times that increase accessibility for you and your staff.

Best of all, attendance is free!

Our programs will focus on topics important to that region. Thanks to TML’s partners and corporate sponsors, lunch will be provided, and our program will conclude by 1:30 p.m.

Watch for registration and location information via TML’s website, social media platforms, and emails.

We’re looking forward to seeing you!

Anthony Haynes  
TML Executive Director



### Save the Dates

## TML District Meetings

District 1	10 AM (Eastern) Oct. 16, 2025	Kingsport Chamber of Commerce
Districts 2 & 3	10 AM (Eastern) Oct. 15, 2025	UTIA Plant Sciences Building, Knoxville
District 4	11 AM (Central) Dec. 5, 2025	Crossville City Hall
District 5 & 6	10 AM (Central) Oct. 23, 2025	Brentwood Public Library
District 7 & 8	10 AM (Central) Oct. 9, 2025	West Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center, Jackson

## Gould joins TML staff as new senior comms director

Corinne Gould is joining the Tennessee Municipal League (TML) staff as Senior Director of Communications.

In her new role, Gould will be responsible for a wide range of communications platforms maintained by TML, including serving as editor and chief of *Tennessee Town and City* and overseeing communications, social media, speech writing, marketing and promotional materials, event planning, graphic design, and photography. She will also play a major role in the coordination and execution of both TML’s Legislative and Annual conferences.

Gould has more than 25 years’ experience in the communications field and comes to TML from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture where she served as assistant commissioner for public affairs.

During her time there, she oversaw the rapid expansion of the department’s social media channels and managed a variety of communications initiatives, including public outreach during severe drought, flooding, wildfires, hurricanes, and animal disease outbreaks. The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture recognized Gould with an award in 2019 for her work in media and public communications resulting in improved understanding of agriculture and agricultural programs.

Prior to her role with the state, Gould spent a decade as a television news producer at the NBC affiliate in Nashville, winning a regional Emmy award and receiving a nomination for a national Emmy award for her coverage of the 2010 Nashville floods.

Gould has served on the boards of the Communication Officers of State Departments of Agriculture, Tennessee 4-H Foundation, Tennessee 4-H Alumni and Friends, Tennessee FFA Foundation, and AgLaunch organizations. She is also a graduate of the inaugural 2019 class of Leadership Tennessee NEXT, and the 2015 class for the Tennessee Government



Corinne Gould with her 27-year-old American Quarter Horse *Investors Bett*.

Executive Institute.

A Spring City native, Gould graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor’s degree in mass communications from Middle Tennessee State University.

Gould owns a small farm in Smyrna, and she enjoys riding and showing American Quarter Horses. In her spare time, she announces horse shows nationwide.

“TML is thrilled to have Corinne join our team,” TML Executive Director Anthony Haynes said “She is experienced and widely respected among her peers throughout the state. She will be a great asset when it comes to telling the story of Tennessee’s cities and advocating on their behalf.”

“It’s an honor to join the TML team,” Gould said. “As a lifelong Tennessean, I know that when our towns and cities thrive, the entire state benefits. I look forward to advancing TML’s passion for and promotion of economic development and quality of life for the citizens we serve.”

## Federal policy changes may shift future of Tennessee's economy

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

Tennesseans can expect changes in both the state and national economy as federal policy shifts bring more economic uncertainty.

Marianne Wanamaker, dean of the University of Tennessee’s Baker School of Public Policy and Public Affairs and a professor of economics and public policy, said Tennessee’s economic growth has outpaced nationwide growth over the past 20 years. Tennessee’s economy is 52% bigger today than it was in 2005, and for the past five years, the state’s growth has exceeded 5% per year.

“You may get growth from having more workers, from the size of the workforce increasing,” Wanamaker said. “The other way you get growth is if the people in your workforce get more productive; they produce more stuff. Economic growth is the sum of those two things. Tennessee’s economy is growing both because the workforce is growing and so is production. That seems like a very simple statement, but it’s not true in every state.”

### POPULATION GROWTH

Tennessee’s population growth

## AI can be valuable tool for cities to enhance outreach, communication

By KATE COIL

At a time when it is more important than ever for municipalities to clearly communicate with citizens, officials can utilize artificial intelligence (AI) to support and improve their outreach.

Kathryn Good, president and founder of Gallatin-based Good Circle Marketing, [highlighted ways municipalities can use AI](#) to enhance their communications during TML’s 85th Annual Conference in Chattanooga. Rather than rely on AI to do all of the work, Good said officials should approach it as a communication partner and a tool to improve what already exists.

### FINDING YOUR VOICE

To begin this process, Good recommends training AI to match the “voice” or style the city needs. The first step is to use real content examples written by a human

“You can take at least five pieces of content that were not written by



Marianne Wanamaker, dean of the University of Tennessee’s Baker School of Public Policy and Public Affairs and a professor of economics and public policy, addresses members at TML’s 85th Annual Conference in Chattanooga.

has exceeded the national average, with the state averaging 1% per year growth over the past 20 years while the U.S. as a whole has only seen a third of that growth. Tennessee is the 11th fastest-growing state in the nation.

However, the state ranks 33rd in terms of natural population growth, meaning that the state birthrate

doesn’t outpace the number of deaths. Tennessee is also 39th for international migration. Wanamaker said people from other states moving to Tennessee are driving the population increase, with Tennessee ranking 7th out of all the states in domestic migration.

Prior to 2020, most of the domestic migration was concentrated in

See **ECONOMY** on Page 5



With numerous AI tools and assistants available, Good recommends picking one tool and focusing on training it. Through this training, the AI can learn the distinct voice of a brand or community.

AI, like press releases, emails, social media content that has performed well, letters, or the transcript of a speech by the mayor and put it into the AI,” Good said. “You then give it a prompt like ‘help me determine my voice, style, and tone.’ You then

take those results into the customized instructions. That prompt should be the standard you set.”

Users can further lock in their city’s voice through preferred terms, words, phrases, and instructions

See **AI** on Page 3

## TNSDC outlines use of population estimates for state-shared sales tax under new law

By KATE COIL

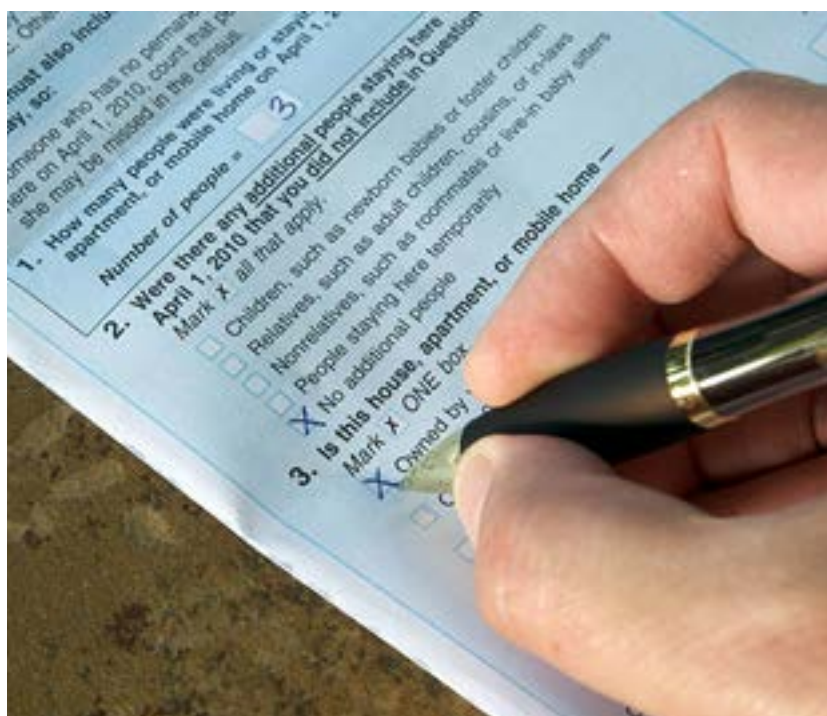
A new state law has tasked the UT Boyd Center with preparing annual population estimates for municipalities to calculate the way revenues are shared between counties and municipalities.

The new state law requires the Boyd Center to revise the population estimates for each municipality and county every year between the U.S. Census with the first round of population estimates to be released July 1, 2026. These population estimates will be used for state-shared sales tax revenue calculations. In the past, cities who wanted to officially change their population for revenue purposes had the option to conduct four special censuses per decade.

Tim Kuhn, director of the Tennessee State Data Center (TNSDC) with the UT Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research, and Cassie Stinson, research director with the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD), explained what the law change means for municipalities conducting special censuses, as well as how the annual population estimates will be calculated during the TML Annual Conference in Chattanooga.

### HOW WE GOT HERE

Last year, 13 municipalities



A new state law requires the Tennessee State Data Center (TNSDC) to conduct annual population estimates to be used to calculate shared-sales tax revenues. TNSDC officials highlighted how these calculations will be made and what cities can do to ensure they are receiving their fair share.

were undergoing special censuses with 11 doing the census in-house and two others partnering with the U.S. Census Bureau. Kuhn said there was a concern because the validation of those results would come due around the same time, putting considerable strain on the agencies, particularly the Greater Nashville

Regional Council, charged with confirming the results.

Additionally, many municipalities have expressed concern about the special census process in a society increasingly conscious about who they give data to.

“Survey responses are going

See **POPULATION** on Page 5

NEWS  
ACROSS  
TENNESSEE



**ALAMO**  
Hitachi Energy officials announced the company is expanding manufacturing operations in Alamo, investing an initial \$97 million and creating 100 new jobs. The additional investment in Alamo will allow the company to expand its manufacturing presence, increasing its total capacity for transformer components such as high-voltage direct current (HVDC) bushings across the globe. Upon completion, the expansion will solidify Hitachi Energy’s position as the second-largest employer in the area. Hitachi Energy is a global technology leader in electrification, delivering innovative power grid and digital technologies to power the daily lives of three billion people. With over a century in pioneering mission-critical technologies like high-voltage, transformers, automation and power electronics, the company is addressing the most urgent energy challenge of our time – meeting soaring electricity demand. Headquartered in Switzerland, the company is the energy arm of the Hitachi Group, one of Japan’s leading technology companies.

**COOKEVILLE**  
The city of Cookeville has broken ground on a new Energy Department headquarters, a \$23.3 million project that will consolidate the city’s electric and gas divisions into one location. City officials said the move will improve efficiency, strengthen customer service and generate long-term savings for ratepayers.. The headquarters will be built on city-owned property along West Davis Road, next to the current Energy Division facility. Once construction is complete, the current Electric Division building will be renovated and incorporated into the project to form a single campus housing both gas and electric services. Construction on the new facility is expected to be complete by the end of 2027.

**ERWIN**  
Three companies in Erwin will each receive shares in a state \$4 million retainment and retraining grant following the devastation and destruction of Hurricane Helene in September 2024. All three companies are located along the Nolichucky River in the Erwin Riverview Industrial Park and have either not yet restarted their operations or are in the preliminary stages of operating. Foam Products will receive funds to retain 47 positions. The leading fabricator and distributor of commercial and industrial foam incurred \$20 million in damages to its facility. PlastiExports will receive funds to retain 53 positions. The plastics company has realized more than \$14 million and counting in damages and losses. PolyPipe will receive funds to retain 66 employees. The company’s Erwin facility was a total loss.

**FRANKLIN**  
The city of Franklin has been awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) for its annual comprehensive financial report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. The report was judged by an impartial panel to meet the high standards of the program, which includes demonstrating a constructive "spirit of full disclosure" to clearly communicate its financial story and motivate potential users and user groups to read the report. This is the 34th consecutive year Franklin has achieved this distinction. The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management.

**KINGSPORT**  
Officials with the city of Kingsport and the Kingsport Chamber of Commerce held a groundbreaking ceremony August 20 for a new IMAX theater slated to be built at the Fort Henry Mall. The new theater is expected to be open by mid-summer 2026. The NCG Cinema will upgrade its existing

space, adding all new luxury seats and elevated concession options for patrons. City officials believe the new IMAX theater will be a "game changer" for the future of the Fort Henry Mall.

**KINGSPORT**  
The city of Kingsport’s water and wastewater treatment plants have received national awards from the American Water Works Association (AWWA) and National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) in recognition of continued commitment to operational excellence. The city received the AWWA Director’s Award, marking the 15th time the city has received the distinction for meeting or exceeding performance and water quality standards. The NACWA presented the city with the Silver Peak Performance Award, which is given to facilities with no more than five permit violations in a calendar year, highlighting the plant’s high standard of compliance and dedication to environmental protection.

**MORRISTOWN**  
MAHLE GmbH officials announced the company is expanding its manufacturing operations in Morristown, investing more than \$10 million and creating nearly 50 additional jobs. The expansion will bring the company’s total headcount in Morristown to 800 people and will allow MAHLE to start production of electric compressors used on fuel-cell electric vehicles, plug-in hybrid vehicles, and full electric vehicles. Founded in 1920, MAHLE is headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, and employs more than 67,000 people across the globe. Today, one in every two vehicles is equipped with MAHLE components.

**NASHVILLE**  
Highlighting the Metro Nashville Police Department’s Partners in Care program that pairs mental health clinicians with patrol officers, among other innovative strategies, the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) awarded the department Advanced Law Enforcement Reaccreditation with Excellence at its summer meeting in Little Rock, Ark. The Metropolitan Nashville Police Department has been continuously accredited since 1994 and was found during an on-site assessment in March to be in full compliance with 364 internationally accepted standards covering the department’s policies and procedures, operations, and support services. The CALEA commissioners also highlighted the city’s Alternative Police Response Unit that is staffed by retired officers who take minor police reports over the phone to free up patrol personnel for more serious calls, as well as the success of the Operation 72 initiative to curtail auto theft. The Advanced Law Enforcement Reaccreditation with Excellence designation is for a period of four years.

**SPRINGFIELD**  
Officials in Springfield have opened a new, accessible playground at the Garner Street Park that includes a replica of the city’s historic clock tower. Other aspects include a wheelchair accessible glider, swings, a climbing structure, and shade sails, among other features. The nearly \$500,000 playground project was constructed by Great Southern Recreation with funds provided in part from a TDEC Recreation Resources Division Local Parks and Recreation Fund Grant. The park also recently added two new pickleball courts and resurfaced three of its five tennis courts. A new, ADA-compliant bathroom facility connected to the pickleball courts was also constructed.

Columbia celebrates reopening of fire station



Officials with the city of Columbia and Columbia Fire Department celebrated the grand reopening of the city’s Fire Station No. 1. The newly renovated and expanded facility marks the most significant upgrade to the station since it was originally built in 1978. Planning for the facility began in 2022 and construction officially starting in 2023. The total investment in the project was approximately \$5.17 million. The facility includes separate male and female sleeping quarters, a new kitchen and firefighter lounge, dedicated administrative office space, and expanded east and west wings.

Mount Carmel cuts ribbon on pickleball courts



Officials with the town of Mount Carmel held a grand opening of new pickleball courts at Mount Carmel Park. The courts were citizens' most requested addition as part of the town’s strategic planning and overall expansion of recreational opportunities and healthy lifestyles. From left to right, City Manager, Jim Stables, Alderman Philip Binstock, Vice Mayor Jim Bare, Mayor John Gibson, Alderman Darby Patrick, and Assistant City Manager Tyler Williams.

Cookeville breaks ground on new playground, splash pad



Officials with the city of Cookeville broke ground on a new splash pad, playground, and parking lot at Cane Creek Park. The new amenities will be located next to the Cane Creek Recreation Center with plans to install pickleball courts in the future. The 91-foot circular splash pad, designed and manufactured by Aquatix, will feature interactive water elements ranging from gentle sprays to high-volume play structures. With various age-appropriate zones, the splash pad is designed to welcome children of all ages. The playground, designed and manufactured by Landscape Structures, will span 8,384 square feet and include slides, swings and stand-alone play features such as a spinner, bouncer, rocker, and climbing structure. ForeverLawn safety surfacing will be added for safety and durability. The total cost for the project is approximately \$2.6 million with construction expected to be complete by spring of 2026.

Hendersonville honored by Department of Defense



Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, Capt. Darren Bess, the executive director of ESGR, and Maj. Gen. Warner Ross, Tennessee’s Adjutant General, present Hendersonville Police Chief James Jones with the 2025 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award. The award honors the Hendersonville Police Department’s support of employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserves. The ceremony took place at Hendersonville City Hall on Aug. 29. (Photo by Capt. Kealy Moriarty)

WAUFORD

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

# Brentwood preserves local history in new pavilion

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

Officials in Brentwood have found a unique way to preserve an important piece of local history that was nearly lost.

Members of the Brentwood City Commission and Brentwood Historic Commission unveiled the new BrentVale Pavilion at the city’s Crockett Park to kick off the city’s BrentFest Summer Concert series. The unique structure takes parts of a historic cabin to make a new pavilion for use by the public.

The cabin was originally built in the 1830s by William Temple Sneed, son of early Brentwood pioneer James Sneed, near what is now Old Smyrna Road in Brentwood. He named the home BrentVale.

The Sneed family expanded the original cabin several times using local logs before selling it to Country Music Hall of Famer Larry Gatlin of the Gatlin Brothers in 1989. Gatlin and his wife, Janice, lived in the cabin before selling it to Roger and Barbara Mick in 1993.

The Micks donated the cabin to the city and in 1994 paid for it to be moved and rebuilt at Brentwood’s Crockett Park. During the new pavilion’s dedication ceremony, Assistant City Manager Jay Evans said the city and historic commission realized in 2022 that the cabin was deteriorating past the point of preservation.

“The chinking wasn’t done quite right,” Evans said. “Time was not on our side. We asked ourselves, ‘What do we do?’ Because we want to honor BrentVale. Joe Grosson [vice chair of the Brentwood Historic Commission] said ‘let’s make it a park pavilion shelter so we can have music events and make it a little bit of a destination.’”

A statement from the Brentwood Historical Commission said



City officials cut the ribbon on the new Brentvale Pavilion at Crockett Park as part of the kick off to their summer concert series. The pavilion preserves the plank and shape of a historic cabin constructed by one of Brentwood’s founding families.

an engineering inspection found that “a combination of foundation settling, and natural deterioration of the nearly 200-year-old log timbers, have rendered the building unrepairable and structurally unsafe.”

The Brentwood City Commission approved a \$260,000 renovation project to take the remaining wood from the cabin and turn it into a new pavilion.

The city hired Homestead Timber Frames to build the pavilion and Majors Construction to oversee the entire project.

A new concrete foundation was poured between the existing chimneys in September 2024, and the pavilion was installed that October.

A month later, the 200-year-old timbers were moved to Spring Hill, where Tad Derrickson of TNTree converted them into sid-

ing. The pavilion was designed to resemble the look of a log cabin while also acting as a shelter for events like performances, weddings, and parties.

In addition to the renovation of the structure, the new pavilion also survived a close encounter with a vehicle that crashed near the construction site, coming to rest inches from the pavilion after taking out a stop sign and fencing at the park in September 2024.

Brentwood Mayor Nelson Andrews said the project shows how, despite the community’s growth, Brentwood still remembers its past.

“It says something about Brentwood’s commitment to history,” he said. “Some stuff here is an important part of the fabric of our community.”



The original 200-year-old log cabin was beyond saving, but boards from it were reused to build the new pavilion.

## AI can be valuable tool for cities to enhance outreach, communication

AI, from Page 1

that should be applied with every response. Good said that giving feedback to the AI is essential with editing prompts and responses providing a more accurate voice over time.

“The best way to train AI is to actually give it examples of the way you want it to behave,” she said. “We are treating AI as an assistant. If the assistant we are using is not performing the way we want it to perform, we tend to shut the computer. Don’t shut your computer; go back and edit the prompt. It is not behaving the way you want it to because you haven’t given it enough training material. When it gets something right, tell it. When it gets something wrong, tell it why you don’t like it.”

Good said it is also essential to set guardrails for what the AI shouldn’t say, such as outdated terms, sensitive topics, and local issues to avoid.

### PICKING PROMPTS

Often, the response of AI is only as good as what humans put into it. Good outlined six steps for creating strong AI prompts: Context, Instructions, Role, Constraints, Language, and Evaluating and Editing.

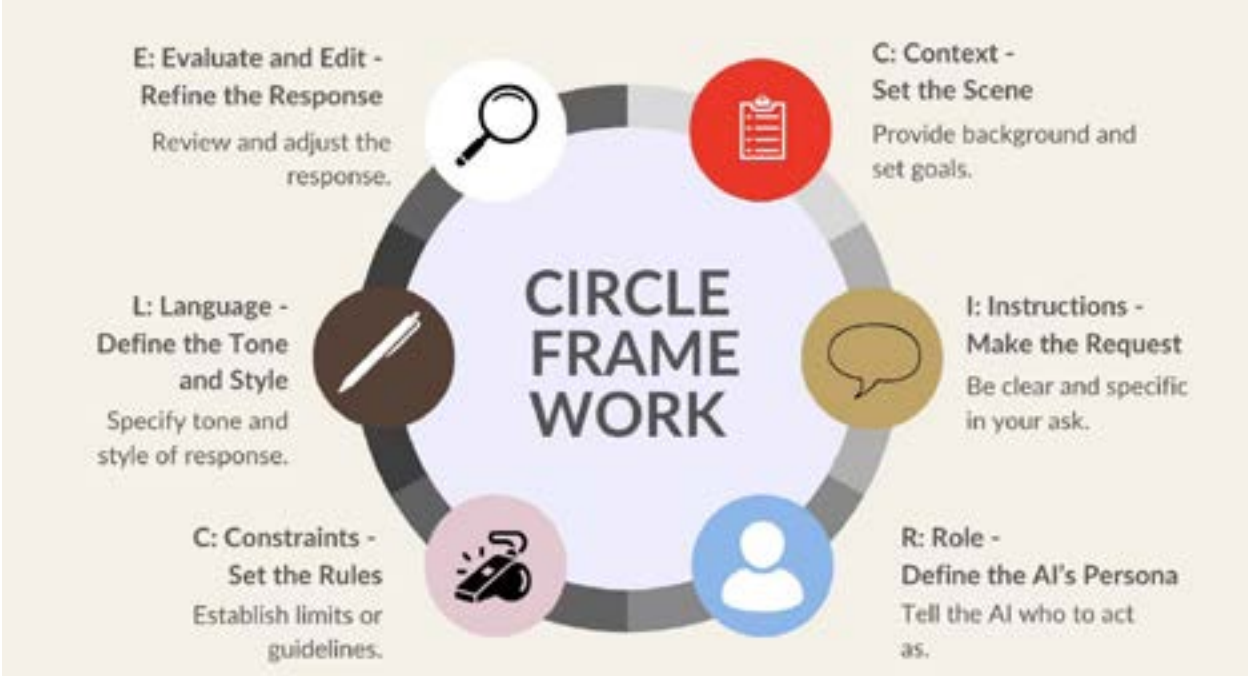
For context, Good said prompters should set the scene by providing background and establishing goals they want to achieve.

“We want to bring the AI assistant up-to-date on what is going on,” she said. “Then we want to give the instructions or make a request, whether you want to create social media content or a press release. Be very specific about what you want the assistant to create.”

For the role, Good said you want to define the lens the AI uses as its persona, such as a legal or communications expert. Making the role more specific can lead to more accurate rules. However, Good cautions that AI can still make mistakes – even when best practices are followed.

“We then want to set the constraints or rules, and I can tell you right now ChatGPT cannot count,” she said. “If you ask for something in 50 words or less, it will estimate. If you want to fit something into a social media post, it doesn’t always work. I will often say follow social media best practices or follow Facebook best practices instead to get that format. You can also instruct it to give the information in a table format or bullet points.”

For those who have already built a voice into the AI engine with



### GOVERNMENT PROMPT EXAMPLE

CONTEXT	CONSTRAINTS
"I'm the Communications Officer for the City of Springfield. We're launching our annual 'Springfield in Bloom' park cleanup day on April 22nd. Our goal is to get a great turnout of volunteers."	"The post must be under 150 words. It should include the date, time (9 AM - 12 PM), and a call-to-action with a link to our website's volunteer sign-up page."
INSTRUCTIONS	LANGUAGE
"Draft a public-facing social media post for our city's Facebook page that encourages residents to volunteer."	"The tone should be inspiring, friendly, and action-oriented. Focus on the community-building aspect of the event."
EVALUATE	
	Review and ask for revisions as needed.

Good's framework for creating AI prompts that will provide more accurate results

previous examples of the work and use, Good recommends specifying “use my voice” to set the tone or voice. Otherwise, prompting is a valuable tool.

“You can also say ‘I want it to resonate with my audience’ or ‘write this in a way a five-year-old would understand’ to make it simple language,” she said. “You want to be specific in language and tone. Once you put the prompt in, you want to go back and edit it, review it, make sure it sounds like you, and make sure it is accomplishing everything you want. If not, you may want to edit the prompt or give it feedback.”

When a prompt is successful, Good recommends saving it to build a prompt library. Saving the prompts that give the most effective results can help generate high-quality results in the future.

### WAYS TO USE AI

There are numerous ways cities

can begin to explore AI messaging on their own, beginning with generating first drafts of emails to citizens, social media posts, press releases, and emergency alerts.

“Let’s say you want to sit down with your mayor and get them on camera,” Good said. “You can start with AI by indicating ‘I want to interview our mayor on these particular subjects. Act as an expert interviewer and give me engaging questions.’”

Good said AI can transform lengthy meeting notes or complex policies into concise bullet points and plain language or adjust content for clarity, tone, and audience appropriateness while maintaining key messages. Another suggestion is to use AI to convert one piece of content – such as minutes or recordings of a city council meeting – and adapt it for multiple uses like press releases, social media posts, and email summaries.

AI can also be used to convert

communications into multiple languages.

“In all of these things, we still need to bring a human into it,” Good said. “If you ask AI to translate something into Spanish, you should have someone who speaks Spanish review it to ensure it is correct and that the cultural meanings are the same. We can’t just put something out there without the right person reviewing it.”

### STAYING ON MESSAGE

AI is far from perfect, and Good said there are several things to consider before sending AI work out into the world. The first step is to always fact check elements like figures and dates, as well as legal information. Good also encouraged having in-house experts review AI-generated work before it is presented to the public, such as having an HR director review AI-generated job descriptions or a lawyer look over policy

documents.

“Hallucinations are when AI makes stuff up, and it happens,” Good said. “It will sound so right, but it’s not. I see it a lot when I ask it to analyze the content of a website. It will come back, and I will be able to tell it didn’t analyze the entire content of the site. You always want to fact check. My trick on this is that you want to read it for sure, but if I generate it on ChatGPT I will also take it to other AI like Gemini or Claude and check it against another engine.”

Users should also ensure sensitive information is never entered into AI to protect that data.

“What you input to AI can be used for training,” Good said. “We want to use AI as an assistant, not a replacement for human judgment.”

The goal is to preserve the city’s unique voice with AI supplementing rather than overtaking the authentic tone, style, and brand. Good also advised to be cautious with any visual content.

“As a brand, you want to represent your city well. The best way to do that is with pictures of your buildings, your residents, and your government officials. You can use AI to correct some of that or for brainstorming, but I don’t recommend using it for true image generation.”

Before sending out AI-enhanced communications, Good recommends starting with low-risk content, such as internal messages or announcements to build confidence before tackling more sensitive content to be seen by the public. During this phase, establish clear workflow for reviewing AI-generated content, such as checklists for fact verification and quality control. The team using these communications should also be trained in both the capabilities and liabilities of using AI tools. This may include creating shared guidelines or policy of AI use by the city.

“Always review before publishing,” Good said. “You have to remain the human in the loop with all AI-generated content, reviewing for accuracy, appropriateness, and your city’s voice. Measure your results. Especially as you go forward and encourage your teams to use AI, you want to be able say ‘I’ve saved 10 hours here.’ This is a revolution, but it is going to take some time for adoption. We need to show time savings. I want you to play. Have fun and get creative. Have one AI tool that you use and use it every day.”



PEOPLE

**Dale Biggerstaff** has been selected as the new director of public works for the city of Brentwood. Biggerstaff has more than 29 years of experience in leading and managing public water utilities and previously worked as the operations superintendent for the Brentwood Public Works Department. A native of Illinois, he graduated from ITT College with an associate's degree in electronic technology and also studied business management at Rend Lake College. He spent 25 years as a water operator and general manager with the Hamilton County, Ill., Water District and 8 years as an elected township official in McLeansboro, Ill. In 2012, he was named the Illinois Rural Water Association's Water Operator of the Year and is a graduate of the 2024 Leadership Brentwood program.



Dale Biggerstaff

in 2004 as well as briefly serving as interim chief of the department. He chaired the Tennessee Commission on Firefighting Personnel Standards and Education and contributed to national firefighting journals and professional boards. He was also a member of the Tennessee Fire Chiefs Association.

**Vernon Gerth** is retiring as Franklin's assistant city administrator for community and economic development after 18 years of service to the city and more than 40 in local governments. Gerth joined the city of Franklin in January 2007 as the first assistant city administrator for community and economic development. He also spent 25 years serving the cities of Kenosha, Wis., and Vernon Hills, Ill. He served as a project manager for a commercial building contractor before his work in municipal government. Vernon holds both a bachelor's and master's degree from Concordia University-Wisconsin.



Vernon Gerth

**Chad McDonald** has been selected as the next director of the Cookeville Department of Leisure Services and Public Facilities following the retirement of current director Rick Woods in October. McDonald has been with the city in various capacities for more than 30 years, beginning as a part-time employee at the Cookeville Drama Center – now the Cookeville Performing Arts Center – in 1992 while a student at Tennessee Tech. Since joining the city staff full-time in 1996, he has served as a cultural arts technician, cultural arts coordinator, cultural arts superintendent, and most recently as the department's assistant director since February 2024.



Chad McDonald

**Joshua Morrison** has been selected as the new assistant chief of the Hendersonville Police Department. Morrison began his career with the Hendersonville Police Department in 2005, serving as a police officer,



Joshua Morrison

**Eric Dougherty** has been selected as the next chief of the Johnson City Police Department and will begin his service with the city in November following the retirement of current chief Billy Church. Dougherty has more than three decades of law enforcement experience, joining JCPD in 1993. He most recently served as the department's operations major for the past two years. He has also served as special operations supervisor for all the specialty units of the JCPD, SWAT team commander, and sergeant for the K-9 unit and Special Investigation Squad. Prior to joining JCPD, he served for four years in the U.S. Army and for three in the U.S. Army Reserves. He also attended East Tennessee State University.



Eric Dougherty

**Mark Finucane**, former assistant chief of the Johnson City Fire Department, died Aug. 31, 2025, at the age of 68. Born in Buffalo, N.Y., Finucane came to East Tennessee State University on a track and field scholarship and competed professionally for six years after college. He joined the JCFD in 1987 and served nearly 30 years, rising through the ranks to assistant chief



Mark Finucane

# Candidates set for Knoxville council election

Primary elections held in Knoxville on Aug. 26, 2025, determined the candidates who will progress to the city's general election in November.

There will be five new faces on the city council in November as all of the present seat holders are term limited. In Knoxville, the mayor and city council members may only serve two, four-year terms.

Karyn Adams will face off against Becky Jones for the City Council District 1 seat after fending off challengers Lindsey Jaremko and Charles Van Morgan. Adams led the vote count with 914 followed by Jones with 331, Jaremko with 309, and Van Morgan with 59. The seat was previously held by Knoxville Vice Mayor Tommy Smith.

Nathan Honeycutt earned 1,551 votes to Melody Watts 403 votes in the District 2 primary race. The pair will advance to the general election in November. The seat was previously held by Councilman Andrew Roberto.

Doug Lloyd and Frank Ramey defeated challengers Nicholas Ciparro and Ivan Harmon to advance to the general election for District 3. Lloyd led the vote



count with 756 followed by Ramey with 571, Harmon with 292, and Ciparro with 184. The seat was previously held by Councilwoman Seema Singh.

Matthew DeBardelaben will be joined by Jeff Talman in the general election for District 4, defeating challenger Jane George. DeBardelaben led the vote tally with 1,589 followed by Talman with 1,067 and George with 193. The seat was previously held by Councilwoman Lauren Rider.

In the District 6 race, Denzel Grant will face off against Stan Johnson after defeating challengers Charles Frazier, George Raudenbush, and Lawrence Williams, Jr. Grant led garnered 566 votes followed by Johnson with 488, Williams Jr. with 281, Fra-

zier with 130, and Raudenbush with 94. The seat was previously held by Councilwoman Gwen McKenzie.

Additionally, this primary election was the first election since 1969 where only voters in a specific district weigh in on that district's representation.

While the council's District 5 seat normally is elected alongside the at-large council seats, mayoral election, and municipal judge, that will change in 2029.

Voters chose, in a previous election, to realign election dates so all of the district seats are elected together, and the mayoral, at-large, and judicial seats are elected together.

master patrol officer, corporal, patrol sergeant, and as a member of the Mounted Patrol Unit. He most recently served as the sergeant over the traffic division.

**Cathy Osbourne** has been selected as the interim city manager for the town of Greeneville following the departure of City Manager Todd Smith. Osbourne previously served as the assistant city administrator and oversaw both the town's grand administration process and implemented the town's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) program. Prior to joining Greeneville in 2020, she was the director of the Greene County Health Department and spent nearly 15 years as director of operations at the Boys and Girls Club of Greeneville and Greene County. She holds a bachelor's degree in human services management with a minor in psychology from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and a master's degree in public health and master certificate in health care management from East Tennessee State University.



Cathy Osbourne

**Brian Shepard** has been selected as the new fire chief for the city of Mor-

ristown. Shepard joined the Morristown Fire Department in 1998 and worked his way up through the ranks, serving as fire marshal from 2017 to 2020. Most recently, he served as deputy fire chief since 2020. He will succeed Chief Clark Taylor, who retired earlier this summer.



Brian Shepard

**Vince Turner** will assume the role of mayor of Bristol after the resignation of Dr. Mark Hutton from the role. Hutton resigned his position as mayor effective Sept. 2, 2025, after Hutton accepted a permanent pastoral position. Turner, who previously served as the city's vice mayor, will assume the mayoral role until the next regular city election cycle. The council will also appoint an individual to fill the council vacancy. A native of Bristol, Turner has served on the Bristol City Council since 2019. He attended Tennessee Tech and East Tennessee State University before working in the financial services



Vince Turner

industry.

**David White**, alderman for Farragut's Ward 2, died Aug. 21, 2025, at the age of 80. A native of Farragut and 1964 graduate of Farragut High School, White worked as a machinist at Y-12 in Oak Ridge before beginning a 40-year career in commercial and residential real estate development. He was elected as an alderman for Farragut's Ward 2 in 2022.



David White

**Tom Witherspoon** is retiring as the water and sewer services director for the city of Johnson City after more than 44 years of public service. Witherspoon began his career with the city as a civil engineer in 1981. He was named assistant director of the water and sewer services department in 1982 and director in 1987. His last day will be Nov. 6, 2025. During his tenure, he has seen a period of significant growth and modernization in the department.



Tom Witherspoon

# No loan is too large or too small



The city of Red Bank has used TMBF's various programs 14 times since September 1997. The most recent loan was in June for a \$100,000 note issue for police vehicles through the TMBF alternative loan program. Seated: Red Bank City Recorder Tracey Perry, left, and Mayor Stefanie Dalton, right. Standing Red Bank CFO Kris Pickel, left, and TMBF Representative Steve Queener, right.



TMBF was able to assist the town of Stanton with obtaining a \$1,000,000 public building authority draw loan to finance the renovation of the town Hall, construction of a new public works shop, and renovation and improvement of the town's Fire Station. Security Bank and Trust, a local bank, was the lender for the loan. Pictured are Mayor Norman Bauer, Jr., seated, and TMBF Representative Justin Hanson, standing.



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# TNSDC outlines use of population estimates for state-shared sales

**POPULATION**, *from Page 1* down,” Kuhn said. “People are holding their information very privately. You don’t want to share those types of things; that is the instinct. There has been a real sea change in the way people respond to requests for information, even if it’s just their name.”

A lot of states have already adopted population estimate model, including New York, Texas, Florida, and California. Tennessee is one only three states – including Washington and North Carolina – that conduct special censuses independent of the U.S. Census Bureau. “No other state that I know of has a program that is as large as what Tennessee does and puts it on the municipalities to do this,” Kuhn said. “It’s a great program in some respects, because we did more special censuses in Tennessee in the last decade than the Census Bureau did, so we’re kind of experts in this regard. We also know [conducting a special census is] getting harder. That’s where the state-run estimate comes in.”

### SPECIAL CENSUS VS. POPULATION ESTIMATES

There are a few differences between a special census and the population estimates to be generated by the Boyd Center. Population estimates will be based on a statistical evaluation using available data – beginning with the federal census – as a base. A special census requires the collection of data, often door-to-door, and validation of results, often in-person as well. “A population estimate is a statistical calculation; it is not a head count,” Kuhn said. “There is no field work involved. We are not going to visit houses or count individual people. It is a statistical calculation for a population at a specific point in time that is based on administrative records, surveys, and statistical models based on the decennial census.”

Special census data results will also be integrated into statewide data under the new law. In the past, a special census undertaken by a city would adjust the population for that city, but not the county to which that city belonged. “It’s important to note on this that the new population estimates do not mean you cannot do a special census,” she said. “It just means that your population estimates can be updated annually without the cost and time of a special census.”

# Federal policy changes may shift future of Tennessee's economy

**ECONOMY**, *from Page 1* Middle Tennessee, but Wanamaker said it is spreading to East Tennessee and more rural areas of the state. She expects the trend to also reach West Tennessee.

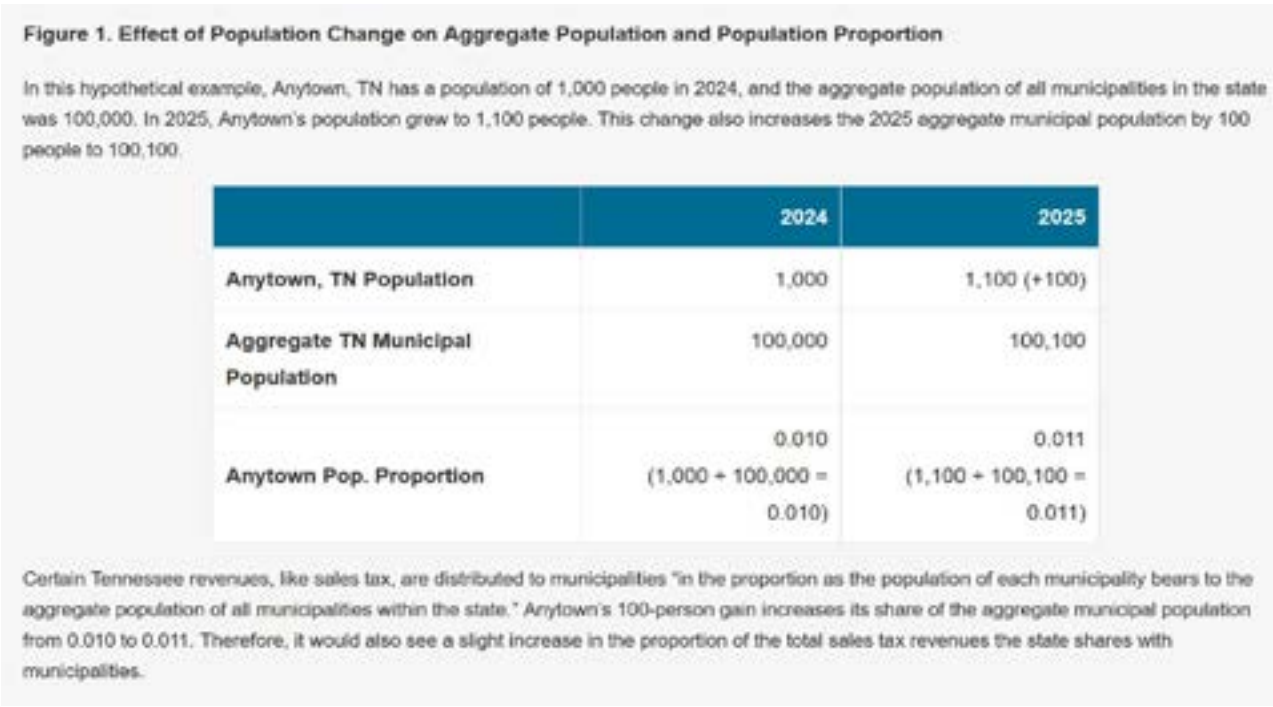
And Wanamaker adds that we can anticipate some changes to the makeup of those moving in. “Although we are not highly ranked in terms of international migration, that segment has become an increasingly important part of our population growth running up to 2025,” she said. “Between 2001 and 2010, we got roughly 90% of our population growth from both domestic and international migration with that number split pretty evenly down the middle. Between 2022 and 2024, international migration became a much more significant factor in our population story.”

Heading into 2024, international migration to the U.S. - both legal and illegal – represented 84% of U.S. growth.

“Remember, if we close the borders, this country grows by 0.1% per year,” Wanamaker said. “Almost all of Tennessee’s population growth came from international migration in 2024, comprising three-eighths of new state residents. We won’t know until the middle of 2026 what the 2025 numbers look like, but I can guarantee you they will be different because we have shut off the international migration valve for the most part, and especially the illegal immigration part. That was particularly impactful for Tennessee.”

While the majority of those moving to Tennessee prior to 2024 were from within the U.S., the paradigm was beginning to shift to include more international migrants to the state. Wanamaker said policies of the current federal administration have largely reversed that shift.

Wanamaker said there is a perception that the majority of new migrants to Tennessee are retirement age and not contributing to the workforce. Between 2021 and 2023, two-thirds of new residents were under 55. While the number of seniors is



Special census estimates will be used for those who have chosen to conduct them and once they are evaluated and incorporated into state-certified data. Otherwise, population estimates will be used. At the ten-year mark, those federal Census numbers become new basis for certified population report.

“Allocation of state shared revenues is going to be based on the population estimates, or in the case of special census those numbers can also stand,” Stinson said. “There are several state shared funding sources that are going to be impacted, like the sales and use tax allocations, liquor-by-the-drink, state privilege tax, municipal street aid fund, and others. For those who have done special censuses, those same revenue streams that are impacted by special censuses are also impacted by population estimates.”

While cities will still be able to conduct a special census, the process to determine population estimates might prove more time and cost effective.

### DATA SOURCES

Kuhn noted data to be released on July 1, 2026, will reflect the population numbers as they are estimated for July 1, 2025. This way, the annual state numbers will align with the release from the federal Census when it is released in 2030. TNSDC already releases updated data projections annually, with state numbers in December, county-level data in March, and and municipal and unincorporated jurisdiction data released in May. This data is based originally on the U.S. Census data with some

adjustments.

Kuhn said the population is calculated by adding births, subtracting deaths, and calculating migration to and from the community. However, it isn’t best practice to only use one model for calculating population.

“We want to implement some sort of averaging where we use multiple sources,” Kuhn said. “We don’t want to have the population estimates tied to any one model directly so that it is not heavily influenced by biases or certain types of data. We want it to be a fairly stable number that is as accurate as it can be.”

Other states may use data like tax returns, housing stock, elementary school enrollment, vehicle registrations, and voter registrations to provide more data for their calculations.

Housing may be used as a calculation by adding the number of building permits and mobile homes constructed and subtracting the number of demolitions reported. This number is then divided into the population of an area - excluding areas like nursing homes, prisons, and dormitories – to calculate how many people there are per housing unit in a community. One area where this can be a challenge are those where there are a lot of rental or vacation homes.

“Versions of the unit housing method we described – people per housing units times number of housing units - is a very common model,” Kuhn said. “Where you do see differences is the implicit time for construction. The Census Bureau’s housing unit method is

that all housing units for which a permit is pulled are built within six months. A lot of states make adjustments to build time that the Census Bureau doesn’t make. They may say a single-family house is six months, a smaller multi-family is a year, and larger multi-family is a year and a half.”

Kuhn said work has already begun on the methodology TNSDC will use to create population estimate models, including review of population estimate models used in other states, an evaluation of available symptomatic population change indicators that are available through Tennessee state agencies and finally selection of appropriate estimates methodology for Tennessee. More information on those efforts will be communicated next year.

### STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Khun said there are steps cities can take to prepare for the implementation of the new law:
- Know your population.
  - Think about what change means for your town.
  - Check if your municipality is on the priority communities list.
  - Participate in housing unit reviews if on the priority communities list.
  - Talk with your building permit chief to make sure they are submitting data to the state building permit survey.

The Tennessee State Data Center provides [current population estimates](#) for municipalities across the state as well as county

estimates. “Think about change in terms of population proportion because that is really what matters in terms of how much money you receive on an annual basis. The two things you need to know are your population and the aggregate population. You can kind of roughly calculate what your revenues might do based on these calculations. MTAS publishes an annual projection of state-shared sales tax per capita. Another way to look at it is to look at the change in state revenues. The Boyd Center puts out a state taxable forecast in the economic report to the governor that comes out in December.”

Kuhn said the one major mechanism communities have to adjust their population estimates outside of a special census is through the building permits they submit to the state. The priority communities list contains the top communities that could benefit from housing unit reviews.

“The housing unit review is the method by which you can change reported building units if it isn’t correct or under-reported,” Kuhn said. “There are three types of communities that can benefit from this. The first is if the Census has imputed information about the amount of building activity in your community. That happens when you don’t report all 12 months, don’t report at all, or there is some other issue that happens. If the building permit survey data is not complete for your community, they will impute the data because it’s an economic indicator for the nation, and they need to have that data every month.”

Municipalities in multi-county jurisdictions are also on the priority list because the building survey indicates how many buildings are in the municipality but not which county jurisdiction the buildings are in. There are 35 incorporated areas in Tennessee that [fall into more than one county](#).

Additionally, adjustments must be made for multi-jurisdiction permits, such as a county that issues permits for small cities or a city that issues permits for multiple municipal jurisdictions.

Kuhn said any cities on the priority list or those that have questions about fine-tuning their building permit estimates and assumptions can contact TNSDC for help with correcting errors and to submit revisions.

one indication of where the federal economy is headed.

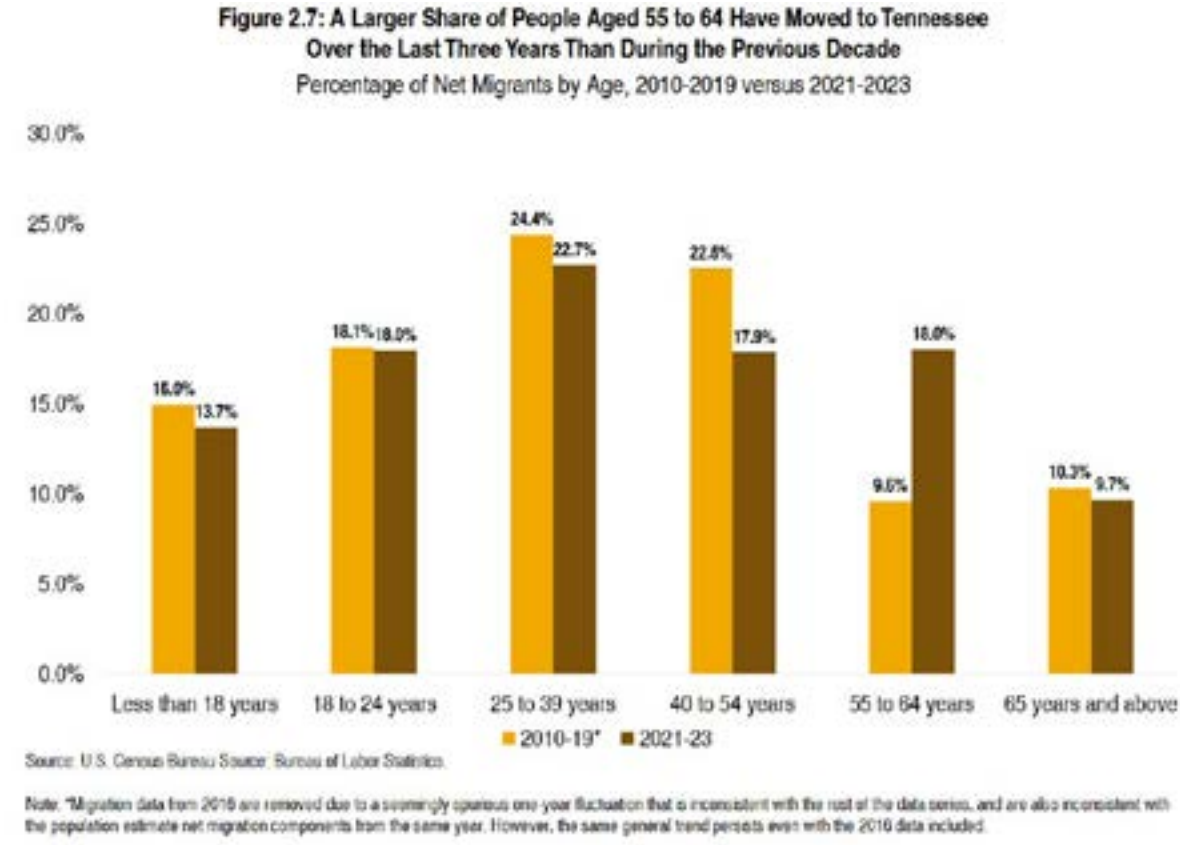
“The Trump administration – as they said they would – has substantially reduced in-bound migration to the U.S., both legal and illegal,” she said. “People aren’t enthusiastic about coming right now, and they made it super hard. On our own, we are only growing by 0.3% per year, so if you think about it, that’s how much workforce we can add annually. Your workforce doesn’t grow much faster than your population. We really have kind of kneecapped ourselves in terms of the number of workers entering the market.”

Meanwhile, industrial policy, including trade and tariffs, remains a moving target, which Wanamaker said can make business investment difficult.

“This is a transition period; whatever we are headed toward, we aren’t there yet,” she said. “The road is going to be rough with low job numbers and higher unemployment numbers. Wherever we get, Tennessee stands to benefit if – in fact – there is a resurgence in manufacturing.”

Wanamaker noted that the “Big Beautiful Bill” lacks mechanisms for improving the economy as the economy wasn’t its major focus. The bill doesn’t include changes that would impact the nation’s gross domestic product (GDP), the economic measure of the total market value of all goods and services the country produces. The goal of the bill was a continuation of the tax code, which can prevent a downturn but doesn’t necessarily fuel an upturn.

“When the government takes in more revenue and spends less money, that’s a fiscal contraction,” she said. “That is the opposite of what we do in a recession. In a recession, the government spends money. In this moment, the Trump administration is choosing fiscal contraction, to spend less money. You take that amount they have contracted and spread it out over a full year, it’s 2% of the GDP.”



increasing, Wanamaker pointed out they pay property taxes and tend to spend money locally but don’t have students enrolled in local schools.

There is also a misconception that many working-age individuals coming into the state have a remote job elsewhere. Wanamaker said even those with remote jobs are still integrated into Tennessee’s economy.

### LABOR PRODUCTIVITY

One way of measuring labor productivity is per capita income. Tennessee is about 10% below the national average when it comes to income per capita. While income has grown somewhat compared to other states in the southern U.S., Tennessee has not seen much change since 1995.

“We’ve done a great job within the South. We have outperformed what you might have expected if you began tracking this in 1995, but we haven’t changed our relative position within the U.S. overall in

that time period. We started the time period at 90% of the U.S. average, and we ended at 90%. That doesn’t mean we didn’t grow; we did. We kept up with the rest of the U.S., which is a win. There are some states that did not do that.”

However, the state has not made progress in terms of labor productivity.

“If you look at the industry mix in the state of Tennessee, we don’t look different from the rest of the country,” Wanamaker said. “So that’s not it. What is true is that within each of those industries, Tennessee tends to have lower-paying jobs. What we want is a situation where we recruit the Googles or the Oracles to come to Tennessee, and we want the jobs they offer Tennesseans to step it up a notch. We want it to reflect the U.S. average.”

To do that, Tennessee has to show these companies they have the workforce to meet that demand. At present, Wanamaker said the state ranks 47th in the number of students

obtaining science and engineering degrees.

“We have to be at the forefront of stuff,” Wanamaker said. “As things are happening, as tech is expanding, and as science is becoming a bigger part of our lives – which it will – we have to be prepared for that. If you look at seventh grade test scores in math and science, we’re fine. We are above the national average. It is what happens after that in that 15-24 age group. It’s something all of us as Tennesseans are going to have to work on. We are going to have to prepare that next generation for whatever that new economy is. It isn’t as simple as making them all major in STEM.”

### BIG PICTURE

Despite Tennessee’s positive trajectory, Wanamaker said what unfolds on the national level ultimately affects what happens in the state. The recent federal reports showcasing flat job growth in the country on average between May and July is

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City Hall - Jackson Neighborhood Services



City Hall - McMinnville



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CLA



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Lee-Smith Inc.



Library Systems & Services



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# STATE BRIEFS

Tennessee’s unemployment rate increased to 3.6% in July, up from the 3.5% rate the state reported in June but still below the national rate of 4.2% in July. In addition to increasing month-over-month, the rate had also increased by 0.2% over the same month last year. Employers added 21,500 non-farm jobs to their payrolls with the biggest increases in the government sector followed by the professional, scientific, and technical services sector, and the leisure and hospitality sector. Declines were reported in the private education sector and the nondurable goods and manufacturing sector. Detailed information about the July 2025 unemployment data is [available here](#).

The Tennessee and Arkansas Departments of Transportation have decided on a new name for the iconic Interstate 55 bridge over the Mississippi River, honoring three legends in both states. Now known as the Kings’ Crossing, this bridge will be named for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., B.B. King, and Elvis Presley. Both the Tennessee General Assembly and Arkansas Highway Commission have formally adopted the name as a way of connecting collective history, heritage, and spirit to the vital piece of infrastructure. TDOT Commissioner Will Reid noted that all three figures “transcended barriers, fostered cultural exchange, and used their talents to build bridges between people.”

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture Division of Forestry (TDF) is now accepting applications for funding to help communities expand tree canopy cover and strengthen urban ecosystems across the state. Through the Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program (TAEP) Community Tree Planting Program, organizations can receive state-funded support to cover costs such as purchasing and shipping of trees, professional planting services, mulch, irrigation tools, tree labels, and signage. Eligible applicants include city and county governments, nonprofit organizations,

and public schools. Grant awards range from \$500 to \$20,000. Applications must be [submitted online](#) by 5 p.m. on Sept. 30, 2025. For proposal assistance, contact Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator Ashley Kite-Rowland at [ashley.kite-rowland@tn.gov](mailto:ashley.kite-rowland@tn.gov).

Nobody Trashes Tennessee, the Tennessee Department of Transportation’s (TDOT) official litter prevention campaign, has received six awards from the Public Relations Society of America’s (PRSA) Nashville Chapter. The 39th Annual Parthenon Awards brings together Middle Tennessee’s public relations professionals to celebrate outstanding work, honor the top PR campaigns and tactics, and recognize leadership in the industry. Nobody Trashes Tennessee was awarded Parthenon Awards for its 2024 No Trash November initiative in three categories: Integrated Communications, Monthly Observance, and Kick-Off News Release. No Trash November also received an Award of Merit for Media Relations. Additional Merit Awards were received for Trash Masters Rewards Integrated Communications, which rewards individual actions towards litter prevention, and TDOT’s Bear-Proof Trash Can Campaign collaboration with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency.

The number of colorblind viewfinders in Tennessee State Parks has expanded to 13 with the addition of viewers to T.O. Fuller State Park in Memphis, Roan Mountain State Park in Carter County, and Pickett CCC Memorial State Park in Jamestown. The viewfinders, designed to alleviate red-green colorblindness, have special lenses to enable people with colorblindness to see a broad range of clear, vibrant colors. Colorblind viewfinders are just one of the many accessible features available at Tennessee State Parks to meet the needs of visitors of all abilities. [View a full list of the accessible features at Tennessee State Parks.](#)

## State wildfire prevention, education grants available

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture Division of Forestry (TDF) is accepting applications for the Hazard Mitigation and Community Education Grant Program until Oct. 14, 2025.

Communities that have developed or are in the process of developing a Community Wildfire Prevention Plan (CWPP) will be eligible for funding to implement hazard mitigation assistance and education projects.

“More than 85% of our state’s population is exposed to wildfire risk, and that number is ever growing,” State Forester Heather Slayton said. “It is vital that we support Tennessee’s communities in mitigating wildfire risk and educating citizens about how they can reduce the danger and impact of wildfires.”

TDF partnered with the Appalachian Resource Conservation and Development Council (ARCD) to administer and manage the hazard mitigation assistance grant program. TDF reviews and

approves all applications and makes recommendations to ARCD for community grant expenditures. Grant recipients are required to sign an agreement with ARCD. ARCD provides guidelines for expenditures and reimbursement.

Last year, the Hazard Mitigation Assistance Program awarded \$136,000 to support 19 communities across Tennessee. Local leaders used these funds to develop or improve CWPPs, reduce hazardous and flammable vegetation, and promote best practices for Tennessee Fire Adapted Communities.

Through knowledge and engagement, communities can reduce the need for large-scale protection efforts and safely coexist with fire as a natural part of the landscape.

More information and the application for applying for a Hazard Mitigation and Community Education Grant can be found [online](#).

Visit [www.tn.gov/agriculture/forests](http://www.tn.gov/agriculture/forests) for more information.

## THSO announces safety grants for 197 cities

The Tennessee Highway Safety Office (THSO) has announced \$33.5 million in federal grants to be distributed statewide, including grants to 196 municipal police and fire departments.

A division of Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security, THSO is distributing the grants from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for the 2025–2026 federal fiscal year.

Police departments in Alcoa, Algood, Ashland City, Athens, Atoka, Baxter, Belle Meade, Bristol, Burns, Cleveland, Clinton, Collierville, Columbia, Cookeville, Coopertown, Dickson, Englewood, Fairview, Franklin, Gallatin, Gatlinburg, Gordonsville, Greenbrief, Greeneville, Harriman, Hendersonville, Jackson, Jefferson City, Kimball, Kingsport, La Vergne, Lebanon, Lenoir City, Lexington, Martin, Mason, McMinnville, Memphis, Monteagle, Mosheim, Mountain City, Manchester, Medina, Monterey, New Johnsonville, Nolensville, Oliver Springs, Paris, Pikeville, Pleasant View, Portland, Red Bank, Selmer, Sharon, Shelbyville, Signal Mountain, Smyrna, Soddy-Daisy, Sweetwater, Tellico Plains, Tusculum, Vonore, Waynesboro, Westmoreland, White House, and White Pine, all received grants for police traffic services (multiple violations).

The municipal police departments for Bartlett, Knoxville, Oak

Ridge, and Union City all received two grants from this program.

Police departments in Adamsville, Bean Station, Belle Meade, Blaine, Bolivar, Brownsville, Camden, Caryville, Chattanooga, Chapel Hill, Collegedale, Cookeville, Covington, Crossville, Dandridge, Dayton, Dickson, Dunlap, Germantown, Gleason, Greenfield, Huntingdon, Jamestown, Johnson City, Kingston, Kingsport, LaFollette, Lexington, Livingston, Manchester, Martin, Maryville, McKenzie, Millersville, Millington, Morristown, Mt. Juliet, Munford, New Market, Oakland, Rogersville, Savannah, Scotts Hill, Sevierville, Somerville, Springfield, Spring Hill, Tazewell, Tullahoma, Wartburg, Waverly, Waynesboro, White Pine, and Woodbury, all received funds for impaired driving enforcement.

Police departments in Alexandria, Bell Buckle, Bells, Berry Hill, Bluff City, Bradford, Brighton, Bruceton, Celina, Church Hill, Clarksburg, Clifton, Cowan, Cross Plains, Decatur, Decaturville, Decherd, Dover, Dresden, Dyer, East Ridge, Elkton, Erin, Estill Springs, Etowah, Fayetteville, Gadsden, Gainesboro, Grand Junction, Graysville, Halls, Henry, Hohenwald, Hollow Rock, Humboldt, Jonesborough, Lafayette, Lawrenceburg, Lewisburg, Lookout Mountain, Maury City, McEwen, Milan, Mount Carmel, Mt. Pleasant, Newbern, Newport,

New Tazewell, Niota, Oneida, Parrottsville, Parsons, Pigeon Forge, Piperton, Plainview, Pulaski, Ridgeley, Rockwood, Rocky Top, Rutledge, Rutherford, Smithville, Sparta, Spencer, Spring City, South Fulton, South Pittsburgh, Surgoinsville, Toone, Tiptonville, Tracy City, Trenton, Watertown, Wartrace, White Bluff, Whiteville, Whitwell, and Winchester, all received funds for high-visibility enforcement.

The Etheridge, Jefferson City and Linden fire departments all received grants from EMS extrication equipment.

Other additional grants included a Teen Driver Safety Education and Child Passenger Safety and Occupant Protection grant for the Cookeville Police Department, Safe Communities grants for Clarksville and McMinnville, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Grants for Clarksville and Memphis.

More than 415 federal grants exceeding \$33 million in total have been awarded to law enforcement agencies and highway safety partners across Tennessee. Approximately \$3 million in media grant funds will be allocated for statewide highway safety education and public awareness campaigns.

To view the full list of grant awards and recipients, visit <http://bit.ly/3Hoifhz>

## State July revenues \$125.5M above estimates

Tennessee revenues exceeded budgeted estimates for the month of July.

Department of Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson reported that total July tax revenues were \$1.8 billion, \$125.5 million more than the budgeted estimate and \$134 million more than July 2024. The total tax growth rate for the month was 7.87%.

General fund revenues were \$130.3 million more than the July estimate, and the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$4.8 million less than the estimates. On an accrual basis, July is the last month in the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

“Tax revenue growth in July exceeded expectations,” Bryson said. “A rise in corporate quarterly estimated tax payments and higher-than-expected gross receipts tax collections boosted overall monthly revenues. Sales tax revenues, though higher than in the same month last year, came in just below July’s estimate. All other taxes combined finished slightly above projections.

“I’m pleased to report that Tennessee has exceeded its revenue estimates for the year. Final receipts will be subject to accruals, but the outlook remains strong.”

For fiscal year 2024-2025, August through July, total tax revenues are 0.94% more than the

budget estimate, or \$206.5 million more than forecasted. When compared to this same period last year, total tax revenues decreased by \$75.2 million or 0.34%.

General fund revenues for the fiscal year are 1.08% more than the year-to-date budgeted estimate, or \$201 million. Likewise, year-to-date general fund collections compared to this same period last year increased 0.12% or \$23.4 million.

### Individual tax performance compared to July 2025 Budgeted Estimates:

- Sales Taxes: Below estimate by 0.67% or \$8.6 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Above estimate by 90.28% or \$117.6 million
- Fuel Taxes: Below estimate by 4.19% or \$4.8 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 11.29% or \$21.2 million

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

- Sales Taxes: Above estimate by 0.79% or \$114.9 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Below estimate by 1.38% or \$53.6 million
- Fuel Taxes: Below estimate by 0.71% or \$9.2 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 7.20% or \$154.3

million

### Individual tax performance compared to July 2024:

- Sales Taxes: Up 2.71% or \$33.6 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Up 78.39% or \$109.0 million
- Fuel Taxes: Down 3.76% or \$4.3 million
- All other taxes: Down 2.00% or \$4.3 million

### Year-to-date tax performance compared to August 2023 through July 2024:

- Sales Taxes: Up 4.24% or \$596.0 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Down 15.84% or \$721.5 million
- Fuel Taxes: Up 0.26% or \$3.3 million
- All other taxes: Up 2.08% or \$46.9 million

The budgeted revenue estimates for 2024–2025 are based on the State Funding Board’s consensus recommendation from Nov. 29, 2023, which was adopted by the second session of the 113th General Assembly in July 2024. These estimates also incorporate any revenue changes enacted during the 2024 General Assembly session. Monthly estimates for fiscal year 2024–2025 are available on the [state’s website](#).

## Five cities to receive USDA investments

Five cities will share in nearly \$89 million in USDA investment in 13 projects to enhance rural development projects across the state, including both grant and loan programs.

Critical utilities investments are being made in the municipalities of Celina, Erin, Gallaway, Selmer, and Vanleer.

Celina will receive a \$2 million loan to re-pave all streets within city limits. Erin is receiving a \$30,000 Special Evaluation Assistance for Rural Communities and Households (SEARCH) grant

for technical assistance and to complete a preliminary engineering report to make improvements at the town’s wastewater treatment plant.

Gallaway is receiving a \$30,000 SEARCH grant to analyze and evaluate options to improve wastewater treatment. Selmer will receive a \$600,000 grant and \$1 million loan to repair the McNairy County Jail pump station and prevent unsanitary overflows.

Additional critical utilities investments include a \$2.325 million loan to the Cunningham Utility District, a \$2.75 million loan to

Marshall County Emergency Communications, a \$729,000 grant and \$530,000 loan to the Copper Basin Utility District, a \$5.38 million loan to the Hallsdale Powell Utility District, and a \$316,000 grant and \$397,000 loan to the Webb Creek Utility District.

Other investments include a \$64.7 million loan to the Duck River Electric Member Cooperation, a \$5.093 million loan to the Ivy Academy in Hamilton County, and \$3.37 million loan to Life Christian Academy in Sumner County.

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# Mayors worry about cybersecurity almost as much as substance use, mental health

The National League of Cities’ State of the Cities survey found 39% of mayors are very concerned about cybersecurity, which is not far behind more traditional public health issues.

By CHRIS TEALE  
Route Fifty

Cybersecurity has become almost as big a public health and safety concern as mental health and substance use, according to a major survey of city leaders released last week.

The National League of Cities’ annual [State of the Cities](#) report found that 39% of mayors say they are very or extremely concerned about cybersecurity, the third biggest specific public health and safety concern behind substance use (54%) and mental health (56%).

Fifty-nine percent said they are slightly or moderately concerned about cybersecurity. It’s the second time that NLC has included cybersecurity in its annual survey as a public safety issue that mayors are concerned about, following [last year’s edition](#) of the State of Cities report.

“Research shows that cyberattacks on municipal governments are rising quickly, revealing vulnerabilities and inflicting financial damage,” the report states. “The complexity of the cybersecurity landscape is exacerbated by a growing technological skill gap, which poses additional challenges for local governments that may have limited capabilities.”

While the opioid and mental health crises have bedeviled city leaders for many years, cybersecurity’s position as a top public health and safety concern — marginally above others like suicide, emergency preparedness, violence and property crime — shows how hacks on local governments and their agencies have mayors and their staff worried.

“The hacks, the things you’re seeing publicly are, I believe, the tip of the iceberg, from what we’re hearing in our pulse surveys from our

mayors,” said Christine Baker-Smith, director of research at NLC’s Center for Research and Data Analysis and a co-author of the report. “This is happening regularly, whether it’s ransomware or it’s just the tech system going down. These are growing concerns.”

Baker-Smith said the growing cybersecurity concerns among city leaders also reflects the increasingly central role technology plays, the growth of artificial intelligence and the need to collect significant amounts of data to train that AI.

Those concerns also highlight how so many operations run at the local level, including critical infrastructure like water and power systems, rely on sometimes-outdated technology that may have significant vulnerabilities.

“I’m not sure that it’s AI driving concerns about cybersecurity, as much as it is shining a spotlight on the number of places where we use technology that may or may not be fully secure,” Baker-Smith said.

Also of concern to mayors is the lack of cybersecurity awareness among their residents, especially as one of the biggest attack threats remains [phishing emails](#) that can impact anyone. And given that local police departments are often called in to investigate cyberattacks, alongside state and federal agencies, making sure that residents are protecting themselves has become a local worry.

“As more of their residents are online, they are more vulnerable to cybersecurity issues than before, and mayors are definitely concerned about that and trying to figure out how to inform and engage their residents on protecting themselves,” Baker-Smith said. “It is something they never had to think of as a responsibility before.”

It all speaks to how public safety has evolved in cities to be an issue that touches and impacts everything else. It remains a top concern for mayors, second only

to economic development overall, but municipal leaders are seeing how difficult it is to do anything without having public safety.

“Local officials are thinking about public health and public safety, not just as intertwined, but as part of the whole,” said Ivonne Montes Diaz, a program manager at NLC’s Center of Research and Data Analysis, and a report co-author. “If you have no security in the streets, your economic development downtown is not going to go up. That’s one of the reasons why they understand that public safety really impacts other areas.”

A challenging aspect of cybersecurity — and public safety more broadly — is a lack of qualified people to fill vacant roles in city government to protect their residents. In cybersecurity specifically, governments have [long struggled](#) to hire as they compete against the higher salaries, benefits, and other perks offered by the private sector.

But help is at hand, as more states collaborate with their universities, colleges, and community colleges in areas like cyber ranges and joint security operations centers, which help build a pipeline of cyber professionals and get students involved early.

And the need to upskill existing workers is something that city leaders must continue to wrestle with, even in areas not traditionally seen as vulnerable to cyberattacks.

Mayors increasingly recognize the challenges they face in cybersecurity and are determined to rise to the challenge, the report found.

“We’ll modernize our city’s financial operations with updated technology that enhances efficiency and transparency,” Carmella Mantello, mayor of Troy, New York, is quoted as saying in the report. “These improvements, coupled with strengthened cybersecurity, aren’t just upgrades — they’re investments in protecting our city and ensuring we’re prepared for the future.”



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**Sept. 19-21: Elizabethton**  
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**Sept. 20: Decaturville**  
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The day will be filled with food, games, and entertainment.

**Sept. 20: Newbern**  
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Depot Days is the longest continually held festival in Dyer County.

**Sept. 27: Jackson**  
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**Oct. 3-4: Jackson**  
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**Oct. 3-5: Jonesborough**  
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**Oct. 4-5**  
[Etowah Fall Festival](#)  
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**Oct. 4-5: Centerville**  
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Celebrating our 16th year in 2025, the National Banana Pudding Festival celebrates the ultimate Southern treat: banana pudding.

**Oct. 11: Altamont**  
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The Fannie Moffitt Autumn Stomp is an annual heritage festival.

**Oct. 11: Athens**  
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If you’re seeking a fun outing, look no further than Pumpkintown 2025, in the historic downtown of Athens, Tennessee.

## NATIONAL BRIEFS



**The U.S. only added 22,000 jobs in August with the national unemployment rate rising to its highest level in 4 years.** The unemployment rate rose from 4.2% to 4.3%, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Economists had predicted that the economy would add 76,500 jobs in August, but accurately predicted the unemployment rate increase. The report also revised the June job numbers, showing that the U.S. economy actually lost 13,000 jobs in

June rather than the gain of 14,000 reported that month. This marks the first time that the U.S. economy lost jobs since August 2020.

**International travel to the U.S. has been down this summer and experts expect the downward trend to continue.** The U.S. Travel Association had initially anticipated that foreign travel spending would rise to \$200.8 billion this year, but that total has been revised down to \$169 billion following a “sharp and widespread” drop in arrivals. The U.S. is expected to see

8.2% fewer international tourists this year, well below the number of foreign visitors who had been coming into the U.S. pre-pandemic. Rising travel costs, political uncertainty and ongoing geopolitical tensions were all cited as reasons why international tourists are choosing not to come to America, with many opting for trips to Canada or Latin America instead. One of the sharpest declines has been in travelers to the U.S. from Canada, which has dropped by 18% - roughly 1.75 million tourists - since the first half of 2025.





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# Spring City finds new identity in endangered fish

By KATE COIL  
TT&C Assistant Editor

The race to save a tiny fish has become the focal point of building community pride and economic development for Spring City.

Stephania Motes, who served as city manager of Spring City during the initial stages of the project, said officials were unaware of the existence of the laurel dace until three years ago. That was when the town was selected by the Thrive Regional Partnership for the Resilient Communities Program.

“That program was about mitigating natural disasters,” Motes said. “During that program, it was mentioned that the laurel dace was an endangered fish on Walden’s Ridge, which is right outside the city limits. They actually introduced us to the Tennessee Aquarium folks. We started brainstorming on how we could help them, and how they could help us as we were looking for more tourism opportunities.”

“We are a small town; we have less than 2,000 people, so for us to find those unique identity points is tough,” she said. “We feel like we live in the best place in the world because we have the Tennessee River on one side and the Cumberland Plateau and Cumberland Trail on the other. We have already been promoting things of that nature to let people know how special our natural resources are, but this is something more personal. This is something that lives and breathes in our community and is part of us. You don’t find those opportunities so often.”

At the same time, researchers from the Tennessee Aquarium were trying to raise awareness about the laurel dace. Helaina Gomez, watershed coordinator at the Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute, said the partnership has been beneficial for them, too.

“This has both improved our ability to communicate and educate people about the laurel dace,” she said. “We have been able to raise awareness and explain the unique situation of this critically endangered species. We were able to identify this interconnected history between the laurel dace and Spring City as well.”

Motes said the partnership came at just the right time for the town and for the laurel dace.

“When we first started the conversation, the Tennessee Aquarium was in the process of trying trying to inform the communities in and around Walden’s Ridge that the laurel dace lives there,” she said. “We tried to help them get more advertising and marketing efforts to let people know they were having these different town halls about conservation.”

### RESCUE OPERATION

First discovered in 1975, the fish was named for Laurel Creek – a waterway in which it is no longer found. The species was also known to swim in five other streams on Walden’s Ridge near Spring City including the Soddy, Horn, Cupp, Young’s, Moccasin, and Bumbee creeks.

Gomez said the fish was once found in eight streams located on Walden’s Ridge, just a ten-minute drive up the mountain from the heart of Spring City. In the past decade, the population has dwindled with the dace now only found in six of the original streams.

The timber boom on Walden’s Ridge in the 1880s and local mining led to erosion of the stream beds over time. This was exacerbated by drought conditions in southeastern Tennessee in the 2010s. The laurel dace was listed as an endangered species in 2011 due to habitat degradation and is one of the 10 most-at-risk fish in North America.

Sediment is the common denominator in both the loss of habitat for the laurel dace and flooding issues in Spring City. The cherry red and iridescent yellow colors of the laurel dace make it not just a colorful fish but are essential to its survival. Gomez said the laurel dace is a sight spawner, meaning it relies on being able to detect those bright colors to both spawn and feed.

When an increase of sediment turns waters murky, the fish cannot perform those essential



Runners from both across the state and across the country came to Spring City to participate in the inaugural race for the laurel dace. The city's first Laurel Dace Day brought both attention to the endangered species and the outdoor opportunities the community offers. (Photos Courtesy of the Tennessee Aquarium)

activities. At the same time, Gomez said this sediment is also flowing down the rivers into Spring City, creating flooding issues there. Mitigating sediment issues benefits both the fish and local residents.

“The sediment in the Piney River that is causing the flooding in our town is the same thing negatively affecting the laurel dace,” Motes said. “We can bring those issues together. We can connect the dots and make a bigger impact for ourselves and this fish.”

During the summer drought in 2024, the Tennessee Aquarium extracted the remaining laurel dace population from Walden’s Ridge. Working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, more than 300 fish were relocated and divided between the Tennessee Aquarium and a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service facility. This allowed both monitoring of the fish and study of the streams to determine when it was safe to take them back home.

“We were able to return them to their creeks in the spring just before their spawning time in early April,” Gomez said. “We did hold on to 30 of them as an ark population. An ark population is a reference to Noah’s ark. In case there is ever another event like this where the laurel dace are looking extinction in the eyes again and we do not have the ability to rescue them or survive their habitat, we at least have their genetics. It is sort of an insurance colony here at the Tennessee Aquarium as we ideally work to restore those habitats.”

Gomez said the ark population at the aquarium also spawned with employees working to collect thousands of eggs measuring about the size of a grain of sand. Later this year, once the spawning season has completed and the baby fish have grown, researchers will also return to the creeks on Walden’s Ridge to do another count to see if the laurel dace population has increased.

### RACE FOR THE DACE

With their new knowledge of the scrappy little fish in their streams, Motes said citizens were ready to enter the race to save the laurel dace.

“We have this nice little fish that needs our help,” Motes said. “We thought we could do a Laurel Dace Day and be able to bring awareness to what’s happening, why the fish is considered endangered, as well as bring people into Spring City.”

Spring City officials proclaimed the laurel dace the official fish of the town and declared Laurel Dace Day on May 17. The Race for the Laurel Dace event held on that day brought together project partners like the Thrive Regional Partnership, Tennessee RiverLine, as well as local fresh food markets and the Aquarium.

Motes said one of the most interesting aspects of the day was the appearance of scientist Charles F. Saylor, who was the first to identify the fish and give it a name. Saylor regaled both aquarium officials and locals with the story of how he found the fish and the process he



Found only in creeks in the ridge above Spring City, the laurel dace has been adopted as the town's new symbol. Town officials have proclaimed it Spring City's official fish with banners and a mascot.



Researchers with the Tennessee Aquarium have been monitoring the species and hope the partnership will aid their efforts. Future goals include turning Spring City residents into citizen scientists who will play a vital role in helping the laurel dace thrive.

went through to have it identified as a unique species.

Of course, the biggest part of the day was the actual 5K race held as part of the awareness event. Motes said 157 runners came from 36 cities across the U.S. with visitors coming as far as Washington state, Minnesota, and Florida to Spring City.

Gomez said the day is an example of how conservation can bring people together from all over.

“I believe Spring City is a hidden gem,” she said. “They are surrounded by natural wonders, and there is room for ecotourism and recreation that will bring light and revenue into that city. In bringing our plans for Laurel Dace Day to life, we attracted both locals and people from across Tennessee. We had people who drove up from Alabama and Georgia. It brought people from near and far to experience Spring City.”

### IDENTITY AND CONSERVATION

The inaugural Laurel Dace

Day doesn’t mean the end of the partnership between Spring City and the Aquarium. Motes said the town has also created laurel dace banners and a mascot to promote both the laurel dace and Spring City at various area events.

“This has given us another identity as a community,” Motes said. “The feedback I am getting from folks is that they feel like this is something special to have; it is something we can put our name with.”

Gomez said the event has also helped the aquarium make valuable connections with community members who will be instrumental in preserving the laurel dace. Spring City residents are being included on an advisory board to keep up-to-date with the progress of the species and trained to conduct citizen science.

For Gomez, the partnership with Spring City has been an eye-opening experience and helped renew her outlook on conservation.

“This is something that has given us hope to continue to do

work like this,” Gomez said. “It can be hard to remain optimistic when you are constantly trying to beat the ticking time bomb. Through this, we really feel that we are not in this alone. I am really hopeful that what we have done through Spring City provides a road map for others who work with critical and endangered species.”

Ultimately, Gomez said the efforts of Spring City residents will play a major role in returning the laurel dace from the brink of extinction.

“A few field biologists cannot protect a species on their own, and we certainly cannot do it without community buy-in,” she said. “These are the people who have been in that area as long as the as long as the laurel dace and it’s their fish. We need the community. It has been amazing and beyond my wildest dreams that this community has gotten so involved in this. It takes a village to save a species.”